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U.S. Jazz in The 1950s

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U.S. JAZZ IN THE 1950s

A Thesis

by

AMANDA CANALES

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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U.S. JAZZ IN THE 1950s

A Thesis
by
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August 2013

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ABSTRACT

Canales, Amanda. U.S. Jazz in the 1950s. Master of Arts (MA), August, 2013, 71 pp., 3 table, 1 illustration, references, 27 titles.

I have examined jazz music in the United States during the 1950s and argue that its popularity in various demographics illustrates that despite social and racial tensions jazz unified them. By explaining this we learn that Jazz's popularity with different groups reflects not only jazz's ever present flexibility but how societal values and issues are shown respectively.

A brief background of the U.S during the 1950s, three key definitions for the non-conformist, conformist and purist as well as a brief history of jazz during the 1950s can be found in the introduction. Chapter II through IV deals with the specific categories respectively. Jazz is difficult to define and it is my goal to provide some context, clarity and deeper understanding of this genre. I discovered that Jazz is a vehicle to help understand the social make up of our country during one of the most nostalgic decades in the country.

DEDICATION

The completion of my master's studies would not have been possible without the love and support of my close family and friends.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks go to my committee member for willing to participate in an important part of my academic career. Dr. Faubion, chair of my thesis committee, offered his time and advice whenever it was needed. Dr Hernandez and Dr. Birk were both so gracious for willing to help and guide me through this process.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Demonstrating how and why jazz's popularity fluctuated during the 1950s in the United States served as my initial goal. I assumed that the rise and fall of Jazz's popularity was due to societal values and views; since Jazz was rooted in the African American community, surely one of the prime causes of this fluctuation in popularity could be attributed to the racism and segregation that ran rampant across the country well through the decade. Aside from racial tensions, other social strains on American society clearly played a role in this fluctuation. Evidence suggested that the aforementioned factors would consequently affect listeners of jazz - how often they were listening to it and why certainly existed. I soon discovered as I delved into jazz scholarship spanning from 1954 to present day using autobiographies, histories and anthologies that my initial assumption was clearly misguided.

Jazz's popularity did not necessarily fluctuate; however the perception of it varied from group to group. The public's view and those who appreciated jazz as an art form and musical genre proved to be diverse. Not only did I find there to be quite the variety in listeners but the performers of jazz were as assorted a group as the listeners themselves. It is a testament to the genre that regardless of the various forms and shapes jazz took musically it maintained a strong fan base as well as steady production. Jazz was able to cross cultural and economic barriers. This is clear by the variety in its listenership. The diverse listenership also mirrors the diversity and shifts that were taking place in U.S. society.

Often music that is considered mainstream by public opinion is not listened to by people that denounce popular culture. However jazz serves to be a unique case in that its presence and vitality in popular culture did not presumably diminish as it was simultaneously appreciated by listeners from various backgrounds. Rather, jazz's appeal survived and continued. The music united diverse listeners and performers. With that said I would like to be clear about the topics and themes that are to be discussed in subsequent chapters: the view of jazz in the 1950s by three distinct groups - the non-conformist, the conformist and musical purists. The people who make up these three groups include musicians: some are simply admirers and listeners of the genre. These distinctions will be made and discussed further. Jazz proves to be a fairly flexible musical genre that transcended through many spheres. More importantly the interrelation between jazz and its popularity, listenership, and perception during the 1950s is providing more than information on musical taste; it is illustrating a mentality, a society, and the lifestyles of many individuals.

Prior to further investigation into culture and jazz music, however, I must answer the obvious question, "why the decade of the 1950s?" The answer is because this decade for the United States was a complicated and contradictive era filled with change and continuity, consumed in revolution and repression concurrently. This can arguably be said of many decades but what is unique about the 1950s is its blatant façade. The unification of these people as jazz aficionados runs against what we know about the divisive and segregated nature of cultural groups during the 1950s.

After suffering an economic depression and exiting World War II there was renewed optimism in the American psyche. The United States emerged from World War II as one of the

most powerful and affluent nations. In the 1950s the gross national product increased to \$500 billion.¹ This economic prosperity contributed to a boom in mass production and consumption. The production and consumption of goods during this time was historically unrivaled and enhanced the ever present consumer culture. These economic dimensions played a “large role in casting the 1950s [as an] Edenic blueprint”.² A great increase of consumerism can be attributed to the automobile boom, a trend that started in the 1920s but reached a high point in the 1950s with 75% of Americans in 1956 owning cars.³ Cars not only served as means of transportation but the car became a status symbol.

Despite a World War ending years before, the 1950s were not free of political conflict. The presence of the Cold War became a source for notions depicting the Soviet Union as a “depraved and morally corrupt” country.⁴ This idea was promoted in part by the Cold War’s power struggle between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. This extraordinarily unique conflict’s focus was not so much involvement in actual military confrontations and physical fighting. Its focus was on strategic deployment of military forces, the proliferation of propaganda and espionage, and the pitting of the United States against Russia in a nuclear arms race and a space race which would culminate with which country had the technological advances to put the first man on the moon. Additionally, the Cold War saw the United States protecting countries which might fall prey to the enemy by providing aid. This mentality consequently placed the United States on a pedestal. Americans saw the United States not only as the greatest country in the world, but the most powerful country. This positivism flourished to a great extent in the dynamics of the nuclear

¹ Andrew J. Dunar, *America in the Fifties* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 167.

² Mary Caputi, *A Kinder Gentler America: Melancholia and the Mythical 1950s* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 17.

³ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

family which was promoted in wholesome images and sound values. These were perpetuated with sitcoms such as “Leave it to Beaver” and “Father Knows Best”. Cartoons like “Rocky and Bullwinkle” depicted Russians as villains in order to advance a negative view of Russians among children. Television programming became a cultural factor for most of middle class Americans. The effect of television was enormous. Instead of sitting around the radio as the previous generation of the 1940s had done, families now gathered around the television to watch popular shows such as do-good cops in “Dragnet” and the protective, paternal Marshall Dillon in “Gunsmoke”. Television took precedence over discussing the day’s events. In 1948, only 2.9% of American families owned a television. In 1956 the number had risen exponentially to 81% of families owning a television.⁵ Despite the happy go lucky characters and images on the small screen something burdensome churned underneath. The law abiding celluloid personas and the puritanical family members of the suburbs depicted on television and mass media demonstrated a stifled and neo-Victorian 1950s.

Underneath this façade of perfection lay a great deal of social unrest which was later characterized by the reform movements of the 1960s. The 1950s set the stage for all of the discontent that later exploded. Dissatisfaction ranged from race to gender. Racial tensions dating back to the Civil War remained; sexual repression and gender inequality continued as well. It is a sweeping misconception that the 1950s represented a decade genuinely full of,

conformity: the decade of the cookie cutter ‘Organization Man’ of rows of identical boxes in the housing tracts of suburbia, of corporate research team that suppressed individuality even in scientific research, of mass consumerism that led everyone to follow fads and fashion trends in unison, of ‘bland leading the bland’ in politics.⁶

⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁶ Dunar, 2.

The 1950s was a decade of crossroads filled with contradiction. Not only did it mark the middle of a century it was a decade simmering with change and turmoil. Proof of this is a youth culture getting ready to change the societal values in the upcoming 1960s. Such was the psychological and social stage of the 1950s that greeted the musical genre known as jazz, the American-born genre. Music historian Gregg Gelb argues that,

when looking at jazz it is apparent that all of the characteristics of American life at that time were reflected in the music. In retrospect, it appears that these were both good and bad times for jazz. Just as new forces in American society were helping to create a pinnacle moment for jazz, the same forces would also become the catalysts for the [variation] in the popularity of jazz.⁷

He also states that, “it is important to understand that while many new suburbanites loved their new environment, others felt a repressive shallowness in suburban culture.”⁸

In order to begin this conversation it is essential to provide background and definitions of jazz and culture before they can be placed side by side. To reiterate, the scope of this paper will limit the musical and cultural aspects solely to the United States during the 1950s. David Halberstram wrote in his comprehensive study of the 1950s that, “one of the most important powerful currents taking place and changing American life in this decade-taking place even as few recognized it-was the increasing impact of black culture on American life.”⁹

Culture in the United States, “from the very outset, was a divided one, replete with ethnic, class, and regional distinctions.”¹⁰ Lawrence E. Levine argues that the culture in the United States in the 20th century became much more “organized and fragmented”¹¹ than in the 19th century resulting in divisions between people and their views of entertainment, literature,

⁷ Gregg Gelb, *1959 Jazz: A Historical Study and Analysis of Jazz and Its Artists and Recordings in 1959*. (Greensboro: The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2008), 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 529.

¹⁰ Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), 9.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 9.

fashion, and more. During the 1950s these divisions increased alongside the flourishing black culture in new urban neighborhoods. I am focusing on three mentalities: the purist, the non-conformist and the conformist.

The non-conformist group and subsequent members are best described as people who refuse to conform and follow society-dictated norms. This group embraces the underground music scene as well as the listeners and musicians that made it thrive. The non-conformist rebels against the norm and creates something new. Here is where many musicians claim their stakes in the musical arena and where musical innovations begin. Artists and movements not limited to music, which find difficulty shooting to stardom and are unappreciated and misunderstood by their contemporaries fall into this category. Examples of this may even be drawn from artists such as classical composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, who during his lifetime struggled for popular acclaim. The Impressionists who revolutionized the art world in the 1800s by changing the subject matter in paintings could not find a gallery to hang their art until years after they had started their movement. It is not uncommon that what is different and new is not readily understood. Upon its inception, jazz fell into this category for two prime reasons: first because jazz was frequently viewed with reservations due to its close ties with the black community in a very racially segregated United States and secondly because of the musicians themselves. As artists performing on the cultural fringes, early jazz musicians struggled to gain credibility in the larger musical community. Not surprisingly these struggles built their character and their discipline and in some cases broke them, leading to a heavy reliance on drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism. Professional struggles fueled their relationship with music. The spontaneous and robust elements in jazz invoke their trials and tribulations. It is not just a sound; it is a

lifestyle being created and shared with instruments.

The conformist is an active participant in popular culture. They are supported by mainstream media and follow the fads of the time. It is the normative accepted and approved by the masses. “Popular culture in the early fifties reflected the larger society as a whole: calm on the surface, turbulent below. This is especially true in the realm of popular music...”¹² Existence in this realm can be fleeting. One day you are hot and one day you are not. What is accepted and loved is so because “everyone else is doing it”. It is peer pressure at its finest and it is the habitat of the conformist. In Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* he states that popular culture is “all that is now influential on our scene”.¹³

The purists and their mentality, elitist in some degrees, is an evolved perspective where a person has adopted a sense of superior intellect or refinement. This mentality fills the minds of people who show deference to others based on their tastes in music, literature, art, and partisanship. For instance, someone who prefers live music as opposed to electronic music because they find the latter to be lacking of talent since it is created with the help of computers and pre-made sounds is an example a purist. This mentality is cyclical and can be found in the minds of a variety of people. These definitions consist of the “qualitative distinctiveness of cultural genres, which makes cultural degeneration easy to spot”.¹⁴

The music during this time was, like society, changing. Music in the United States which was once defined by orchestras led by the likes of Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey and Glenn Miller went through several transitions by the 1950s. “Popular music of the early fifties generally

¹² Dunar, 268.

¹³ Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 250.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 250.

reflected the prevailing view of fundamental American decency”;¹⁵ but, as discussed previously the 1950s was filled with contradiction and underlying tensions; music fell victim to this reality as well.

In the midst of all this musical change remained a genre that had influenced United States for many years: jazz. Jazz, which can be classified as a blend of the blues, ragtime, minstrel and African music, rose in popularity and progressed both lyrically and instrumentally since the 1920s. It is multi-faceted in that it encompasses different types of music within itself. Jazz is spontaneous and possesses a certain type of vitality marked with heavy improvisation. While other types of music are played in the same fashion over and over again, jazz is most often delivered in the spirit of spontaneity. Melodies, harmonies and intent are altered by a performer depending on their current mood, relationship with other musicians, and/or by the audience.¹⁶ From ragtime to the twenty first century mixtures it is a “musician’s music” possessed by rhythm and improvisation. Jazz underwent major changes in the 1950s. It remained “the music of the city” but styles unique to regions surfaced. “Jazz in the fifties continued to be a genre in the making, influenced by 1940s swing and the big bands of Duke Ellington and Count Basie, the vocals of Ella Fitzgerald and the Bebop movement.”¹⁷

Jazz, like most art forms, is difficult to define clearly. Louis Armstrong once stated “If you’ve got to ask what jazz is, you’ll never know.” Common definitions by many historians are varied and fall somewhere between: jazz is an African-American music; an improvised music; and/or a music fusing blues and swing. It would be incorrect to categorize jazz as only one of the aforementioned definitions. It is a music created by people of many ethnicities so it cannot be

¹⁵ Frank A. Salomone, *Popular Culture in The Fifties* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2001), 12.

