2014

Seeing (for) Miles: Jazz, Race, and Objects of Performance

Benjamin Park anderson

College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd

Part of the African American Studies Commons, and the American Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

anderson, Benjamin Park, "Seeing (for) Miles: Jazz, Race, and Objects of Performance" (2014). Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects. Paper 1539623644. 
https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-t267-zy28

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
Seeing (for) Miles: Jazz, Race, and Objects of Performance

Benjamin Park Anderson
Richmond, Virginia

Master of Arts, College of William and Mary, 2005
Bachelor of Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2001

A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

American Studies Program

College of William and Mary
May 2014
APPROVAL PAGE

This Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Benjamin Park Anderson

Approved by the Committee,

Committee Chair
Associate Professor Arthur Knight, American Studies Program
The College of William and Mary

Associate Professor Charles McGovern, American Studies Program
The College of William and Mary

Assistant Professor Max Katz, Department of Music
The College of William and Mary

Professor Krin Gabbard, Department of Cultural Analysis and Theory
Stony Brook University
ABSTRACT

Using jazz trumpeter Miles Davis (1926-1991) as its primary example, "Seeing (for) Miles" attempts to build on a growing discourse related to the intersection of jazz, race, and visual / material culture that has heretofore largely ignored the role of consumption. Davis' numerous decisions to spend money on expensive things and/or have them custom made, insisting these things be seen by others, and overseeing his image in advertisements are a reminder that famous musicians often found themselves straddling the line between being consumers and objects of consumption. Following Davis on both sides of that line also necessitates following him on and off the stage, in the eye of his fans as well as the general public. Each of the chapters of this dissertation seek to understand how Davis negotiated this variety of viewpoints as a musician, consumer, and African American via his colored trumpets, tailored suits, sports cars, an expensive home, and instrument advertisements.

The decisions Davis and others made with regard to their positions as consumers and African Americans reflected back on a longer history of black interaction with the marketplace while positioning themselves within existing debates concerning racial equality, jazz's status as high art, and the merits of capitalism as a catalyst for democracy. At the same time, their careers as public performers, status as celebrities, and the increasing presence of the visual mass media ensured that their consumer-related decisions reached bigger and wider audiences than ever before. In such a context, the marketplace can be understood as having constituted a unique venue in which black jazz musicians performed a variety of roles relative to their musical and racial identities. Understanding the ways Davis and others negotiated this process allows us to shed light on a relatively unexplored aspect of jazz culture while also suggesting ways in which racial and musical identities continue to be impacted by visual / material culture in modern society.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledgements</th>
<th>ii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedications</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1. Kind of Green, Black, Red, and Blue: Expressions of Individualism and Race in the Colored Trumpets of Miles Davis</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2. Miles Runs the Zoot Suit Down: Jazz, Race, and the Politics of High Fashion during the Civil Rights Movement</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3. &quot;Those Funny Things That Only A Ferrari Can Do&quot;: Miles Davis, Race, and the Issue of Mobility</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4. Interesting Places. Interesting Men: Jazz, Race, and Home Space</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5. Miles and Martin: Jazz, Instrument Ads, and Identity</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my appreciation to Professor Arthur Knight, under whose guidance this investigation was conducted, for his patience, guidance and criticism throughout the investigation. I am also indebted to Professors Charles McGovern, Max Katz, and Krin Gabbard for their careful reading and criticism of the manuscript.

Aside from the aforementioned professors, this dissertation was guided by the patience, feedback, and encouragement of other professors within the American Studies Program as well as numerous family members, friends, co-workers, and fellow graduate students.

The education I received at William and Mary has been invaluable and will continue to serve me for the rest of my life, during which I will do my best to use it for serving others.
This Ph.D. is dedicated to the members of my immediate family – my wife, Ashlyn; brother, Kjell; mother, Barbara; father, Gene; and future son, Miles, or daughter (who has yet to be named) – who were my biggest sources of motivation and support.
LIST OF FIGURES

1. Miles Davis' green and black Martin Magna 25
2. Davis performing in Paris with a red trumpet, July 1991 41
3. Davis playing with his back to the audience, ca. 1958 81
4. Civil rights protesters at an Alabama bus station, 1961 82
5. Davis posing with his red Ferrari, 1969 88
6. The first known ad for 312 West 77th St., 1892 126
7. Davis on the front stoop of his home, 1970 126
8. 312 West 77th St., present day 126
9. Miles Davis and Chet Baker sharing ad space with Martin, 1954 180
10. Martin ad in Down Beat featuring Davis alone, 1974 187
11. Miles Davis' 2012 USPS Forever Postage Stamp, 2012 200
12. Cover of Wallace Roney's album Munchin’ 204
INTRODUCTION

Seeing (for) Miles: Jazz, Race, and Objects of Performance

By: Ben Anderson

In 1989, Miles Davis was interviewed for a feature story on the popular television news show 60 Minutes. He was asked by a white reporter if black musicians played better than white ones and explained that while he didn’t think either played better than the other, there was nonetheless a fundamental difference in how they played. “White musicians seem to lag behind the beat,” Davis said, “I don’t know why.” But, when the same interviewer asked if black musicians played differently because they came out of slavery and “hurt more,” Davis dismissed the notion completely by saying “that didn’t have nothing to do with it.” He followed that up with a story from his brief stint as a student at Juilliard in the 1940s when one of his instructors (presumably white) gave a similar explanation regarding the origin of the blues. In response, Davis said, “I raised my hand and said, listen, my father’s rich, my mama’s good looking, and I can play the blues. I’ve never suffered and don’t intend to suffer.”

In the twilight of his long and influential career, Davis was being featured by an esteemed, award-winning program, famous for its hard-hitting and professional journalism, a unique opportunity befitting his many important achievements. Yet, he found himself having to counter a decades-old notion of racial essentialism when it came to music. Though he ultimately swapped one form of essentialism for another, Davis’ aforementioned response nevertheless forged a link between one’s wealth, race, and musical ability. His aversion to suffering was produced by an upbringing in an upper-
middle class home but had been maintained over the years by an incredibly successful career that afforded Davis some of the finest things money could buy. Davis made no apologies for his upper-middle class background and taste for the finer things in life. Rather, bragging about it in this setting provided him an opportunity to counter white assumptions about race and black music, an opportunity he was likely eager to take. As someone whose expensive sports cars attracted unwarranted police attention and whose lavish home in Manhattan’s Upper West Side had convinced a white visitor that Davis couldn’t possibly be the owner, Davis was acutely aware of the performativity of material things and especially how they signified upon matters of racial identity. His insistence on wearing suits tailored for performing in, playing with custom-made colored trumpets, and controlling the images used of him in instrument ads indelibly linked this awareness with his identity as a jazz musician as well.

Using Davis as its primary example, this dissertation attempts to build on a growing discourse related to the intersection of jazz, race, and visual/material culture that has heretofore largely ignored the role of consumption. Davis’ numerous decisions to spend money on expensive things, insisting they be seen by others, and overseeing his image in advertisements are a reminder that jazz musicians often found themselves straddling the line between being consumers and objects of consumption. The decisions that Davis and others made in light of this reflected back on a longer history of black interaction with the marketplace while positioning themselves within existing debates concerning racial equality, jazz’s status as high art, and the merits of capitalism as a catalyst for democracy. At the same time, their careers as public performers, status as celebrities, and the increasing presence of the visual mass media ensured that their
consumer-related decisions reached bigger and wider audiences than ever before. In such a context, the marketplace can be understood as having constituted a unique venue in which black jazz musicians performed a variety of roles relative to their racial and musical identities. Understanding the ways in which Davis and others negotiated this process allows us to shed light on a relatively unexplored aspect of jazz culture while also suggesting ways in which racial and musical identities continue to be impacted by visual culture and consumption in modern society.

**Literature Review/Context**

This dissertation situates itself within a body of work that has lately been referred to as “New Jazz Studies,” which utilizes a multi-disciplinary framework to promote an understanding of jazz and its musicians within a variety of cultural contexts. “What is new here,” state the editors of *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies*, “is the conviction that jazz is not just for players and aficionados… but that knowing about jazz and its cultural settings is part of what it means to be an educated woman or man in our time.”¹ As the statement suggests, the field of New Jazz Studies has inherited the idea of jazz as high art worthy of critical study from previous generations of jazz scholarship, but has nonetheless uniquely positioned itself against that collective body of work which has, of late, been primarily relegated to limited groups. New Jazz Studies entertains questions regarding jazz’s relationship to a multitude of academic disciplines while, at the same time, exploring “new methods of studying the history of jazz, its social contexts and broad cultural ramifications.”² As such, the field works to shift understandings of jazz

---

² Ibid., 3.
away from the modernist sensibilities that have largely defined the music's scholarship in recent years, and it is in this vein that my work proceeds.

One of the many fields of discourse within New Jazz Studies is a growing body of work that has lately concerned the intersection of jazz and visual culture. Much of this scholarship has tended to focus on two sets of archives—photographs and album cover artwork—as important examples of the ways in which jazz has been marketed and/or represented to the public. Authors focusing on both sets have agreed that each constitutes works of fine art that were often intended to facilitate a greater appreciation and understanding of the music and musicians. Robert G. O'Meally's 1997 article, "Jazz Albums As Art: Some Reflections," for instance, claimed that the packaging an album comes in occasionally "outswings the music it is meant to complement." "But," he argues, "when all of a jazz album's artistic values are high, music and package alike, the listener/observer/holder/reader has access to an aesthetic experience that is deeply and uniquely satisfying."3 This was just the kind of customer experience desired by the heads of Blue Note Records, a label that became famous during the 1950s and 1960s for both its high musical standards and stylish album covers. While record executive Alfred Lion was busy shelving innumerable recordings from sessions he felt were "unsuccessful," staff photographer Francis Wolff and graphic designer Reid Miles worked together to create "the distinctive Blue Note look." According to Wolff, "We established a style including recording, pressing and covers. The details made the difference."4