¹⁶ Peter Townsend, *Jazz in American Culture* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 9.

¹⁷ Dunar, 271.

solely considered African-American music. That is certainly not to make light of the influence African American culture has had on jazz. Many of the elements in jazz such as the rhythm patterns including drum rhythms, overlapping call-and-response, and voice/instrument interchange are elements found in African music and undoubtedly influenced the development of jazz.¹⁸ Jazz's improvisational nature is one of its distinctive characteristics, however it would be an injustice to claim jazz is only improvisation. Blues and swing are a part of jazz but one could argue that swing can be considered a byproduct of jazz and blues respectively. Therefore, labeling jazz as the sum of blues and swing is inaccurate. My goal is not to confine jazz to a particular definition. Rather, I am using its indefinable quality as a vehicle to showcase its overwhelming flexibility and more importantly why so many people can appreciate and identify with it. Jazz's ambiguity is what makes it so distinct and why it makes the perfect vehicle to demonstrate the diversity of people during the 1950s. Its innate versatility serves as clear indication as to why there are so many different styles. Let us consider the table below:

Table 1. John F. Szwed's chronological table of jazz¹⁹

Pre-Jazz (ragtime, vaudeville)	ca. 1875-1915
Early Jazz (New Orleans jazz)	1910-1927
Swing	1928-1945
Bebop	1945-1953
Cool jazz/West Coast jazz	1949-1958
Hard bop	1954-1965
Soul/funk jazz	1957-1959
Modal jazz	1958-1964
Third-stream jazz	1957-1963
Free jazz	1959-1974
Fusion and jazz-rock	1969-1974
Neo-traditionalism	1980-

¹⁸ John F. Szwed, *Jazz 101: A Complete Guide to Learning and Loving Jazz* (New York: Hyperion, 2000), 58.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

After reviewing the table two main points are evident: firstly, there are over ten different types of jazz; secondly, it is evident many of these styles overlap throughout the years, making it very difficult to organize jazz definitively. Herein lays the answer as to why jazz cannot be defined in a precise way. This would only limit it.

For the scope of the thesis the focus will be on a few of the more prominent types of jazz in the 1950s such as Bebop, Cool jazz/West Coast jazz, and Hard bop. These three could also easily fit into the categories aforementioned. Bebop is arguably the jazz of the non-conformist because it was not a readily accepted form of jazz at first while Cool jazz is the jazz of the conformist since it was jazz that the masses accepted quickly. Finally, Hard bop is the jazz of the purist because it was created by jazz musicians who were seeking to take jazz back to its initial roots. Bebop began roughly in the mid 1940s and is often characterized as a response to swing and the big bands of the 1940s. Jazz historian, John F. Szwed describes it as the

music of World War II, and though some of its key players were never in military service, musicians on the home front experienced their own displacements and upheavals in the form of strikes, the injustices of segregation, discrimination, and economic inequality.²⁰

Bebop experienced its share of controversy. Some viewed it as a “musical affront” against swing while other times it was considered part of the mainstream of music.²¹ A technical definition of Bebop can be explained through a simple breakdown of its instrumental structure. Bebop bands typically consisted of a saxophone, trumpet, bass, drums and piano. Bebop band leaders Charlie Parker, a saxophone player, and Dizzy Gillespie, a trumpet virtuoso helped popularize this structure. Another feature found in Bebop is that it is music to listen to not dance to; therefore, its composition differed from earlier versions of jazz including swing. It is faster, more erratic, and

²⁰ Ibid., 160.

²¹ Salomone, *Popular Culture*, 161 &156.

a moment of experimentation for musicians. It is meant to be as unconventional and improvised as possible. Bebop, as difficult as it is to define like other types of jazz, is coincidentally a defining moment in jazz history because it placed spontaneity at center stage of musical creativity. Disorganization and broken up melodies became a legitimate form of music; it was not a mistake or experiment. Bebop showcased not only a new way to create music, but it provided musicians the opportunity to exhibit their remarkable and individual talents with their instruments. Thelonious Monk, Sonny Rollins, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Bud Powell are only some of the musicians who took advantage of this soloist characteristic in Bebop. Being able to perform solos allowed musicians to challenge themselves and test their virtuosity with their instruments and soar above their own and the public's expectations.

A leading innovator of Bebop was pianist Thelonious Monk. His unconventional technique when composing music and his creative contributions to Bebop are some of the reasons why he proved to be so influential. He stands out in Bebop primarily because he diverged from what other beboppers were doing. While most musicians incorporated a "seemingly endless flow of melody lines" he "favored spare, calculated melodies and carefully chosen notes, graced with silences which were treated as a part of the melody."²² Bebop had its enemies. Dizzy Gillespie lists and counters major misconceptions and "lies" about Beboppers. One lie is that "Beboppers threatened to destroy pop, blues, and old-time Dixieland jazz."²³ He dismantles this notion as he explains that without those genres of music, modern jazz would cease to be. It would have been detrimental if Beboppers would have severed their ties with

²² Szwed, *Jazz 101*, 171-172.

²³ Dizzy Gillespie, *To Be, or not... To Bop* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 293.

some of those genres. Gillespie describes the Bebopper as someone who wanted to “impress the world with a new stamp, the uniquely modern design of a new generation coming of age.”²⁴

Cool jazz and west coast jazz became a new form of jazz which sparked a behavioral change in listeners and performers alike. Ted Gioia states that cool was not just a term it went “deeper, shaping psyches and characters, and impacting how people dealt with situations and looked at themselves.”²⁵ He is emphasizing that coolness is a persona one takes on. This role was embodied in fashion trends, in film, in a certain gait, and most pertinently in music. The concept of cool originated in jazz music, arguably in Miles Davis’ *Birth of Cool* released in 1957. The collaboration and experimentation between Miles Davis, his band, and composer Gil Evans marked *Birth of Cool* as a milestone for jazz music. It, like most new types of music, did not achieve instant popularity but its influence on jazz and its musicians was undeniable and irreversible. Cool jazz can best be described as a lighter version of Bebop. It consists of mellow and smooth sounds. It maintained “an overtly modernist music with radical implications”²⁶ and shared many components with Bebop such as “its predilection for experimentation and distaste for conformity”²⁷ Dizzy Gillespie argues that Cool jazz “was Bebop only cooler.”²⁸ Nevertheless, cool distinguished itself from Bebop predominantly due to its structured nature, a sharp contrast to Bebop. Its “mood [was] cerebral, reflective, and understated. Timbres are blended and indistinct floating in and out on quiescent waves.”²⁹ Cool jazz also incorporated various European musical elements. Consequently, this version of jazz became “associated with

²⁴ Ibid., 302.

²⁵ Ted Gioia, *The Birth and Death of The Cool* (Golden, Colorado: Speck Press, 2009), 2.

²⁶ Ibid., 280.

²⁷ Ibid., 280.

²⁸ Gillespie, *To Be, or not*, 359.

²⁹ Grover Sales, *Jazz: America’s Classical Music* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1984), 165.

whiteness, which, as it turned out was both a burden and a benefit.”³⁰ This association is conceivably a direct result of the formation of West Coast jazz. West Coast jazz is a byproduct and to a certain degree an extension of Cool jazz except this branch of music is often cited as being practiced predominantly by white musicians³¹.

Hard bop was a response to Cool jazz. Many jazz musicians soon found themselves in a restless state and rebelling against Cool jazz because many of them felt that Cool jazz was a mass produced cookie cutter mockery of jazz. Miles Davis yet again is commonly credited with some of the earliest performances of hard bop. Hard bop “reasserted the primacy of rhythm and the blues.”³² Davis performed the title track to his 1954 album “Walkin’” making it the first public performance of hard bop. Davis and fellow musician John Coltrane joined forces and created a quintet that would set the structure for the Hard bop movement. Charlie Mingus, Max Roach, Thelonious Monk, Sonny Rollins, Cannonball Adderly, and Sonny Stitt are some of the few leading Hard boppers of the 1950s. Dizzy Gillespie states in his personal memoirs that Hard bop, including cool, drew new black fans to jazz and helped “extend the scope and popularity of modern jazz.”³³

It is significant to recognize that jazz is a lifestyle for some and simply music for others. Jazz to many listeners and musicians is not just a collection of improvised sounds rather the music itself is the embodiment of their lifestyle. The key theme that remains in jazz, in all of its varying forms, is that it relies on improvisation, spontaneity and progress. It is music that absorbs from its surroundings and in turn influences its surroundings.

³⁰ Szwed, *Jazz 101*, 173

³¹ Sales, *Jazz*, 167.

³² Gillespie, *To Be*, 369.

³³ *Ibid.*, 369.

In each of the subsequent chapters the various groups are presented with coinciding examples. Chapter II focuses on non-conformists. It weaves together various musicians such as Miles Davis, Chet Baker, Charles Mingus, and several female jazz musicians along with their individual experiences... Musicians fully embody the non-conformist in jazz because their lifestyle is the best representation of jazz as a lifestyle. They came from different backgrounds and geographic locations in the United States but all endured battles with addictions, family, prejudice, music, and inner demons. These musicians characterize the non-conformist best primarily because their goal was to make music whether it became successful or not. Their concern was not to be the most popular jazz musician but to simply make music. Also, upon achieving success their personal view of themselves remained the same as when they had started. In their minds they were not the superstars so many perceived them to be. Rather their self-images remained strongly associated with their rudimentary experiences of struggle. As a result they went against the grain.

In Chapter III, the conformist is further defined by figures such as Louis Armstrong, who personified jazz popular culture in the United States. Unlike other jazz musicians he played it “safe” by creating music that had mass appeal. Several musicians such as Miles Davis considered Louis a “sell out” because he played into the middle class American idea of an entertainer. His chief purpose in this chapter is to illustrate that it was possible to preserve mainstream popularity throughout a jazz career even when other jazz musicians, especially African American musicians, were not as easily embraced by pop culture. This chapter also includes jazz’s influence on different genres of literature which were commercially successful.

Excerpts from *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, *On The Road* by beat author Jack Kerouac, as well, as celebrated poems “Howl” by Allen Ginsberg and “Montage of a Dream Deferred” by Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes is used to reveal the influence jazz had in these works. Beat poets and authors such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg frequented jazz clubs and were friends to jazz musicians. Hence, they were able to experience a similar lifestyle and expressed a similar perception through their literary contributions.

Chapter IV discusses jazz’s role in the life of the purist. Jazz had once been rejected and soon began to be placed in high regard by others. The first instance happened in the mid 1950s when a new music by the name of rock n’ roll ushered in a mania that took the youth by storm. There was much resistance and a negative response to this new genre. The conservative mindset of the country proclaimed that rock and roll was allegedly encouraging rebellion and promiscuity. Jazz, once viewed negatively, was now considered safe and eventually became known as “America’s Classical Music”. Another instance comes from the musicians themselves who responded and reacted to forms of jazz they were unsatisfied with. Cool jazz was popular with mainstream America but not as readily received by an inner circle of musicians. Some viewed Cool jazz as a degenerate form of jazz lacking vitality and life. According to them, Bebop was the “real” jazz. Movement, disorganization and the impulsive nature of Bebop were hailed as true jazz characteristics and were soon manifested into Hard bop.

The goal is to understand jazz’s flexibility and fluidity in music, art, books, media, and ultimately its appeal to a diverse range of people. Its different facades give jazz appeal to a broad spectrum of the population. With all of its evolutionary elements there is one form of jazz for everyone. Jazz transcended through various mentalities and demographics never losing its luster.

It was reinvented itself over and over as it became the music for the underdog, for the masses, and for those seeking something unique and original. Jazz is a unique study for its enduring quality. This quality is attributed to the fact that it was appreciated by such a large population in the United States during a time when much of the country was starkly divided on other issues.

CHAPTER II

NON-CONFORMISTS IN JAZZ

This chapter seeks to first formulate a clear definition of the non-conformist nature by describing some of its characteristics. I will tie in these characteristics to the autobiographies presented. Although some of the characteristics which identify non-conformists may be found in other groups, it is the purpose of this chapter to find a consistent pattern of the defining aspects of non-conformists with the jazz musicians being discussed and in that matter show the commonalities possessed by these jazz musicians. In a 1960 study by Alan Merriam and Raymond Mack they write,

To all these [people], the peculiar qualities of jazz have an irresistible appeal. The unspoken protest, the kinesthetic release, the stimulation of repressed erotic drives- all these strike a responsive chord in the spirits of those members of society who regard themselves at once its outcast and its prisoners...jazz is thus a music for those who seek liberation and individuality.³⁴

This “liberation and individuality” that Mack speaks of is the central essence of the non-conformist. Jazz musicians and listeners were seeking to identify with others who shared their experiences and not by following along with trends. Many, if not most, musicians made music their career due to their background and struggles. Music provided them with the vehicle to

³⁴ Alan Merriam and Raymond Mack, “The Jazz Community.” *Social Forces* 38, no. 3 (March 1960), 213.

bridge a gap amongst themselves and others. They were able to speak and chronicle the common American experience during the 1950s with their music. Non-conformists chose to attain individuality and further garner their independence by creating music that was original work and made simply for the sake of making music not notoriety. The intent of the non-conformist is what distinguishes them. Their intent is to be free of conformity and be as individualistic as possible. A common denominator found in the varied musicians is that most lived a tumultuous life, which germinated in a powerful will to express oneself. Non-conformists lived out their music as an attitude and life style. Many of them had erratic behaviors and personalities that can paralleled to the spontaneity found in the musical structure of jazz. The focus is on the commonalities found in jazz musicians rather than the commonalties identifying them as an exclusive group. This chapter's research focuses on some musicians who are representative of non-conformists and uses these representations as prime examples.

If ever there was a jazz musician who embraces the elements of a non-conformist on multiple levels it would be Charles Mingus. In his streaming, reflective autobiography, *Beneath the Underdog*, he presents the life from a black jazz musician's and his own personal perspective. He offers a lens to look through the hunger, poverty, and racial discrimination endured by the African American community. His accounts subscribe to the idea that jazz musicians' creativity crystallized under the duress of life's "hard knocks". These experiences of poverty and oppression encouraged in these jazz musicians the pulse to create an art form that was unlike anything being listened to at the time and completely different from the mainstream music being listened to. Mingus presents his autobiography in the third person as if he is detached from his own life. He depicts his life story as a festival of debauchery, but intersperses

poignant glimpses of his childhood, adolescence, and manhood that defined his music. The reality that he was once a poor, struggling musician is something that he cannot forget even as he enters an opulent world through his musical success. The remembrance of his struggle is an awareness that remains ingrained in him enabling him to remain a non-conformist.

Before Charles Mingus is studied as an example it is important to take a glimpse at his contributions to jazz. Mingus, considered a bass prodigy by his teachers, studied with Herman Rheinshagen as he became a rising star and learned to play the piano under the tutelage of Lloyd Reese.³⁵ As a band leader he worked with Charlie Parker, co-founded Debut Records with Max Roach, played with Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, and was at one time a member of Duke Ellington's band.^{36 37} As a bassist he applied a "volatile and virtuosic" approach to an "inflexible" instrument.³⁸ He worked with all the masters of jazz infusing Latin, rhythm and blues, church spirituals, Bebop, and partook of Duke Ellington's arrangements. *New Tijuana Moods* is considered one of his finest works, in which he incorporates all of his musical influences.³⁹ His presence roared in the world of jazz when he created a Jazz Workshop where he utilized some of the most accomplished musicians of the time, embraced their individual style as he encouraged their originality, and proceeded to teach them by ear.⁴⁰ Despite his abilities as a musician and composer, feelings of unworthiness shadowed him.

Growing up in the Watts area of Los Angeles in the 1930s Mingus soon discovered that life was a struggle and life was not always good. By the time he turned eight Charles' father replaced his son's trombone for a cello and paid for lessons where children learned music by ear,

³⁵ Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, ed. Neil King (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 133 & 76.

³⁶ Szwed, *Jazz 101*, 203.

³⁷ Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 324.

³⁸ Szwed, *Jazz 101*, 203.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 205.

a short-cut method that short-changed the parents and the children who did not receive the formal musical instruction of a true musician. When Charles was thrown out of the Los Angeles Junior Philharmonic Orchestra for not knowing how to read music, the inadequacy of his previous instruction was exposed⁴¹. By the age of seventeen he walked approximately twenty miles a day shining shoes in Compton City, California going in and out of the neighborhood and reading about such things as karma, yoga, and reincarnation.⁴² His autobiography uncovers a young Charles facing an array of evidence to indicate that his status in life was lower than others. While Mingus married and entered fatherhood he played in the club circuit, engaged in extramarital affairs and ultimately became a panderer of female escorts. After becoming disillusioned with making money in this fashion he returned to work in a “first class club” and nearly appeared on television. Unfortunately, his television performance never happened due to the color of his skin.⁴³ He turned to Duke Ellington, his hero, and played in his band only to be one of the few to be fired by Ellington. Charles’ dueling with one of Ellington’s trombone players, Juan Tizol, led to the firing. Tizol was “an old problem” Ellington could cope with but not with the “whole bag of new tricks” Mingus brought to the dynamics of the band.⁴⁴ After this firing Mingus worked tirelessly in other clubs. His exhaustive schedule proved to be unhealthy and he ended up at Bellevue Hospital where a white doctor diagnosed that the problem with “Negroes” was that they are paranoid and think the whole world is against them. He proceeded to offer a cure for this ailment by performing a lobotomy on the frontal lobe.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 31.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 323.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 325.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 333.

Although he uses different names for the people that he speaks about, the most important aspect about the recounting of the array of incidents aforementioned is that they are Mingus' words which reflect his state of mind, his point of view, and his commentary about his life experience. The personal struggles, the negative self image, the rebellious nature of his personality are all present here. These experiences were expressed in his music in the sense that he would play his instrument almost angrily and compose music that was robust with emotion and occasional disorder. He recounts that his grandmother shared her life as a slave with him and the reality of slavery remained seared in Mingus. Racial discrimination closed some doors for him as an artist because of the color of his skin, where poverty determined part of his emotional unrest and came together in a *gestalt* for the boy who would bring to jazz his own sort of symphony.⁴⁶

A final important aspect of this quasi-autobiography finds Charles Mingus using people he knows to voice his own discoveries of the racist and discriminatory nature of people he dealt with. Many of these accounts also support his non-conformist nature. Fats Navarro, one of Mingus' contemporaries and a renowned trumpet player, forced Mingus to face his reality. Fats indoctrinated Mingus to believe that jazz was a big business for those *owning* record companies and the popular jazz musician is but a "work ant". It is someone else, mostly white men, who own the agencies and the record companies and if the jazz musician does not do what he is told, he will face unemployment, as well as, bad publicity.⁴⁷ Through Fats, Mingus was convinced that his role models like Duke Ellington had sold out to the superficial business strategies and that all famous jazz musicians got cheated out on the actual number of record sales, and played

⁴⁶ Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 114.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 188.

according to the “white man rules” and/or what was being popularly accepted at the time.⁴⁸ If a jazz musician dared to strike out on his own, Fats Navarro, pointed out to Mingus, he needed to contend with “the biggest gun in the world to stick in a man’s ribs—*hunger*”.⁴⁹

He believes that white businessmen selling jazz acts are “choking to death the goose that’s laid all them golden eggs” and states that he will never make money because he does not bow down to agents and this refusal to “bow” to agents is an explicit example of a non-conformist characteristic. He ends with this conviction:

My main motive for living would be getting money to buy my way out of a decaying society that’s destroying itself while it tries to figure out what to do with the new kind of ‘black’ it produced. But I’d have nothing to do with black or white; I’d be a member of the race less people of this earth.⁵⁰

Charles Mingus’ life experiences translated into the emotional struggles embedded in his music appealed to other non-conformists because of their related experiences. Additionally, in his professional life Mingus dealt with the disappointment of not being able to perform on television because he was black, and faced the reality that his heroes like Duke Ellington accepted the profile assigned to the black jazz musician. His mastery of jazz is marked with the originality and individuality of the jazz musician from the street who translated their struggles into music. It is Mingus’ experiences which resonated in his brand of jazz- the vitality, the holding of time and tempo, the improvisation, the music’s unexpected erratic broken rhythms, and explosive doubling of the bassist’s four beat all invoke images of a life filled with defeat, triumph, and an enormous amount of obstacles erected from socio-economic and racial prejudices.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 189.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 190.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 353.

Chet Baker did not suffer racial discrimination like Charles Mingus. He suffered internal emotional struggles instead. Chet Baker, the Cool Jazz trumpeter, became a prisoner of his own addictions. Like Mingus he had a challenging home life as a child. The emotional hunger and struggle began at that time. As a talented white man he brings another dimension to the non-conformist. Possessing the chiseled good looks of a movie star and musical talent it would seem success would come easy. Unfortunately, a series of drug busts seemed to draw more attention from his fans than the exquisite sound of his trumpet. In his autobiography Baker speaks fondly of his uncle and aunt who took his family in during the Depression. He writes that he was mostly raised in Yale, Oklahoma by his uncle Jim and aunt Agnes between the ages of one through eight. It was at this time that he experienced a stability he never again recaptured.

When he left his uncle's home and moved to Glendale, California, Baker lost the stability he knew and became truant at school. He struggled in music class because he could only play by ear. During his time at El Camino Junior College his drug habit began as he experimented with smoking "grass" and consequently dropped out of college when his music teacher told him he would never make it as a musician.⁵¹ Shortly after leaving school Baker met Jimmy Rowles, a famous piano accompanist. Rowles advised him to keep "things simple and about not getting too busy [with his] horn."⁵² This might be the most profitable advice Baker ever received. His trademark sound evolved from this slow, subtle, quieter musical approach.

Between two different tours in the Army, Chet Baker also worked with Vida Musso and Stan Getz, playing a substantial number of gigs on the West Coast before he auditioned for Charlie Parker who chose Baker to play with him. Charlie, or "Bird" as he was nicknamed, is

⁵¹ Chet Baker, *As Though I Had Wings: The Lost Memoir* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997), 36.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 29.

considered by jazz musicians to be one of the most influential American jazz saxophonists ranking in importance with Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong. Chet Baker reveals a great deal about himself through anecdotes. He offers an intimate portrait of himself and other musicians such as Parker that are laced with a rebellious quality and resonate with the non-conformist. When he is the focus of his own narrative he recounts playing he does not say that on one night while he played with Gerry Mulligan they “received a lot of publicity” as he interplayed and debuted his solo *of My Funny Valentine* which has since become a standard synonymous with him and one that mainstream culture has adopted as their own.⁵³ His conscious effort to leave out his commercial successes demonstrate his active and personal need to remain as a non-conformist and most uniquely it shows us that jazz was fluid even when it was not intended to be by the artist. Baker expresses his frustration when the focus of his talent was with how fast, how high, and how loud he could play. In his opinion the people interested in this aspect of his playing only had a cursory understanding of jazz, more indicative of pop listeners. He wrote they should learn how to hear, that is follow the “horn player through his ideas, and be able to understand those ideas in relation to the changes, if the changes are modern.”⁵⁴ He chastises the public only in that one instance as he reveals his ardor and respect for his preferred style of music.

Chet Baker’s autobiography is replete with references to drugs. His own use and those around him is something he wrote extensively about. Drug is a hallmark of non-conformist behavior during this time because the use of drugs is not an act of a person who is concerned with public appeal particularly in a neo-Victorian decade when drug use was so strongly looked

⁵³ Ibid., 59.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 29.

down upon. A musician who wanted to gain popularity hid their drug use while Baker did not. Throughout their careers most jazz musicians dealt with rejection, firings, long tours with temptations for drugs which Baker extensively chronicles. Starting with marijuana and culminating in heroin Chet Baker succumbed into the drug scene. His attempts at sobriety were in vain. Interspersed with the successful recordings and gigs was the ever present temptation of drugs. Like a shroud that hung over his cool, and easy-going sound, drugs would continue to sap his focus from what was really important, his music. Music and drugs were the loves of Chet Baker. It is interesting to note that a dichotomy presented itself with most jazz musicians. The beautiful music came from painful experiences and inner demons. These realities caused in many cases a form of rebellion that often times lead to the use of drugs. Chet Baker is not an exception.