---

In a similar vein, collections of photographs are often thought to convey a unique and intimate look into the lives of jazz musicians. Endorsements on the back cover of photographer Herb Snitzer’s 1999 book, *Jazz: A Visual Journey*, promise the viewer a set of photographs that exemplify “the particular inner life force each musician has” and images that “capture private meditative moments of the artist most often photographed on stage.”5 K. Heather Pinson’s introduction to *The Jazz Image: Seeing Music Through Herman Leonard’s Photography*, likewise claims that Leonard’s images – mostly from the 1940s and 1950s – “capture the very essence of jazz.”6 Photographs, such as those taken by Snitzer and Leonard, established a “canon of jazz photography” that has since been revived along with a renewed interest in classic jazz during the 1980s. As Pinson notes, “Record companies, advertising representatives, agents, collectors, musicians, jazz repertory ensembles, museum curators, and universities have asked these jazz photographers for copies or prints of their work….Spurred by a reissuing of classic jazz CDs and jazz imagery, the visual image of jazz has been on the rise.”7 Leonard’s unique success as a jazz photographer – whose work can be (and has been) seen in numerous books, museum exhibitions, documentaries, and on commercial products – is thought to have set the standard for what good jazz photography, and by extension images of jazz musicians, consists of.8 As such, his record attests to the high level of influence visual accompaniments have on the public’s understanding of music and musicians.

---

7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
The use of race as an analytical framework, however, has proven capable of assigning deeper levels of meaning to each set of archives. Jon Panish's 1997 book, *The Color of Jazz: Race and Representation in Postwar American Culture*, argues that while whites have tended to view jazz musicians as decontextualized from their communities, as individual heroic figures, blacks have typically understood them in opposite terms, as members of communities defined by their broader social contexts. Art historian Carissa Dougherty has recently cited this distinction to help explain the prevalence of individual musicians depicted in photographs on album covers during the 1950s and 60s. Dougherty argues that the existing white power structure in jazz accounted for a lack of participation from African American jazz musicians when it came to designing album covers. Consultation between the designers and musicians was rare which created "a gulf between the two most creative endeavors of jazz record production." Few African Americans made their living as commercial artists, a factor that also contributed to the dearth of black culture being used as the subject of album cover design. Aside from, and in addition to, photographs of individual musicians – what Dougherty terms "neutral photography" – abstract designs and modern art were commonly used on album covers. This approach was intended to provide the music with a sophisticated identity and was a marked difference from the heyday of race record advertisements in the 1920s and early 1930s which often framed both the music and black musicians as primitive. However, despite the growing civil rights movement, such representations often diluted direct affiliations the music and musicians had with politics and/or race consciousness.

---

11 Ibid.
According to Dougherty, the labels and covers that chose to engage with black culture typically reflected a commodification of black culture and, thus, an objectification of race.

Benjamin Cawthra’s recent work on race and jazz photography, on the other hand, has argued that photographs of black jazz musicians help “describe the social and political significance of jazz on American cultural history.” Looking at a variety of photographers who were active between the 1930s and 1960s, Cawthra argues that their work established a “visual rhetoric” that reflected prevailing moods concerning racial identity and helped identify the music as culturally African American to broad audiences. Cawthra notes the fact that these goals were complicated “by the racial discourse in the jazz press and by the claims made upon the music by competing political and economic agendas,” acknowledging that the majority of the photographs taken were by white photographers for white institutions. However, where Daugherty sees the photographs that appeared on album covers as evidence of a one-sided power relationship, Cawthra uses a larger set of photographs (ones that appeared on album covers as well as in magazines and journals) as proof of a “symbiotic relationship between photographers and subjects” in which the musicians helped “define the contours of the mid-century American jazz image.”

Miles Davis did more than any other single jazz musician to contribute to that image and utilized the medium of the album cover to do so. His rise to fame between the late 1940s and 1950s paralleled the development of long-playing records, the rise of jazz photography as an art form, and, thus, the emergence of record covers as commercial art.

---

His recording contract with Columbia, the largest record label for popular music in America, had made him a star in both jazz and popular music by the mid-1950s and he used his position to project a “cool” persona that appealed to a broad consumer base. Yet, it was a coolness that also included a sense of masculinity, elegance, and racial pride.

“Nearly every aspect of the persona Davis developed – including the notion of ‘cool,’ his choices in clothing and his wearing of sunglasses, his physical beauty, and his projection of gender identity – may be discerned in the story of his early album covers,” Cawthra states. “Along the way, Davis exerted more and more control over his self-presentation on album covers. He is perhaps exceptional in the amount of artistic control he enjoyed, but that exception had a wide impact during a time of social change.” According to Krin Gabbard, it was a level of control that has also had an important lasting impact: “If few other artists have become so ingrained in the popular imagination, it may be because Davis worked very hard at supervising how people saw him...Davis was as devoted to controlling how people perceived him as he was to how people heard him.”