The contributions of female jazz musicians of the 1950s made inroads in the male dominated world of jazz music. Like most of their male counterparts they faced discrimination and rejection however most of the rejection these women faced stemmed from their gender. Women were considered mediocre talents who sang and played only moderately well. Women had a double-edged sword before them: they fought off the “wartime attitude” of coming to the rescue during a crisis, but now needing to return to their previous domestic duties, and the critical competition in music entertainment brought on by the decline of the big bands of the 1940s. The silent code of the times dictated that whatever select musical jobs existed, that they be reserved for the male jazz musician.⁵⁵ Additionally, women needed to fight off the television and movie stereotypes. Movies of the 1950s and television shows like *Leave it to Beaver* depicted women as models of domestic servitude. Society seemed to determine appropriate

⁵⁵ Sally Placksin, *American Women in Jazz: 1900 to the Present Their Words, Lives, and Music* (New York: Seaview Books, 1982), 223.

behavior of women. It is important to mention these middle class standards in this chapter because it reveals the societal perceptions and mores of the time when it came to women. Also it is indicative of the additional pressures the female jazz musician had to face. Despite the enormity of these road blocks women of jazz paved open new paths.

Some famous female musicians of the 1950s included Barbara Carroll, a classically trained pianist and early interpreter of Bebop. Tiny Davis who led a group called the Hell Divers which included musicians such as Helen Cole, Eileen Chance, and Maureen Smith. Vi Burnside, a well-known bass player led her group dubbed The Syncoettes.⁵⁶ Other female jazz instrumentalists found work and recorded albums in Europe. These included Lil Hardin Armstrong and a trio led by Beryl Booker. Another noteworthy female musician of the decade was Willene Barton, a tenor saxophone player greatly admired by Eddie Durham. Durham, a jazz guitarist and composer, worked with Count Basie, Cab Calloway, Glenn Miller, and many other jazz musicians. When referring to Willene Barton, Durham expressed his admiration: “None of ‘em was as good as Willene. Willene’s got that tone that touches the soul for some reason. Ben Webster had it ... And Louis played it on his trumpet”.⁵⁷ In 1952 she played with Anna Mae Winburn in a small Sweethearts unit and they toured the South with bassist Eileen Chance, pianist Lorraine Walsh, trumpeter Maxine Fields and percussionist Pauline Braddy. It was during this tour doing six to seven shows that Barton credits for her becoming a professional saxophone player playing alongside women who were at a professional level greater than hers at the time.⁵⁸ She let “one of the guys (she worked in bands with male jazz musicians in the late 1950s) call the numbers. That way it did not seem that [she] was the overbearing female. [She would] make

⁵⁶ Ibid., 224.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 227.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 229.

it a group kind of thing; [they would] all make decisions. That's how you had to work with those guys in those days.”⁵⁹ Hence, she led the men to believe they were making the decisions while downplaying her role in leading them to those decisions. The fact that today Barton is not a household name like Dinah Washington is due to the fact, according to Barton, that she did not play the right politics.⁶⁰ This refusal to play the “right politics” is a clear indication of her non-conformist nature. She refused to play by any one else's rules but her own. Outwardly she functioned as the team player; inwardly she followed her own accord. While female jazz instrumentalists determinedly made inroads in jazz, female jazz vocalists such as Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughn stood on the crest of national fame.

In an interview conducted by Art Taylor, Carmen talks about how her interest in music began since she was an infant, she explains how she sought to learn as a child all the “popular tunes of the day”. She talks in this interview of her idol, Billie Holiday, of whom she was in “awe” of. She described Holiday as “utterly perfect” and felt that she would be “anticlimactic” to Holiday's perfect voice. Although she knew how to play the piano it was as a singer that she excelled and used the idea of playing the piano only to advance her singing career. This is the little extra she had to do, play the piano so that she could use the platform to sing. (This parallels with the extra performances Willene Barton was being asked to do, so that she could have equal footing with the male jazz musicians) In an interview entitled “Painter of a Song: Carmen McRae Song Stylist” featuring McRae and notables such as Carole Sloane, singers Abby Lincoln and Ernestine Anderson, she again mentions the influence of Billie Holiday but adds Irene Wilson Ketchings, a famous lyricist, as one of the most influential persons in her singing career.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 230.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 230.

McRae recalls that at only seventeen Ketchings would write lyrics which she would then sing to Holiday. McRae states: “I don’t want to sound like her, but I try to do what she would do if she were me”.⁶¹

She went to Chicago on the advice of a chorus girl named Lulu and got a job singing and perfecting her piano skills. However, in the early 1950s she returned to New York and sang at Minton’s, a popular jazz club amongst musicians. She talks in the interview about the importance of the lyrics, especially in the ballads and how she tried “to act them out without being overdramatic”.⁶² Ray Gleason mentions how she could interpret a lyric and “gave it an intimacy that was almost embarrassing”. Her accompanist stated in the interview that the secret to McRae’s unforgettable voice was that unlike other singers she “did not bring her act, she brought herself”. Carole Sloane observed that hers was a very “tight vibrato sung beautifully” with “shortened spaces between phrases which is a very effective technique”.

The fact that McRae had perfected her singing style with an intricate knowledge of her craft did not seem to matter. She still faced the obstacle of being accepted in the world of music because of her gender. For this Carmen McRae developed a tough exterior. Abby Lincoln observes that she did her best to live in a “man dominated business”. She recounts that once when McRae performed at the Los Angeles Parisian Room a man was talking rather loudly and she stopped singing on the stage and admonished him. In a recording of this incident the listener can hear Carmen say: “I am going to teach you how to sit in a nightclub”⁶³ and then proceeds to tell him that others paid to hear her sing and she cannot continue with his loud talking. Applause is heard and she ends by telling him to “cool it”. Then she continues to perform as if the incident

⁶¹ Carmen McRae, interview by Nancy Wilson, *NPR’s ‘Jazz Profiles*, PBS, December 5, 2007.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid

did not occur. Ernestina Anderson notes that she was labeled a “bitch”, by fellow musicians, predominantly male musicians because she was a “no-nonsense person who was always in control”.⁶⁴ Yet Carol Sloane states she feared people getting too close and would “keep you at arm’s length. She had been hurt by men, broken marriages, and broken love affairs”.⁶⁵ But when she let her guard down and trusted you she could be” funny, delightful and caring”. Ernestine Anderson offered one last anecdote about McCrae in the interview. Ernestine recalled how she had retired and was planning a comeback. The problem was she did not have any songs. She visited McCrae who pulled out drum cases where she kept her songs and told her to take whatever songs she needed for her comeback. These small but generous acts of McCrae exemplified a sisterhood which bonded female jazz musicians and vocalists who against all odds entered the male dominated world of jazz and have stayed there by following their own rules.

The last jazz musician that I discuss is Miles Davis. Outwardly, it is easy to suspect he would fit into the conformist category given his popularity however his rebellious and independent nature is what makes him a non-conformist. His refusal to create music that was expected of him and jazz musicians demonstrates his goal to remain individual and independent. One explicit example of this non-conformist nature is when he was playing at the Sutherland Lounge in Chicago his mother asked him to smile at his admiring audience and his response was “What do you want me to be, an Uncle Tom?” This refusal to fit or even remotely resemble a stereotype was quickly admonished by him. Although he was bolder he internalized the same racial discrimination his black contemporaries did. His perception of what he was, a black man with all the ramifications that brings, marks him as a non-conformist.

⁶⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵ Ibid

What exactly makes Davis a little different? He is able to vacillate between different groups and fan bases because he was able to channel and translate much of his work to most groups.”⁶⁶ The fact that his father was a dentist and his thinking of coming from a line of “somebodies”, did not prevent him from the following: going to a school that smelled like a cesspool, racial name calling while in school defending himself from racial profiling as an adult on his way to the White House, and rejection from a boxing trainer who told him he was a drug addict. Davis’ only defense was his fierce sense of self-worth. However, his consciousness contains the racial discrimination he endured, the struggle with drugs, his perception of coming from a line of “somebodies” being challenged, and having to defend that he was somebody are all. Regardless of his subsequent successes and celebrated status in the world of jazz Davis is a non-conformist because he achieved all of that by following his individual choices and not by the influences or expectations placed before him.

Because Davis’ contributions to jazz were vast and expanded through several decades it is important to elaborate on his musical influences. His early lessons came from Bobby Hackett and Harold “Short” Baker who advised him to “play without any vibrato... you are going to get old anyway and start shaking.”⁶⁷ This lesson might have awakened in Davis two of his central musical traits-his concern with sound and his refusal to be relegated to a period of time, and playing something that may sound passé. He simply refused to be identified with a particular time period again, identifying with the non-conformist by refusing to be identified or categorized.⁶⁸ Many of the themes of his various bands through the years are standards which are emulated by many jazz musicians. His sound seeped into all of the following: bebop, hard

⁶⁶ Larry Kart, *Jazz In Search of Itself* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 201.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 230.

bop, cool, funky, Avant garde, fusion, R&B, soul, dance, and rap, and his “lyrical trumpet” embraced three different approaches: a New Orleans-based sound, an operatic approach, and a plaintive style.⁶⁹ This fluid quality he presented is precisely what makes jazz so unique during the 1950s. Many artists such as Miles Davis were able to resonate their sound to multiple demographics all the while remaining true to their own artistic self.

Davis produced three highly celebrated albums towards the end of the decade: *Miles Ahead* (1957), *Porgy and Bess* (1958), and *Sketches of Spain* (1959).⁷⁰ At this time the initiator of change in the forms and shapes of jazz was confronted with the emergence of “free jazz”, a form of jazz John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman embraced. As expected Davis reacted negatively to it and resisted in true non-conformist form. While Coleman and Coltrane found American popular song irrelevant to their brand of music, Davis delved into it. A “lyrical player” he had an affinity toward the American popular song and created a “wonderful tension by approaching and then withdrawing from the symmetry and sweetness of Gershwin and Richard Rogers.”⁷¹

In 1956 Davis discovered the Harmon mute, a whisper like sound produced by playing softly into the microphone. This was unlike what any other musician was experimenting with at the time. Coltrane, Charlie Parker and Dexter Gordon teamed up to produce an accompanying personalized harmony. Davis used as a model the Ahmad Jamal trio whose sound was “light but swinging”.⁷² The uniqueness and innovative individuality by showcasing a new instrument and sound showcases how Davis’ non-conformist behaviors also prompted success. Miles Davis diversified jazz music like no other artist. The accomplishments discussed in this chapter are

⁶⁹ Bill Kirchner, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 389.

⁷⁰ Kart, *Jazz In Search*, 204.

⁷¹ Ibid., 206.

⁷² Kirchner, *The Oxford Companion*, 394.

from only one of four complete decades of contributions. More than just a chameleon in his artistry, he offered a dimension of self-reliance, self-respect, and a resilience that served as a model to his counterparts.

Non-conformist as defined in this chapter encompasses a perception or self-image frequently shaped from experiences involving prejudice, struggle and rejection. Evolving from these circumstances are rebellion, the use of drugs, and rejection of the status quo. Each biographical glimpse provided in this chapter shows how some of the most notable artists and names in jazz during the 1950s experienced their fair share of trials and tribulations. In some instances these challenges prompted prolific creativity. At other times it led the jazz musician into a whirlwind of addiction and self-destruction. In either case, this non-conformist mentality enabled musicians to create music laced with raw talent and pure emotion that was all their own.

CHAPTER III

CONFORMISTS IN JAZZ

This chapter proposes a definition of the conformist who maintained a symbiotic relationship with the mass media and popular culture of the 1950s and how the diverse elements of jazz became infused in different pieces of literature during the decade of the 1950s. The conformist and the popular culture they fostered are defined in this chapter as the standard in music, literature, art, or fashion. It refers to that which is mainstream what is easily recognizable and accepted. It is the preferred choice of what the majority of the people would like to see, hear, or read. Popular culture places great importance and helps determine what is accepted or approved by most. Ted Gioia argues that “cool” was not only a kind of jazz phrase it was a behavior.⁷³ Jazz music and its subsequent culture have been a fabric of American popular culture since the iconic “Jazz Age” of the 1920s. The article below from the Washington Times published in 1920 demonstrates how jazz culture had permeated into the fashions of that time. This is a clear representation of the influence of jazz in popular culture and mainstream America. It also helps explain when jazz became an element of pop culture and that a fan of jazz was much more easily identified in the 1920s while in the 1950s fans of jazz were so varied that it was more ambiguous as to who those fans were.

⁷³ Gioia, *The Birth and Death*, 2.

Not only did jazz music serve as an element of pop culture during the 1950s, it also gained traction through literature and references in some of the decades most famous written works. In the area of music Louis Armstrong will be discussed in this chapter because during the 1950s he had become one of the most recognizable performers of the decade. Literary works which contain jazz influence include: *Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac, and poems written by Langston Hughes and Allen Ginsberg. I have chosen these writers because they are relevant to the decade and because of the apparent influence of jazz on their work.

Louis Armstrong became a mainstream artist and reached the pinnacle of his career in the 1950s. He crossed the threshold from the underground scene and experienced his greatest success during this decade. His transition from the raw, unknown musician to the highly commercialized and popular musician became a permanent transition. As he enjoyed his greatest success during this decade, the focus is on his marketability. Having marketability means being recognized by the masses and being famous is very much a part of popular culture. In his autobiography, *Swing that Music* Louis Armstrong traces his own personal journey to jazz. Touted by music historians as the only true uniquely American art form, it spread, according to Armstrong, from New Orleans up the Mississippi to St. Paul and on to Chicago. West of Chicago it spread to San Francisco and east of Chicago it reached New York⁷⁵. Louis Armstrong's placement in the Waif's Home for Boys was one of those "hard knocks" in life which brought him to the door of his eventual success. It was here where he became part of a boys' orchestra called the Waif's Home Band. Mr. Peter Davis, one of the caretakers of the boys' jail, gave him a cheap trumpet and as a member of the band he got to play in parades in New Orleans and at

⁷⁵ Louis Armstrong, *Swing That Music* (New York: De Capo Press, 1993), 16.

picnics in the summer.⁷⁶ These were the humble venues where Louis Armstrong learned not to be afraid, but to keep on playing. This sense of the “show must go on”, even though one is afraid, seems to foreshadow the concept of improvisation in jazz where if something is forgotten from your “musical memory”, you change it. This is what Louis Armstrong discovered as a teenager. His actions transcended into his music, and became a part of this emerging American musical staple.

Louis Armstrong formed his own orchestra with Joe Oliver, Fletcher Henderson, and other musicians, and as he rode boats such as the *Dixie Belle* down and up the Mississippi, played as a feature trumpeter in the Broadway production *Hot Chocolates*, starred at Harlem’s Cotton Club and found out that Europe (especially England and France) embraced his brand of music with greater enthusiasm than America⁷⁷.

In his autobiography Armstrong makes the observation that the originators of jazz never heard of classical music such as Bach, Mozart, or Mendelssohn and that is precisely the reason they became great musicians. Furthermore, he reflects that not having proper music training is what prompted the jazz musician to *create*. This indicates that jazz musicians lacked classical musical training but were still able to create music that those with a more “proper” background were able to appreciate. Armstrong provides an interesting piece of insight about the jazz musician when he states that the jazz musician is not only an artist but a composer. He would compose the rendition of a song by playing through “musical memory”.⁷⁸ It was when people, who heard this brand of music, wrote it down and played over and over again the same way that swing music was almost obliterated. Had they gone to a music conservatory, swing musicians

⁷⁶ Ibid., 18.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 80, 89, 95, &101.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 73.

would have been taught to “worship the great masters of classical music and been told it was sacrilegious to change a single note of what was put before them to play, [then] swing music would never have been born at all”.⁷⁹ Of course this swing music was not in the vein of classical music, but Armstrong’s analogy brings out key elements of swing music which later became known as jazz. Certainly spontaneity was the central element in jazz’s creativity. The authentic jazz musician would “swing” or play “by ear and musical instinct”.⁸⁰ Only a few musicians could, as a band, “play in and out together as one man”.⁸¹ Unlike a “regular” orchestra in a swing band certain instruments would stand out, new notes would emerge, regular rhythms would be broken up and, although the melody would sound familiar, the score would be improvised.⁸² This is why a song played by a swing band consisted of different versions, and the countless improvisations were a result of playing by ear and pouring into it a spontaneous “musical feeling”.⁸³ The magic of swing music was keeping the listener alert to variation and expecting the unexpected. It made it seem as if “something really creative [was] happening right before you”.⁸⁴ Although Armstrong does not mention it in his autobiography, he added to jazz music *scat singing*. This is the singing of wordless syllables sung in an instrumental manner with a fluid urgency and patterns of sounds in constant motion. Armstrong observes that music played with predetermined notes and scores is music that takes a life of its own. The trained musician who reads music plays it the way he has been taught. The “ignorant” musician, as Armstrong defines the swing musician, is the one who brings an enormous amount of feelings and emotions which must be expressed. Hence, the product of the latter is one that is “crude” not quite

⁷⁹ Ibid., 73.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 32.

⁸¹ Ibid., 32.

⁸² Ibid., 33.

⁸³ Ibid., 33.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 34.

finished.⁸⁵ Armstrong conceded that jazz had been refined by professionally trained musicians, and that it is “broader and richer” than the original swing music of New Orleans. This is what gives it its permanency in the world of music. Orchestras such as Benny Goodman’s or Jimmy Dorsey’s belong to this permanent type of music with a classical bent. This then provides jazz with a path into a more elite cultural bracket. Armstrong refers to these orchestras as “regular” orchestras where the conductor follows the arrangements as they are written.⁸⁶ An extension of the legacy left by these “regular orchestras” is the phenomenon of recording American standards such as *Moonlight Serenade*, and *I’ll be Seeing You*, by contemporary artists. The jazz musician of Armstrong’s earlier period lived totally in the now, capturing the moment. While that is part of the spontaneity that defines jazz the popular audience does need a sense of permanency. It needs a recording which very much like a snapshot allows the listener to reminisce and feel a connection, a sense of continuum. The permanency of the recordings Louis Armstrong talks about in his autobiography may not have been charged with the spontaneity or the improvisation he knew at the beginning of his career, but as he recorded his own hits, like “Hello Dolly” or “It’s a Wonderful World” his recordings sold. It was what the general public wanted. It was saleable. It was part of popular culture.

The greatest byproduct of the permanency of the “regular orchestras” is that it allowed jazz to become part of the great music genres on an international scale. Armstrong’s popular acceptance abroad was evident when he visited England and his jazz band broke attendance records at London’s Palladium.⁸⁷ He found out that Europeans created fan clubs composed of amateur musicians who studied and followed the development of jazz, appreciating it as “an

⁸⁵ Ibid., 74.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 31.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 97-100.

important advance in the history of all music”.⁸⁸ America initiated its own clubs in 1931, United Hot Clubs of America, to learn more about the American entrée, *swing music*, into the musical universe. Armstrong strategically points out that a newsletter issued by the American Hot Clubs about swing music stated: “The fact that, like our poets Walt Whitman and Edgar Allen Poe, it was first truly appreciated abroad, adds to our obligation to study it and spread an understanding of it at home. Like the skyscraper, it remains typically American.”⁸⁹

Because Louis Armstrong became commercially successful in the glossy world of business and profit, he is considered to have “sold out”. Miles Davis certainly thought so. Davis “loved Louis ‘Satchmo’ Armstrong, [but] always hated the way [he] used to laugh and grin for the audiences.”⁹⁰ Davis acknowledges that they rose to fame at different times which allowed him to understand the behavior, but he did not condone it. However, Louis Armstrong’s career fits the definition of popular culture. His music and stage persona were accepted and cherished by the mainstream then and now. Never going back to the insecure world of the streets, he honed his talents as a premier trumpeter; improvisation and spontaneity might have been too big a price to pay.

The next part of this chapter will examine the influence of jazz in the literary works aforementioned. It may not be so extraordinary that jazz filtered into literature. After all poetry, like jazz, has rhythm. However, the fact that jazz influenced the meter of poetry and it influenced the subject matter of novels affirms its national appeal and demand, making it very much a part of popular culture in the 1950s. It is also important to take into account that not all of the

⁸⁸ Ibid., 105.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 108-109.

⁹⁰ Miles Davis with Quincy Troupe, *The Autobiography* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2005), 83

literature discussed below was popular at the time it was published but was soon embraced by the masses making it's placement in this study.

The characteristics of jazz music such as syncopation, improvisation, broken rhythms, varied meter, a movement, and lyricism are literary forms incorporated in works of literature. For example, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) devotes many of the passages in the book to describing how jazz impacted the protagonist. Earlier writers as diverse as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Harlem Renaissance authors such as Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston, for example, perceived jazz music as the catalyst which heralds a liberating force from racial, social, and sexual repression in America. These writers welcomed the prospect of the freedoms jazz music represented and injected the swinging tempo and rhythms of jazz into their prose and poetry. Furthermore, popular jazz musicians were used as the models for characters in novels or short stories displaying freedom in their lifestyle and the music which they performed. The characteristics of jazz music and sounds emitted from both instruments and the jazz singer are mimicked in the works of literature to be discussed. Broken rhythms, spontaneity, and improvisations are paralleled with the non-traditional grammatical elements of broken sentence structure, lack of punctuation and repetitive or erratic syntax.

One of the writers who injected jazz music motifs into his literary works was Langston Hughes. He was an American black novelist, poet, and short story writer whose influential work was highly regarded. A multidimensional literary figure within his inner circle of Harlem Renaissance contemporaries, he encouraged in them a sense of pride for their ancestry. Always bringing innovation to his craft, he created a new literary art form called jazz poetry. In 1951 he wrote the poem, "Montage of a Dream Deferred":

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up?
Like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
Like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
Like a heavy load
Or does it explode?⁹¹

Like jazz the poem is spontaneous. It has a jagged sense with an irregular amount of syllables in each line giving it the irregularity of rhythms which is a hallmark of bebop. The use of similes and the literary vehicle of alliteration which repeats initial sounds echo the repetitive fast-paced beat of bebop as well. While the meter and rhyme of the poem is the focal point of comparison with bebop, it is important to note that its powerful message is similar to the music's pulse in that both the poem and bebop music are charged with an authentic intensity. The subject of the poem pulls the reader toward introspection. This mirrors the slow, repetitive beat of a slow jazz melody right before a menacing fast-paced horn sounds off in dizzying paced notes. What happens when a person's dreams are thwarted? Does the person just internalize his or her lack of fulfillment or does the person "explode" into action and fights back to get a sense of equity? This introspection becomes the self-expression of a jazz musician who pours into the vibrant, bluesy notes of his music the emotion of such human circumstance.

Jazz music in all its guises, swing, bebop, cool, and fused, is an outlet, an expression of the human condition. In the preface of *The Jazz Poetry Anthology* its editors, Sascha Feinstein and Yusef Komunyakaa aptly use the eloquent words of W.E.B. Du Bois who remarks that jazz

⁹¹ Langston Hughes, *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad (London: Vintage Classics, 1995) 426.

music is the “singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people.”⁹² While this poetry is associated with jazz music and musicians who were predominately black, the jazz music which influenced this poetry influenced an *international* community.⁹³ The anthology’s compilation makes it evident. Some of the diverse writers included are: Carl Sandburg, Jack Kerouac, French composer, Andre Hodeir, Cuban poet, Dionisio Martinez, and Japanese poet Kazuko Shiraishi to name a few.

The multitude of poetic voices shared their individual sound from the arrangement of words, overtones, pulse, and rhythm. These writers bring diversity to their integral themes. Some create their own characterizations of jazz artists with the written word; others have a passion for the music and mimic the music’s beat as it transfers “emotional and imagistic energy.”⁹⁴ Robert Hass, the Pulitzer-Prize winning poet, states that: “listening to Charlie Mingus’s *Blues and Roots* ...is the most astonishing thing... the only thing like it in literature that almost approaches it, is the Bendy section of *The Sound and the Fury* when he is howling to his sister who’s lost, only you can’t hear him howl ...everybody is saying to him, hush up now, while this cascade of images is going through his head.”⁹⁵ I would like to borrow from Hass that exquisite imagery of “cascading images” which so vividly captures the beat and pulse of the poetry presented in this anthology.

Before I discuss the next literary selections which include the works of J.D. Salinger and Jack Kerouac I cannot resist noting that critics have dismissed their success and, therefore, their place in popular culture as a mere matter of *timing*. For example, *Catcher on the Rye* by some is

⁹² Sascha Feinstein and Yusef Komunyakaa eds., *The Jazz Poetry Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), xviii.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, xviii

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, xix.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, xx.

nothing more than a rambling, aimless story about an adolescent boy who has just been kicked out of prep school. Truman Capote famously dismissed Kerouac's *On the Road* by stating that it was not writing, just typing. Yet in more than half a century that has passed since their publication, these works and their unforgettable characters are iconic and are considered literary breakthroughs. Their characters belong to timeless strata from which readers young and old continue to find relevance. The influence of jazz is found in the "behavior" Gioia speaks about in *Catcher in the Rye*'s Holden, its improvisation and overflow of rhythms are found in the abundant images of *Howl*, and its beat is emulated in the description of George Shearing dancing in Kerouac's *On the Road*.