This work has taken Gabbard’s quote and the significance assigned to the intersection of jazz, race, and visual culture by Cawthra and others as its primary cues. However, it also attempts to take this growing discourse in a new direction. Davis, indeed, established a “cool,” masculine, elegant, and proud racial persona through album covers and photographs, but it was a persona, I argue, he developed more thoroughly out of the view of camera lenses. Focusing on the multitude of ways he did this not only opens a set of new archives to explore – in terms of both the life of Davis and for future scholarship on other musicians – but also allows for a deeper understanding of the

13 Ibid., 135-136.
14 Krin Gabbard, Hotter Than That: The Trumpet, Jazz, and American Culture (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), 185.
musician and music involved. Cawthra’s overarching idea that musicians and photographers shared the power to shape the image of jazz is a model I intend to replicate but with one that largely substitutes the marketplace for photographers. Davis’ background, as the product of an upper-middle class family, had endowed him with a sense of racial pride and entitlement, both of which were complemented by his choices as a consumer. But, just as many of the photographs Cawthra focused on weren’t seen for the first time until decades after they were taken, Davis’ choices as a consumer have been under-analyzed. Through them, we can broaden our concept of the visual as it relates to jazz by gesturing to its lesser-known material (i.e. instruments, musicians’ clothes, their modes of transportation, advertisements, etc.) and structural (i.e. houses) histories while, at the same time, further supporting our understanding of consumption as it relates to race and individual agency.

As a lavish spender living in New York City in the decades after World War II, Davis represented a continuation of “New Negroes,” members of the black middle class who, between the 1910s and 1930s, lived in urban areas and rejected the previous generation’s calls for thrift and sacrifice as means for success. The “New Negroes,” Davarian Baldwin argues, embraced the act of consumption in order to create new forms of modernity while increasing the level of control African Americans had in the leisure industry. This process ultimately constituted what Baldwin called a “marketplace intellectual life” by establishing the marketplace as a site where consumption became a primary catalyst in broader debates over black culture, class identity, and racial advancement.15 This dissertation adopts Baldwin’s approach to consumption as an act

capable of possessing deeper meanings than mere materialism and self-gratification. Davis was certainly not the first black celebrity, let alone jazz musician, whose materialism led him to practice conspicuous consumption. However, like the New Negroes who came before him, Davis utilized the marketplace to establish new forms of modernity for black culture and jazz. His trumpets, suits, cars, home, and instrument ads became objects of performance which signified on a broader history of blacks’ engagement with the marketplace as well as helped him to embody the “cool,” masculine, racialized, and sophisticated image of jazz at mid-century and continue to shape it for decades to come.

The timing of Davis’ consumer choices, however, draws into focus their specific gender, racial, and visual connotations. Davis’ rise to fame, in addition to the technological and visual factors mentioned above, paralleled that of what Liz Cohen has termed the “consumer’s republic.” It was a period, she argues, following World War II that was largely defined by a tension between the concepts of “consumer” and “citizen.” The two concepts had largely been conflated for years during and prior to the war, which appeared to offer African Americans and women an opportunity to become what she calls a “countervailing power worthy of official recognition” as American citizens. With the close of the war, however, the conflation of those concepts began to fall apart as the practice of consumption became more privatized and the act of satisfying one’s personal interests was increasingly equated with satisfying the needs of the nation. This shift not only made it more difficult for those on the margins of society to use the marketplace to argue for equal and full citizenship but also marked a change in how consumption was understood as a gendered practice. Women, as Cohen notes, had often led the consumer
movement and were framed as ideal consumers prior to the war, but were increasingly substituted in advertisements afterwards by couples and single men helping to normalize the idea of the male breadwinner and men as the head of household. *Playboy*, which began publication in 1953, exemplified this shift by promoting “the good life” as consisting of single men surrounded by jazz, fine clothes, sports cars, and attractive women who weren’t interested in settling down. Meanwhile, African American civil rights activists in the 1950s and 60s worked to regain their position as a “countervailing power” by focusing much of their attention on racial discrimination at sites of consumption such as bus terminals and restaurants.

Consumption remained a central component for much of the civil rights movement’s strategy, but it was informed by the increasing presence of the visual media as an outlet. At the same time that the modern civil rights movement gathered momentum in the 1950s and 1960s, televisions and mass media magazines were gaining in popularity and had a significant impact on the movement itself. The decision of *Jet*, to publish the mangled face of the late Emmett Till in 1955, for instance, sent shockwaves throughout the black community and galvanized widespread support for the movement. Television footage and photographs of police officers turning fire hoses and dogs against peaceful protesters in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963 made President Kennedy “sick” and placed him on the defensive regarding his relative lack of intervention on the movement’s behalf. The following year, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)

---

created its own Photo Department, including a staff of seven photographers who took and publicized photos documenting the brutal treatment of civil rights activists at the hands of those who opposed them. Throughout the movement, civil rights organizations also utilized photographs (as well as jazz) for fundraising purposes which ultimately imbued them with political, socio-cultural, and financial significance. The noted civil rights activist John Lewis went so far as to credit the media for much of the movement’s success. As the recent guest editor of a news-based website, Lewis stated “I have often said that without the media, the Civil Rights Movement would have been like a bird without wings.”