Allen Ginsberg's lengthy poem *Howl*, written in 1956, became the credo of the youth of the post war era. Divided in three parts, it grieves over being young in America and facing the post war realities of poverty, materialism, loneliness and governmental bureaucracy. The power-hungry are personified as Moloch, a malevolent deity, to whom children are sacrificed. Thus, he epitomizes the destruction of the goodness in human nature. In the latter two sections there is whisper of atonement as Ginsberg refers to everything as holy: "Holy the groaning saxophone! Holy the bop apocalypse! Holy the jazz bands ..."⁹⁶ and ends the poem with a hopeful vision of redemption.

Considered the voice of youthful angst and disillusionment, *Howl* is representative of the tones, the ebb and tide of emotions that characterized jazz music as both the beat writer and jazz

⁹⁶ Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems (City Lights Pocket Poets Series)* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001), 27.

musician faced the challenges of validation. To study the elements of jazz in Ginsberg's work one needs to visualize and hear an excerpt of *Howl*:

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked,
Dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix, Angel –
headed hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the
machinery night, who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the
supernatural darkness of cold water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating
jazz.⁹⁷

Ginsberg's use of the long line that can be spoken with a variation of improvisational rhythm resounds the long melodious and intricate sounds of jazz. Like jazz, *Howl* is “unmediated by craftsmanship, traditionalism, regular metrics, Eliotic tightness and concision. It is the open poetic line__ long, free, colloquial, packed with images and phases that tumble out, it's the illogical connection, the bardic shout, and the bizarre juxtaposition.”⁹⁸

The poem's livened rhythm echoes that element of jazz music which employs a spatter approach of convoluting musical notes. The poem does not follow any grammatical rules and bursts out with layers of images analogous to the layers of pulse and beat in jazz. Like jazz, it possesses a broken rhythm but yet remains as alive as the rapid jetting of notes of the jazz instruments. The tempo of phrases such as “starving hysterical naked” or “starry dynamo in the machinery night” takes up an urgent, fast paced, modern turn which is at the core of jazz music. The poem's non traditional, but yet rhythmic form, its “colloquial” feel which young Americans could identify with, its reference to jazz in its subject matter all reflect the influence of jazz in this piece of literature. Popular culture seemed to have a double dose of jazz. It was the easily

⁹⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁹⁸ David Castronova, *Beyond the Gray Flannel Suit: Books from the 1950s that Made American Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 72.

recognizable sound of the time and its rhythm and beat was infused in the literature which was in vogue at the time.

Similarly, jazz influenced the novels of the time. J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* is an example of such a novel. Although considered inferior in providing a grand literary consciousness, it drew its power by daring to provide a new state of mind for the young, permitting impulsiveness; it sparked the idea of searching for self-identity, and voiced the youthful rebellion against the establishment that became prominent after World War II.

The energy of the book exemplifies a "blend of explosive denunciation and heart-on-sleeve sentiment". It possesses a "managed incoherence, an attractive breakdown of logic that appeals to the confused adolescent in all of us."⁹⁹ Salinger has managed to skillfully mix cynicism with a "rich brew of sentiment and idealism, a childlike faith that life contains more than pretensions and phoniness."¹⁰⁰ Besides the fact that Holden listens to jazz, *Catcher in the Rye* has an attitude about it, like jazz. Some of its maxims are: be "casual as hell", value digressions over logic, and ignore what the mass media has to say.¹⁰¹ These are the basic rules of jazz: create a relaxed feel of the music, break rhythms, and improvise. The detached, "cool" sway and movement of jazz is captured by Salinger's injection of a new brand of "diction, tone, and objects of attention"¹⁰² in the character who seeks authenticity in his world. Holden's rambling sometimes illogical statements echo the more relaxed, improvised delivery of jazz and the inconsistency of his remarks is reflective of the improvisation that makes jazz the music that it is.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 60.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 60.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 63.

¹⁰² Ibid., 62.

The last piece of literature examining jazz' influence is Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. Kerouac is considered the most important of the Beat writers and *On the Road* is considered the most influential book written by a Beat author. A saga about a man, Sal Paradise, whose life is stifled, the book is a journal of Sal's trip on the open road with his friend, Dean Moriarty. The book which chronicles their cross country adventures has become an anthem for the young and daring. Of all the works discussed which show the influences of jazz, *On the Road* is the one work whose prose follows jazz rhythms most closely.¹⁰³ A lover of jazz music Kerouac describes George Shearing, the British jazz pianist, as if with the quiet swaying of a jazz piece thusly: "a distinguished looking Englishman with a stiff white collar, slightly beefy, blond with a delicate English –summer's night air about him" plays "a rippling sweet number".¹⁰⁴ But then Shearing begins to really rock and Kerouac's prose rocks right along:

Slowly at first, then the beat went up, and he began rocking fast, his left foot jumped with every beat, his neck began to rock crookedly, he brought his face down to the keys, he pushed his hair back, his combed hair dissolved, he began to sweat. The music picked up. The bass-player hunched over and socked it in, faster and faster, it seemed faster and faster, that's all.¹⁰⁵

The crescendo of the prose follows the movement of jazz music hand in hand as the beat becomes more excitable and elevated. Kerouac uses jazz as subject matter, for example, as he describes a black jazz player in San Francisco who sparks up the crowd when he scats out those nonsense syllables "hello-orooni... bourbon—orooni...all-orooni".¹⁰⁶ However, none of the passages scream out jazz like the description of Shearing "rocking". Not only did jazz music have a popular culture audience during the 1950s, it also influenced popular literature of the

¹⁰³ Ibid., 68

¹⁰⁴ Jack Kerouac, *On The Road* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 127.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 128.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 176.

period. Because jazz was popular, some jazz musicians were considered mainstream and others were considered mainstream without intention. Notably, Louis Armstrong became a saleable commodity and enjoyed a decade of great success. The fact that jazz was infused in popular culture became evident with some of its elements such as broken rhythms, movement, and varied meter being copied in the poetry of the time and the characteristics associated with jazz such as “coolness” being emulated in the speech of characters in the novels of the decade. The conformist embraces that which is acceptable, admired and imitated. The popularity of jazz in the national, as well as, the international scene during the 1950s provided a vehicle for emulation in the literary world.

CHAPTER IV

PURISTS IN JAZZ

The purist is best described as someone and/or a group of individuals who place mass importance on the “truest” and most skilled form of jazz. This individual can often develop an elitist nature and mentality shunning other forms or variations of a particular style. This elitism then causes some people to look down upon things viewed as too common or popular to be unique, ranging from music and art to cars and food. This mentality is often associated with wealth but it is not the only factor that sways a person one way or the other. Some purists come from affluent backgrounds but that is not always the case. Hence, an individual who believes his likes are superior to others is an active member of the purist group. In the chart illustrated by Tom Funk for *Life* magazine in 1949 he lists ballet and Bach as the primary forms of entertainment for the “highbrow”¹⁰⁷ while the “low brow” listens to jukeboxes and watches western movies as opposed to theatre ballet.¹⁰⁸ The combination of people, values and a time is a direct factor as to how something is considered; this determines placement. Jazz music as discussed in the first chapter is personified by the non-conformist because when jazz first made its public debut it wasn’t received with open arms immediately. Anything that is different is often viewed with much reservation and often disliked. Also jazz had its roots with African Americans and despite the interest and influence of many white musicians it was considered

¹⁰⁷ Another term for high culture.

¹⁰⁸ Michael Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 98-99.

“race music”, “black music”, and certainly not music for the majority. Racial tensions during the 1950s were high and there did not seem to be an end in sight as it escalated into the infamous riots of the coming decade. As jazz evolved and maintained a staying power it soon made its way into the realm of the conformist and eventually the purist.

When the 1950s arrived, jazz found its way into the minds and likings of the purist. This was not only because it endured years of change, but because those changes developed a new kind of music that burst onto the scene. This new sound was the “devil’s music”. This new defining and irrepressible music was called “rock n roll” by radio disc jockey Alan Freed. Rock and roll music, similarly to jazz music, was discriminated against mostly because of its close ties with African American music. Actually, rock and roll music has stronger roots and connection with rhythm and blues since the latter significantly differs from jazz in composition, beat, and rhythms.

In the mid 1950s artists such as the proclaimed King of Rock n Roll Elvis Presley, Charles Perkins, Chuck Berry, Buddy Holly, and Bill Haley played the rebellious music of and for the youth. Not only was the music filled with provocative guitar sounds and carefree lyrics of young love, the advent of Presley’s swiveling hips intoxicated a generation of youth ready to lift the repression of feelings and vent in self-expression. Youth culture in the 20th century United States began as early as the 1920s. After World War I the American psyche shifted from the Victorian era. It proclaimed a “live for today because tomorrow is not a certainty” type of philosophy. The invention of the car and accessibility of alcohol helped identify a youth culture as a social group. Adolescents, who had previously been under the scrutiny of adult supervision were now able to proclaim their independence with a new found mobility. They now had the

means to go out on their own for a night of fun. Conservative middle class Americans sought to counter the youth culture which began to sprout and those efforts enjoyed temporary success until the 1950s. Rock and roll not only gave youth their own music but it also showcased young artists who appealed strongly to teenagers. Elvis Presley provided a charismatic, rebellious and raw persona whom young men admired. They aspired for his look as young girls swooned over. He also provided a unique concept of androgyny that had not really been tapped before. It was uncharted territory to journalistically cover his use of eye shadow. An androgynous look was now something that was considered attractive. It was on its road to acceptance.

In this familiar itinerary for emerging movements, rock and roll and its artists dealt with non-acceptance. The artists were forced to wear the conventional suit and change song lyrics which were in any way suggestive in nature. Elvis Presley was once taped for a television show only from the waist up so that his gyrating hips could not be seen on national television. With all of this new music and turmoil jazz now found itself in a completely different place than it had been during the past 30 years. It was now being placed on a pedestal and hailed as a premier kind of music adults were promoting to youth so as to replace rock and roll. The roles had been switched. Jazz became more acceptable. When placed next to rock and roll it appeared standard, acceptable, and classic. The virtuosity with which the jazz musician played gave him a new status as a great artist. The suited up jazz musician stood on the opposing side of the stage from the grass roots Southern young man of rock and roll. The emergence of rock and roll gave jazz a new audience with purists. Jazz and its multiple facets as a music genre was now a part of various taste levels and groups. The fluidity of jazz and its multiple sounds made it big

enough to influence many listeners. Its vastness in terms of musicality and emotion offers an opportunity for its appreciation a wide range of listeners. This is why it can co-exist in more than one sphere of listenership.

It is interesting to note that some rock and roll artists had background in other genres of music such as Big Joe Turner. He frequented with jazz bands such as Count Basie's, but found his success in rock and roll instead with hits such as "Shake Rattle and Roll". More evident with rock and roll was the prompting of censorship issues. Some historians such as Frank Salomone have argued that rock and roll was not for the youth, it was rather to exploit the youth¹⁰⁹. Even though this statement has some truth to it, it is incorrect to label rock and roll as simply a ploy to exploit the youth. It certainly was targeted for the youth once hot shot record producers and disc jockeys saw the popularity and demand there was for this kind of music in a huge demographic scale. The youth of the 1950s "seized upon white imitations of black music as their anthem of revolt"¹¹⁰. The fragmentation of society discussed in the introduction was sped up with the birth of rock and roll. It was time that "white middle class youths launched a frontal assault on the elders who brought them the Bomb, Eisenhower, Joe McCarthy..."¹¹¹ The youth counter culture going against their parents and adults that attempted to push neo Victorian ideals on them now had a musical movement that lasted throughout the decade and continued on. In the 1950s jazz continued to be popular, but rock and roll was now struggling to gain respectability. Like jazz it reached Europe and returned in the form of the British Invasion with imports such as The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. However, in the 1950s jazz was the music genre which brought to the national scene the jazz musician who had dealt with struggle, gained national popularity, and

¹⁰⁹ Salomone, *Popular Culture*, 149.

¹¹⁰ Sales, *Jazz*, 157.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 157.

now the music had made enough inroads to reach the apex, the purists. Thus, in that chart that was illustrated in 1959 the high brow would more than likely be listening to jazz by Gillespie, Minus, and Parker while the low brow would be listening to Presley, Perkins, Richard and Holly. The paradigm shift for jazz was complete. This shift became most notable when the Newport Jazz Festival was established in 1954.