Nearly ten years earlier, the same man repeated the same phrase to me but in reference to music instead of the media. “Music was a bridge,” he said, recalling the presence of jazz singer Nina Simone at a protest and other musicians performing for benefit concerts. Lewis’ quotes and recollections serve as a reminder that jazz was an important part of a movement that sought to benefit from the increased presence of the visual media in Americans’ daily lives. As an art form, jazz established a long association with the visual media before the movement began. Early sound films and radio programs in the late 1920s regularly featured jazz music and bands, and jazz magazines in the 1930s, such as Down Beat, highlighted nearly every aspect of the music business from news, advertisements, record reviews, and more. Television, first introduced in the 1940s, became more popular than radios by the end of the following decade, but jazz

---

21 Lewis’s quote to me matched his quote about the media, word-for-word, with the exception of the “I have often said” part. He uttered it to me after a speaking engagement at the College of William and Mary on April 6, 2004.
made the transition naturally. Scott Yanow, author of *Jazz on Film: The Complete Story of the Musicians and Music Onscreen*, identified the period between 1948 and 1970 as the “golden age of jazz on television.” This period, Yanow states, contained “a surprising number of jazz performances on television” which consisted of jazz music on the soundtrack, guest appearances by jazz musicians, jazz bands as the house bands for popular late-night comedy shows, and numerous others that helped educate the public about how the art form developed and introduced them to a wide variety of its stars.22 Television specials which focused specifically on jazz – including the “Sound of Jazz” (1957), the “Timex All-Star Jazz Show” (1957-1959), and episodes of “The Robert Herridge Theater” (1960-1961) – gave many musicians, including Miles Davis, their first opportunities to appear before millions of people as the home became an increasingly important site for the consumption of entertainment.

Unlike the civil rights movement’s relationship with television during the same period, many of the programs that featured jazz music had corporate sponsors. As Kristin McGee has recently argued, these sponsors were interested in developing a broad audience base by appealing to traditional values and “representing popular culture through a more generalized, nonparticular nonethnic identification.”23 This approach, however, stood in stark contrast with existing debates within the jazz community regarding its long association with African American culture, its status within America’s cultural hierarchy, and the impacts of racial integration. Perhaps influenced by the impacts of the civil rights movement’s coverage in the visual media, black jazz musicians

recognized the medium's capacity for facilitating social change and worked within it to counter assumptions about the black body and more closely align the music with black culture. The short-lived Jazz and Peoples Movement - which was active between 1970 and 1971, precisely at the end of Yanow's "golden age" - aptly reflected this confluence by adopting a nonviolent strategy and arguing for the need of major television networks to include more performances by and interviews with black jazz musicians. Backed by Operation Breadbasket, the economic arm of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Jazz and Peoples Movement was successful in having its members appear on network television to articulate the movement's goals as well as secure performances and interviews for its leader, multi-instrumentalist Rahsaan Roland Kirk, and others to appear on popular shows.²⁴

Miles Davis was never a member of the Jazz and Peoples Movement, but he was nonetheless one of the many musicians the movement aimed to help. Writing in sympathy with the movement in 1971, journalist Hollie I. West claimed that the "Sound of Jazz" program on CBS was "the last time a network show was devoted to jazz," proof, in her view, that the lack of dignity with which jazz and its musicians had been presented on television reflected Americans' lack of appreciation for their artists. West included Davis among a long list of jazz greats who, she felt, deserved lengthy exposure on television to present their work, but singled both Davis and his well-known collaborator Gil Evans out to drive her point home: "Consider the rich artistic potential in televising a performance by Miles Davis and an orchestra conducted by Gil Evans."²⁵ On this point, West might have been ignorant of the fact that such a broadcast had already been done -

"The Robert Herridge Theater Show" in 1959. In any case, Davis made for an effective example because he had long since recognized the visual medium as a platform from which to attempt social change. In 1960 – soon after photos of Davis having been beaten by police in New York City splashed across the nation’s newspapers – Davis refused to accept awards from *Playboy* jazz polls because the magazine didn’t use black models and lobbied successfully to get his wife, Frances Taylor, on the cover of his album *Someday My Prince Will Come.* Speaking to *Playboy* about the album cover two years later, Davis remarked, “I just got to thinking that as many record albums as Negroes buy, I hadn’t ever seen a Negro girl on a major album cover unless she was the artist. . . . It was my album and I’m Frances’ prince.” Davis’ protest of *Playboy* and his success at getting Taylor on his album cover paralleled his being named *Gentleman’s Quarterly*’s “fashion personality for the month of May” in 1961 after complaining that the magazine never used black male models in their ads.