The Newport Jazz Festival, created by Elaine Lorillard, her husband Louis Lorillard and jazz pianist and impresario George Wein, brought jazz to the affluent resort town of Newport.¹¹² This effort showcases the fluidity of jazz I've been discussing and the value it had with a purist and at times an elite group of individuals. The festival itself is one of a kind because it was more than a festival with live performances there was an academic and educational structure to it as well. For example, the most distinctive component of the Festival is the panel discussion element coupled with live music performances by various jazz musicians and vocalists. This panel discussion allowed for listeners and musicians alike to have an open dialogue about their perception and analysis of jazz. Musicians were able to discuss the technical advancements in the music they were playing among other topics such as upcoming collaborations and experimental ideas. These discussions provided many musicians with the opportunity to share with one another their beliefs and further advocate their ideas on what jazz *should* sound like.¹¹³ A musician being given this vehicle in which to express their individual ideas on jazz is an example of an additional instance when jazz finds itself in the purist sphere as will be elaborated later in this chapter. Initially the Festival found success and only met partial resistance from some of the

¹¹² Globe Staff, "Elaine Lorillard; helped start Newport Jazz Festival," *The Boston Globe*, December 3, 2007, accessed August 5, 2013, http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/obituaries/articles/2007/12/03/elaine_lorillard_helped_start_newport_jazz_festival

¹¹³ *Jazz*, DVD directed by Ken Burns (2001; PBS Video,)

older upper class citizens in this well-established community. The majority of the elite youth in the area were integral in organizing the event. However, this event rose in popularity and is still held annually.

Another indication of the purist motive for this Festival is that a goal for the organizers and musicians participating brought traditional jazz and avant-garde jazz acts to larger audiences that would not normally hear them. This traditional and avant-garde style of jazz was often considered to be the most original and purest form of jazz so the Festival allowed for many to have exposure to it and for its popularity to grow demographically. The decision that the music being performed at this festival needed to almost exclusively be traditional and avant-garde demonstrates the importance by purists being placed on the purity of jazz. Co-founder George Wein provides an essential piece of insight by expressing his belief that providing this exposure is “essential to the perpetuation of the music, which is increasingly challenging as a result of its rapid change of directions.”¹¹⁴ With this quote we can see again the vitality and significance of preserving the genre. Wein’s concern with the preservation of jazz due to the quick and different directions jazz taken provides us with a clear example of the same concerns many purists had of jazz evolving and moving away from where they imagined jazz should be. As a result the Newport Jazz Festival listeners and musicians have a platform in which to create and listen to pure jazz. Maintaining the purity of jazz is a fundamental part of their being therefore it needs to be presented in its truest form. For Wein, the Festival,

was [not about] making money. I was in it because I really loved it. It was my life. I wasn’t in-I never went into as quote, ‘a business’. Sure, you had to make a living, but I mean the music was in my head, in my heart, in my soul, and it still is.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Jacob Teichroew, “Profile: Jazz Festival Founder George Wein,” *About.com Jazz*, accessed August 5, 2013. <http://jazz.about.com/od/artistprofiles/p/GeorgeWein.htm>

¹¹⁵ George Wein Reinvents his Jazz Festival at 84, interview by Scott Simon, *NPR’s Listen Now*, PBS, June 18, 2010.

This personal attachment, not only upheld by George Wein, but one that many other jazz aficionados displayed helps us understand why the conservancy of this music held the importance it did with this group.

Another instance when jazz is thrust into the purist sphere is amongst musicians where there was also a purist mentality. This instance is the most tragic because it is a sphere in which many musicians find themselves attacking others. In music circles there is friendly competition and a sense of teamwork due to most musicians joining together to form bands and collaborate. However, within these music circles battling egos and conflicts erupt as well. On several occasions musicians criticized another for “not having a sound”, imitating, or worse “selling out”. A case in point comes from trumpeter Miles Davis,

I always hated the way they [Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie] used to laugh and grin for the audiences. I know *why* they did it—to make money and because they were entertainers as well as trumpet players...But *I* didn't like it and didn't *have* to like it...I wasn't going to do it just so that some non-playing, racist, white motherfucker could write some nice things about me. Naw, I wasn't going to sell out my principles for them. I wanted to be accepted as a good musician and that didn't call for no grinning, but just being able to play the horn good.¹¹⁶

Davis states that he along with percussionist Max Roach, trombonist J.J. Johnson and pianists Thelonious Monk and Bud Powell collectively felt this way about their “long time idols”¹¹⁷. Miles Davis is seemingly the most vocal about labeling fellow musicians as “sell-outs”. Another difference between musicians such as Armstrong and Gillespie in contrast to other jazz musicians in the 1950s is age. Both Armstrong and Gillespie were older, had been performing and producing music for a few years before jazz musicians like Miles Davis, Max Roach and Bud Powell came along. Miles Davis admittedly states that “he didn't have to go through the shit

¹¹⁶ Miles Davis with Quincy Troupe, *The Autobiography* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2005) 83.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 83

they had to go through to get accepted in the music industry”.¹¹⁸ These head starts that Gillespie and Armstrong helped pave the way for other up and coming black musicians.

Selling out wasn't the only complaint musicians had amongst themselves; they also degraded and criticized other forms of jazz that were being played at the time by fellow musicians. As seen earlier in the table provided (See Table 1) jazz music isn't one dimensional. There are many forms of jazz. During the 1950s the most prominent forms of jazz were Bebop, Cool/West Coast Jazz and Hard Bop. Bebop wasn't readily accepted by the public but when Cool jazz made its debut and later West Coast jazz the public found itself listening and appreciating jazz more. However reviews of this new form, from musicians, were mixed. Dizzy Gillespie recounts his thoughts on cool jazz:

There was no guts in that music, not much rhythm either. They never sweated on the stand, Lee Konitz, Lennie Tristano, and those guys. This music, jazz, is guts. You're supposed to sweat in your balls in this music.¹¹⁹

The beginning of Cool jazz is often attributed to Miles Davis because of his 1957 album “Birth of the Cool”. This album by many is considered to have prompted not only Cool jazz but West Coast jazz, West Coast jazz being an extension of Cool jazz primarily in California. Jazz musicians, mostly Beboppers, didn't like this new form of jazz. Cool jazz not only was criticized for its sound but also because it “became associated with whiteness”.¹²⁰ The strains of racism that were so prevalent during the 1950s never failed to surface even in the world of musicians. Strife amid black and white musicians surfaced, as several black musicians felt that white jazz musicians were stealing their material and commercializing jazz. Cool jazz became considered, by several, as a “sell out” commercialized kind of music. After experimentation and time many

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 83

¹¹⁹ Gillespie, *To Be*, 360.

¹²⁰ Szwed, *Jazz 101*, 175.

Beboppers found themselves using this new form and slowly transforming it into yet another form known as Hard Bop. The rebellion, frustration and dismay musicians felt towards Cool jazz soon became channeled into a response and a new form of jazz—Hard Bop. Hard Bop illustrates the purist mentality in musicians. It demonstrates not only their dislike for another form of music but also their readiness to produce a new kind that was “better”. Jazz musicians, felt a certain ownership of jazz and when there was jazz being produced not keeping in tradition with “true jazz they did not shy away from vocalizing their opinions. Many times this served to be a benefit as new forms jazz came from their disapproval and it also allowed jazz to be placed in high regard. Evidence of the differentiation of jazz fans can be seen in the in the polls taken by DownBeat Jazz Magazine below:

Table 2: 1953 DownBeat Readers Poll by DownBeat Readers, December 31, 1953¹²¹

1953 DownBeat Readers Poll [Back to Index](#)

by DownBeat Readers — 12/31/1953

An Exclusive Online Extra

Hall of Fame: Glen Miller

Best Record-Popular: Ray Anthony, *Dragnet* (Capitol)

Best Record-Jazz: Woody Herman, *Moten Stomp* (Mars)

Best Record-Rhythm & Blues: Ruth Brown, *Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean* (Atlantic)

Best Record-Classical: Arturo Toscanini, NBC Symphony, Respighi: *Fountains of Rome/Pines of Rome* (Victor)

Dance Band: Les Brown

Jazz Band: Stan Kenton

Combo-Instrumental: Dave Brubeck

Vocal Group: Four Freshmen

Alto Saxophone: Charlie Parker

Tenor Saxophone: Stan Getz

Baritone Saxophone: Gerry Mulligan

Trumpet: Chet Baker

Trombone: Bill Harris

Clarinet: Buddy DeFranco

Drums: Gene Krupa

Vibes: Terry Gibbs

Bass: Ray Brown

Guitar: Les Paul

Piano: Oscar Peterson

Accordion: Art Van Damme

Miscellaneous Instrument: Don Elliot-Mellophone

Arranger: Ralph Burns

Male Singer (Not Band): Nat Cole

Girl Singer (Not Band): Ella Fitzgerald

Male Singer (With Band): Tommy Mercer

Girl Singer (With Band): Lucy Ann Polk

¹²¹ http://www.downbeat.com/default.asp?sect=stories&subsect=story_detail&sid=759

Table 3: 1953 DownBeat Critics Poll by DownBeat Contributors, August 26, 1953¹²²

1953 DownBeat Critics Poll—I

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by DownBeat Contributors — 8/26/1953

An Exclusive Online Extra

Big Band: Duke Ellington
Acoustic Jazz Group: Dave Brubeck
Alto Sax: Charlie Parker
Tenor Sax: Stan Getz
Baritone Sax: Harry Carney
Trumpet: Louis Armstrong
Trombone: Bill Harris
Clarinet: Buddy DeFranco
Drums: Buddy Rich
Bass: Oscar Pettiford
Guitar: Barney Kessel
Piano: Oscar Peterson
Male Vocalist: Louis Armstrong
Female Vocalist: Ella Fitzgerald

After examining these polls is it clear that the opinion of critics vary from the listeners. The categories are also different. The “readers” are the listeners and arguably representing popular culture while the critics are representing the purist demographic.

¹²² http://www.downbeat.com/default.asp?sect=stories&subsect=story_detail&sid=679

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Many subscribe to jazz's alpha being the merger of tribal musical traditions with European harmony, and perhaps it is. It is difficult to find the parameters of jazz because it absorbs and embraces all those elements influenced or touched by it. It is a genre of music, but it brings with it an attitude and an approach. Jazz in its diversity resists categorization. After all it has transitioned from ragtime to swing, to bebop and beyond. Jazz reached a sort of crowning glory at the end of the 1950s.

It was in 1959 when jazz reached a "state of permanent diversity" with the release of three phenomenal albums.¹²³ These included John Coltrane's *Giant Steps*, Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue*, and Ornette Coleman's *The Shape of Jazz to Come*. These albums embraced jazz spectrums where there is complexity of the music and harmony at one end and a tendency to simplify chords at the other end. For example, in Coltrane's *Giant Steps* there is a dichotomy of frenzied notes, a convolution of rapid chord changes while in other selections such as "Naima" the pace becomes meditative with a "drone" like effect of repetitive notes.¹²⁴ It is almost as the genius of Coltrane sought to create a microcosm of all things jazz in this definitive album.

Miles Davis may be considered jazz's greatest ambassador. He is one of the giants in jazz who gave the genre a face, transfixed it in its different facets and his contribution is so extensive

¹²³ Szwed, *Jazz 101*, 209.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 210-211

that it would require much time to review and analyze his work. In 1959 people who did not listen to jazz all of a sudden owned his newly released *Kind of Blue*. Considered to be the only compilation of work where every note is delivered perfectly, it is a major recording that defined what later was to be known as modal jazz. Modal jazz uses the mode or musical scale as the basis for structure and improvisation. Of course the musicians who helped produce this work were extraordinary: John Coltrane, Julian “Cannonball” Adderley, Bill Evans Paul Chambers and Jim Cobb, exemplary musicians in the genre, whose virtuosity culminated in the creation of a “weightless” music which broke loose of “fixed harmonies.”¹²⁵

The importance of the third ground breaking album, Ornette Coleman’s *The Shape of Jazz to Come*, heralded what would become free jazz in the 1960’s. Coleman ignored harmonic foundations and attempted to “reshape” a brand of jazz “to come” by spurning the musical “collective wisdom” of the previous generations.¹²⁶ Free jazz opened new ways to play instruments, a new order of sound organization, and most importantly it became a fertile avenue for a “non-imitative space for improvisers.”¹²⁷

Jazz beyond the 1950s continued to change and grow. Free jazz was one of the first offshoots. While bebop featured a departure from convention it still retained the aspect of harmony in jazz. It kept the beat, the climaxes, and the melody which listeners could identify.¹²⁸ However, free jazz featured harmonies and rhythms which were unpredictable. Artists utilized variations of volume and sound, texture, and tone to create a variety of sound which was the focus rather than the harmony. Free jazz could be loud, intense, and emotional or soft and

¹²⁵ Ibid., 211-212.

¹²⁶ Mervyn Cooke and David Horn, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 198.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 198.

¹²⁸ Szwed, *Jazz 101*, 224.