Davis clearly recognized that there was much at stake regarding the representation of jazz and race within the combined realms of the consumer marketplace and visual culture. It was a recognition that took into account both African Americans as consumers and as the objects of consumption. His concerns regarding the race of models used in popular men’s magazines reflects how much of a conscientious consumer Davis was and, thus, frames his own consumer choices as having important racial implications. The parallel developments of the civil rights movement and the popularity of television were likely reminders to Davis and many others of the inherent potential of the visual media to incite social change and, at the same time, how the same medium could facilitate a more

---

privatized understanding of the world. In the current contexts of an unfinished struggle for African Americans’ civil rights, a capitalist economy, and a techno-centered culture that has placed increasing significance on the synaesthetic capabilities of music, it’s worth contemplating how black musicians, like Miles Davis, positioned themselves as consumers against the shifting backdrop of racial and visual politics.

Chapter Outlines

Davis had an acute awareness of how visual and material culture deeply affected socio-cultural attitudes about race and jazz. While this dissertation focuses greatly on how that awareness manifested itself in Davis’ actions as a consumer, it does not lose sight of the fact that he was a musician, first and foremost. However, his life as a musician, I argue, does warrant comparison to his life as a consumer and the subject of each of the chapters represent items that bore a direct relationship to Davis’ music. His trumpets were custom-made to help produce the sound he wanted; his suits were tailored to be performed in; his cars transported him (and others) to and from gigs and recording sessions; his home was the site of practices, jam sessions, auditions, and even composition; and the instrument advertisements forged audio-visual relationships between Davis and other musicians as well as publicly lauded him for placing highly in musician polls. Instruments aside, however, neither of the items can be said to have had any direct impact on the actual music Davis played at any particular point in his career. As such, in-depth musicological analysis of Davis’ work – which, thankfully, has been done elsewhere\textsuperscript{29} – is absent here. The overall goal of this work, in keeping with New

\textsuperscript{29} See Lex Giel, \textit{The Music of Miles Davis: A Study and Analysis of Compositions and His Solo Transcriptions from the Great Jazz Composer and Improviser} (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 2005); and
Jazz Studies' focus on jazz's cultural contexts, is to analyze each subject as an object of cultural performance within Davis' life and use them to highlight the roles they played in the lives of other jazz musicians.

Davis' consumer choices can be viewed as evidence that he had inherited or internalized a set of discourses regarding what it meant to be an African American, heterosexual male, member of the upper-middle class, jazz musician, trumpeter, etc. at various stages throughout his career. However, we can also just as likely (and more importantly) view them as evidence of Davis "spinning the discourses," tweaking them to fit his immediate desires and ideas. A business suit when tailored to Davis' body and worn during a performance became less a signifier of labor than a means by which Davis avoided it. Davis' love of Ferraris maintained a time-honored interest in fast, luxurious automobiles as signifiers of self-determined mobility but eschewed African Americans' historical preference for American-made largesse as a symbol of wealth and power. Dizzy Gillespie's custom-made trumpet, with its upturned bell, bespoke his modern-ness as an innovative musician in the 1950s, but Davis' subsequent decision to alter the colors and etching designs of his trumpets provided him with a more fluid set of expressive tools that, over time, became a visual and material parallel to his ever-changing music (and, perhaps, racial mood). Davis' lavish home in Manhattan's Upper West Side, once under his ownership, continued its close association with wealthy residents but simultaneously represented a challenge to the prevailing pattern of racially segregated neighborhoods and created a residential toehold in an area of the city where few jazz musicians had ever lived. Davis' endorsement ads for the Martin Band Instrument

Company went beyond simply being signifiers of stardom and provided an index of how the musicians’ and company’s agendas sometimes differed in terms of racial and musical representation.

Because Davis remains one of the most iconic figures in American music, a multitude of works concerning his life have been published. These have included numerous biographies, an autobiography, collections of essays, interviews, and magazine articles, in-depth histories of individual albums, and even a “diary” (not written by Davis) that attempted to chronicle his professional day-to-day life over a 14-year period. While some of these sources proved more useful to me than others, they have all contributed to a rich body of work that has firmly established the important moments and themes in Davis’ life and career. With that body of work in mind, this dissertation has not taken, as its chief aim, a re-writing of Davis’ history. Nor has it attempted to primarily view the world from his perspective. Yet, in the process of researching this work, several opportunities did present themselves to provide a detailed exploration into aspects of his life that are largely absent in the aforementioned body of Davis scholarship. Davis’ Upper West Side home, for instance, has been correctly identified by Davis scholars and others as having previously served as a Russian orthodox church. But, as I argue in Chapter 4, a more thorough knowledge of the home’s pre-Davis residential history allows for a better understanding of how Davis’ decision to move there affected the class and racial identity of both the house and its neighborhood. Davis’ colored trumpets, likewise, were in need of their own detailed history in order to better understand the impact of Davis’ color choices. While the “homography” I provide in Chapter 1 is far from exhaustive, it nonetheless establishes a general pattern that allows for an initial
understanding of those choices within the contexts of specific time periods and cultural trends.

Because this work does not aim to re-write the history of Davis' life and career, it follows a more thematically-driven than chronological narrative. Contextualizing Davis' choices as a consumer as well as his appearances in instrument advertisements has meant exploring a variety of different historical periods and subjects. The issue of mobility, discussed in Chapter 3, for instance, required slavery as a historical context due to the era's establishment of both highly restricted mobility for all African Americans but also increased access to modes of escape for males in particular. Both issues, I argue, are important given the continued policing of black mobility after slavery, the centrality of it to the livelihoods of black musicians, and the fact that the jazz community was predominantly male up to and during Davis' time. Slavery was also a useful context for Chapter 2 due to the fact that attending church service on Sundays and dressing nicely established a cultural connection between slaves' clothes and their status as laborers. In my view, the predominance of suits on the bandstand before and during Davis' career reflected a variation on that connection with Davis paving the way towards an understanding of the suit as a means to obscure one's status as a laborer (on the bandstand), frame themselves as serious artists, and suggest a commitment to racial equality. In contrast, the historical context in Chapter 5 which looks at Davis' advertisements for the Martin Band Instrument Company, is significantly smaller in scope, reaching only as far as back as the 1920s when increased access to music education facilitated an expansion within the instrument industry just in time to cash in on the widespread popularity of bandleaders (and, oftentimes, instrumental sections
within their bands) during the swing era. The confluence of these two factors, I argue, helped set the stage for individual musicians to become stars as smaller combos increasingly replaced big bands on the frontlines of jazz after World War II.

In light of this work’s thematic approach, an underlying sense of structure presents itself in terms of the order in which the chapters are placed as well as the periodization and subjects that are covered. Chapters 1 and 2 explore Davis’ penchant for custom-made commodities within the specific contexts of musical performance. Each of the two chapters’ subjects – Davis’ colored trumpets and his tailored suits – were objects that he performed in and with when onstage and, together, establishes the confluence of Davis’ identity as a consumer, African American, and jazz musician. Chapters 3 and 4 continue the theme of Davis as consumer but follow him offstage as it were and place him within the contexts of car and home ownership, allowing for a consideration of how Davis’ actions were positioned against a broader history of both African American and jazz musicians’ similar consumptive practices. Chapter 5 attempts to round out the theme of Davis as consumer by exploring his position as the object of consumption via advertisements for his instrument manufacturer, the Martin Band Instrument Company. With Davis’ penchant for conspicuous consumption and his acute awareness of how visual/material, racial, and musical discourses overlap firmly established, ideas regarding how the meanings of such ads could have been interpreted by Davis, and other musicians as well. The first two sections of the Conclusion extend the theme of Davis as the object of consumption through both actual and suggested representations in an attempt to better understand what I refer to as Davis’ visual legacy. While segments within each of these sections concern Davis while still alive, the latter
parts of each explore how that legacy has manifested itself since his death. The final
section of the Conclusion, however, veers away from that history and into a debate
between performance and situationist theorists as a way of both summarizing the main
arguments of this work and outlining the connections between it and the present day.