“chamber-like.”¹²⁹ In this stance jazz replicated the politics of the moment. The Civil Rights Movement of the era injected a sense of liberation in the American conscience. Coupled with this sense of freedom, the emotionality of soul singers such as Aretha Franklin was absorbed by free jazz. This idea of greater freedom and the expanded breadth of improvisation permeated in drama (Judson Poets Theatre), in dance, (Judith Dunn), in rock (Frank Zappa) and finally free jazz became international when musicians in Europe and Russia embraced it.¹³⁰ While free jazz as a movement was ultimately peripheral it tapped on an enormous amount of possibilities in jazz, concert music, and rock. The array of musicians who dabbled in free jazz and encompassed its elements into their music is where the influence of free jazz remains indelible.¹³¹

While free jazz may have been a forerunner for musicians to step outside the comfortable parameters of spontaneity, improvisation, syncopating, and scat singing, it was the jazz fusions of the 1970s and 1980s which added another dimension to the ever flexible, effervescent genre. Perhaps the most versatile and prominent of the fusions is *jazz rock* where jazz improvisation is combined with rock rhythms and electric instruments. Influenced by the incomparable rock guitarist, Jimi Hendrix, Miles Davis produced the landmark album entitled, *Bitches Brew*. There is a distinct Hendrix influence throughout the album where key features include dissonant chords and improvisation. This album sealed the concept of the merger between rock and jazz when it won the “Best Jazz Record” at the 1970 Grammy awards.¹³²

Although jazz is America’s music it absorbed influences from Latin, African, and Asian music. From the 1950s jazz greats such as Louis Armstrong, Max Roach, and Duke Ellington

¹²⁹ Ibid., 225.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 230

¹³¹ Cooke and Horn, *The Cambridge Companion*, 211.

¹³² Ibid., 225.

traveled the world and picked up new modes to add to their repertoires, modal music which influenced John Coltrane with its irregular notes, and departure from the subscribed harmonies¹³³ all added to the constant emergence of inspiration and newly chiseled facets. Worthy of mentioning is the contribution of English guitarist, John McLaughlin, who formed the Indian-inspired jazz Mahavishnu Orchestra. The orchestra's maiden appearance at Greenwich Village's Gaslight Café was the venue for the recording of *The Inner Mounting Flame*. This work's influence was comparable to Davis's *Bitches Brew* because it had its focus on structure and rhythm, and the "collective ensemble interplay was reinforced with an intensity that belied its spontaneity and with the bass often participating in the complex ensemble passages, the role of Cobham on drums was elevated to that of an equal voice with the ensemble."¹³⁴ The sense of newness this album conveys to the present may be attributed to the virtuosity of the jazz musician. In this case it is John McLaughlin.

It is interesting to note that in the 1980s jazz was lukewarm as jazz musicians and enthusiasts were divided. Some musicians were in a retrospective mode and wanted to keep the traditional jazz styles pioneered by Armstrong and Ellington. It is interesting that in a decade that found the interest in jazz waning, Congress passed in 1987 a bill designating jazz as a "national American treasure". Others experimented with new sounds and styles. One of these innovative stylings of jazz in the 1980s was smooth jazz. Also known as "lite jazz" or "contemporary jazz" it is "rhythmically bright and melodically recognizable", as well as, "unambiguous" and "non-ethnic".¹³⁵ This type of jazz became part of twenty first century pop music with artists such as Norah Jones, Kenny G. and Michael Buble. Finally, today's experimental jazz revolves around

¹³³ Szwed, *Jazz 101*, 215.

¹³⁴ Cooke and Horn, *The Cambridge Companion*, 227.

¹³⁵ Szwed, *Jazz 101*, 264.

New York's "Downtown" scene. This jazz style is called modern creative or postmodern. The leading exponent of this style is alto saxophonist John Zorn who has contributed a rich body of work using a technique called collage which employs a "juxtaposition of seemingly incongruous elements where there is never one fixed configuration".¹³⁶ This is the most diverse brand of jazz because it contains an innumerable amount of personal styles where artists employ unified concepts such as New Orleans, Swing, Bop, Hard Bop, Cool, Free Jazz, Jazz Rock, and others. Obviously, this diversity does not allow for categorization. By employing so many styles it does exemplify a cohesive evolution. It is from these canons that the new generation of jazz musicians draw to create their own individual and new styles.¹³⁷ Jazz seems to be an eternally changing genre from which generations of musicians come to partake and find another nuance to create another melody, another harmony, and another song.

In my journey into this research of jazz I quickly discovered how fascinating and hard it was going to be. Music has the capability of changing your perspective and mood. It is a source which may prompt you to do something. From a positive perspective, it can improve the quality of the moment. Music evokes emotion. It is a cousin to the visual arts and brings with it color, texture, volume, timbre, and all the wonderful things that are part of the world of sound. With this passion for music I greeted my passage into the wondrous pathway of jazz. This task proved to be difficult when I discovered the voluminous amount of information that is available on the subject. While I poured through many resources in my itinerary, I feel somehow I have made but a miniscule dent on the subject. It is a wonderful opportunity to write on the subject as I have tried to follow jazz's mercurial path. The writings on the subject are so vast and diversified that it became another challenge for me to capture its essence, development, and importance within the

¹³⁶ Cooke and Horn, *The Cambridge Companion*, 238.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 240.

scope of this paper. The works to review and synthesize are of encyclopedic proportions. However, I feel this paper offers a vignette of jazz's endless diversity, as well as, that of some of its main characters.

In all of the trends and movements which have defined the tone, rhythm, melody, or harmony of jazz the fundamental trait of improvisation is present in all time periods. Herein lays the secret of jazz's versatility. With improvisation at its core, it is natural to adapt and absorb new features into jazz. The absorption of so many features has led some to believe that jazz is debased. Debasement is defined as something that is lowered in quality, character, or value. Jazz did not become lower in quality, character, or value when it incorporated rock at the hands of Miles Davis's *Bitches Brew*, for example. While rock elements infiltrated in this musical collection the following elements were retained: "collective improvisation, the range of volume (from great howls to whispers), the importance of space, the rapid shifts in meter, tempo, mood, and the absence of vocals".¹³⁸

Some of the sources used in the research for this paper were pedantic and saturated with theory that only a student of musicology would understand thoroughly. Some were filled with good and solid information that made many concepts understandable and logical. Others mirrored the profound influences of jazz in language or a visual art. However, the most enjoyable sources were the primary sources in the form of autobiographies and interviews which were used as the basis for my chapter about non-conformists. Reading the words of Charles Mingus, Chet Baker, Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, and listening to Carmen McCrae and Max Roach are extremely personal and gives the feel of being in actual conversation with these artists.

¹³⁸ Szwed, *Jazz 101*, 262.

The focus of my chapter on the non-conformist is defining this irrepressible musician of jazz. Part of that definition is that he or she has an innate musical ability which propelled him or her to fame. There have to be certain characteristics which like ingredients blend and mix to create a product. In my profile of the jazz musician I discovered certain commonalities. These include a natural talent, playing music without *initial* musical training, (most of my primary sources are musicians who played music by ear) and facing discriminatory circumstances. The latter were either racial (Minus, Davis), gender (Carmen McCrae), or social (Chet Baker).

In some of my research I found other research which countered my profile. Frank Salamone in *The Culture of Jazz* writes a “persistent myth has been that of the untutored genius who cannot read music”.¹³⁹ He goes on to say that he has “hypothesized that the vast majority of American jazz musician come from the middle class” and furthermore they received “formal training in addition to their apprenticeships with older musicians”.¹⁴⁰ As I sought to find out what substantial evidence he had to refute the profile in my research, I found no sign of proof in the subsequent pages. Instead he focuses on writing about how the Down Beat Jazz Hall of Fame is filled with members who contradict “the stereotypes” and gives statistical information as to how many male and female and African-American and white are members of the Down Beat’s Hall of Fame. He never cites specific examples to substantiate his hypothesis and mentions Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Armstrong, and others as part of this elite group.¹⁴¹ He offers no definition; he simply calls this a stereotype. Interestingly Salamone turns around and discusses how the quintessential jazz musician was a victim of the excesses of drugs, drinking, and a fast life and faced a society that was “hostile”. Paraphrasing Max Roach, Salamone states how “those

¹³⁹ Salamone, *The Culture of Jazz*, 83.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

who control society do all in their power to co-opt or otherwise stifle dissident creative expression”.¹⁴² This certainly is similar to the discussion of discrimination in my profile of the jazz musician in the 1950s.

My analysis is based on one decade, the 1950s, and it formulates a definitive profile of the jazz musician who represents the non-conformist in my research. Charles Mingus played music by ear. Chet Baker not only played by ear, he was told by his music teacher that he would never make it as a musician because of it. When in Chicago Carmen McRae had to play the piano as a stepping stone before she was given the opportunity to showcase her voice. Although Miles Davis’s father was a dentist he was ostracized in his own neighborhood and was aware that he could not go to the nice, clean school white children would attend down the street. These are some of the elements of the profile—the experiencing of discrimination and the initial lack of formal musical training. Some of these elements play a significant part in the creation of the music the jazz musician executes. It is vibrant and real like the life experiences lived. The need for acceptance and the need to create which comes with talent fit into this composite profile of the jazz musician of the 1950s. There is absolutely no myth here. It is a reality, a way of life for that particular generation. I do believe that in more recent times the degree to which these aspects of the jazz musician’s profile are present may have changed, but the reality is that in the 1950s this is what was true of the jazz musician. Furthermore, jazz had been “conceived largely in terms of a black and white binary”.¹⁴³ As much as jazz has become an international genre, it is responsible for taking on a prominent role in “representing ‘blackness’ in America, and musicians such as Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker...Miles Davis have long

¹⁴² Ibid., 228.

¹⁴³ David Ake, *Jazz Cultures* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2002), 10.

exemplified the evolving hopes, fears, dangers, joys, and frustrations of living as African Americans” .¹⁴⁴

The impact of jazz in literature presented in the conformist chapter of my research is validated with some of the literary pieces used. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye* is a novel with jazz references in the manner of speech of the main character who also emulates the “cool” life style associated with jazz. Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* models jazz’s spontaneity and departure from the usual. Representing the Beat Generation Kerouac’s novel sets forth a resistance to conformity in the presentation of spontaneous characters who reflect the spontaneity of improvisation of melodies and harmonies in jazz. Langston Hughes unveiled a new type of poetry called jazz poetry which used the irregularity rhythms of bebop in its verses to mimic the pulse and beat of this type of jazz. Allan Ginsberg, who like Kerouac represented the Beat generation, utilized jazz mechanics using long lines in his poem *Howl* to accommodate varying improvised rhythms. What is remarkable is that in more recent times the influence of jazz in literature remains evident. Krin Gabbard’s essay entitled, “Jazz in Fiction” summarizes *The Bear Comes Home* by Rafi Zabor which is about a bear who wears a trench coat (another cool jazz image) and plays the saxophone like Charlie Parker. The bear that is “unpredictable” (improvisation in jazz music) has problems with producers, children, and policemen. The bear, nonetheless, is witty and intelligent (just like the jazz musician) and finds satisfaction in a loving relationship with a human female.¹⁴⁵ Although this novel is more contemporary than Kerouac’s novel of more than fifty years ago, the fact that jazz and its elements are influencing fiction today is an affirmation of the genre’s enormously influential elements.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 11.

¹⁴⁵ Cooke and Horn, *The Cambridge Companion* , 333.

In my chapter of the purist I focused on the rite of passage for jazz. It was not a remarkable one hit wonder. Its own rhyme and reason was being heard by the poor, middle and high classes and this gave jazz not only acceptability but a certain new respectability. With respectability came refinement and jazz entered a new period of elitism. This elitist mentality separated jazz musicians into two factions. The purist jazz musicians believed jazz should be presented as a genre of music of skill and talent. Others believed that jazz could be parlayed as music for mere entertainment. The latter was about selling out. Salamone concurs when he identifies Duke Ellington as part of the “Establishment” and selling out to commercialism.¹⁴⁶ Although Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong may have been accused of selling out, they gave jazz elegance and Charlie Parker and Miles Davis gave it edge. It unfolded and evolved capturing the spirit and the heart of the connoisseur of music.

In my research I was able to learn of jazz’s growth from a genre that was met with resistance, and then embraced for its versatility, to finally securing its place in the respectability of what is envisioned as classic and standard. However, this does not mean that jazz is static. It remains flexible, absorbing new influences. The difference from the beginning to the present is that jazz now has a heritage.

¹⁴⁶ Salamone, *The Culture of Jazz*, 146.

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