Miles Davis led a long, productive life that spanned many eras musically,
culturally, and historically speaking. While moments from each of those eras are
explored in this dissertation, the heaviest focus is on the period between the 1950s and
1960s. It was within these two decades that Davis would make all of the purchases and
appearances noted herein and, through them, established the visual/material tropes with
which he would remain associated for the rest of his life. Not surprisingly, I argue, it was
the same period of time that would witness Davis’ rise to jazz superstardom, the modern
civil rights movement, postwar economic boom, and emergence of technology that
forever altered the landscape of visual representation. As I hope each of the subjects of
this dissertation make clear, it was during this period that Davis came to fully understand
the implications of his positionality with respect to these overlapping histories. By the
end of the 1960s, much about those histories was changing (or was about to change) and
Davis was changing along with them, as evidenced most notably by both his electrified
music and comparatively electrified wardrobe. However, despite the fact that Davis had
begun to produce radically different sounds and wear radically different threads, these
changes were mere variations on a theme; Davis’ reputations as an artistic innovator,
conspicuous consumer, lover of the custom-made commodity, and being highly self-
conscious of his race remained very much in-tact.
Another example of that continuation, in terms of Davis being an artistic innovator, is perhaps the most glaring absence from this work: the subject of Davis the visual artist. During the last nine years of his life, Davis feverishly sketched and painted, producing hundreds of works that were both sold to others and publicly displayed. He often used loud, primary, colors – many of which were also used with his trumpets – incorporated recurring motifs of race, and even designed stage sets which complemented his colorful clothing during performances. In many ways, the subject of Davis’ artwork would have made for a comfortable fit with this work. However, since 1991, three books have been published that chronicle Davis' artwork, establishing the subject as one that has been more thoroughly acknowledged than the subjects of this dissertation. While the most recent of these books – Scott Gutterman’s *Miles Davis: The Collected Artwork*, which came out in 2013 – does place Davis’ work within a broader context of postmodern art and draws close connections between Davis’ music, his art, and even his wardrobe, more work could certainly be done in this area, perhaps even using some of this dissertation’s analytical frameworks as a starting point. At the very least, the theoretical underpinnings of New Jazz Studies beg for Davis’ artwork to be considered alongside that of other jazz greats who engaged in nonmusical arts – including Louis Armstrong, who was a committed collage-artist, and Ron Carter, who was an avid photographer – as evidence of how the aesthetics of jazz bled into other art forms. In any case, it was my intention to use less-explored examples from Davis’ life to strike newer ground, and thus provide fresher perspectives on how jazz, race, and visual/material culture have, and continue to, intersect.
Analyzing the intersection of jazz, race, visual, and material culture through the lens of consumption allows for a new direction with regards to the existing discourse and helps constitute a model by which other musicians’ lives, identities, and music can be better understood. Davis’ immense purchasing power allowed him to develop a visible aura of exceptionalism compared to both fellow jazz musicians and African Americans. But, like photographs and album covers, the kinds of items Davis bought, owned, or had his image appear on (home, cars, clothes, instruments, and advertisements – the subjects of each of the following chapters) affected the lives of nearly every jazz musician during Davis’ life and often complemented their music as a mode of self-expression. I do not mean to propose that the level of analysis engaged here regarding Davis can or should be done for all other jazz musicians. Davis’ uniqueness with respect to the level of control he had over his image on album covers (and eventually his instrument ads) paralleled that of his purchasing power. But, Davis’ insistence on controlling how each of the subjects in this work were seen (and often constructed) is nonetheless a reminder of their performative capabilities with respect to other musicians, and how the meaning of certain consumer goods was/is able to transcend one’s private and public lives, ultimately broadening our concept of performance.
CHAPTER ONE

Kind of Green, Black, Red, and Blue: Expressions of Individualism and Race in the Colored Trumpets of Miles Davis

Introduction: In “Memory” of Miles

When jazz trumpeter Miles Davis was buried in New York’s Woodlawn Cemetery in the fall of 1991, he had two things with him: a Medal of Honor he received in France for his cultural achievements just two months before his death and his custom-made black lacquered Martin Committee trumpet. Given the color black’s close association with death, it’s quite possible that that explains why the horn was chosen for this particular occasion and, incidentally, why an image of the horn appears on the tombstone as well. But, as it turns out, it was just one of several colors applied to Miles Davis’ trumpets during at least the last 31 years of his life, the bulk of his professional career. Also, it wouldn’t be the only colored trumpet ever chosen to memorialize him.

In 1994, a representative from the Montreux Jazz Festival requested a red-lacquered trumpet be custom-made for a permanent showcase honoring Davis in Switzerland and in 2000 a red trumpet that Davis actually owned was on display at the Missouri Historical Society in St. Louis, the city of his birth. While the horn in St. Louis displayed a blue and red combination in 1996.

Sarah Stoll, “Leblanc fondly recalls the charms as well as the talents of Miles Davis,” The Leblanc Bell (Winter 1992): 7. The information came from a phone conversation that horn designer Larry Ramirez had with Miles’ son Gregory one year after Miles’ death. The so-called Medal of Honor is most likely the cultural award Davis received when he was made a Knight of the Legion of Honour in Paris on July 16, 1991. As with the trumpet, the award is reflected on the tombstone in Davis’ title as “Sir.” The musical notation at the bottom of the tombstone appears to be the opening melody to a song called “Solar,” which Davis recorded in 1954. Controversy surrounds authorship of the song to this day and the reason for its being chosen for the tombstone is unknown.

Leblanc Memo, dated June 8, 1994 from “Larry” [Ramirez] to “Leon and Vito,” entitled “Miles Davis” – from the “Miles Davis” file in the Leblanc Archive at the National Music Museum in Vermillion, South Dakota. On the horn at the MHS, see AP Photo taken by Mary Butkus on February 3, 2000 – from an online database of AP Photos. The caption explains that the horn, which was on loan from Davis’ daughter Cheryl, was being displayed in the museum’s “Reflections area of the new $30 million addition.”
Louis was on loan from Davis' daughter Cheryl, Miles himself also gave gifts of his colored trumpets. One was a green and black Martin Magna given to the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University in Newark, NJ and he was also known to have given at least five – including two red ones (one trumpet and one flugelhorn), an aqua blue one, and a black and copper one (used on Davis' landmark 1970 album Bitches Brew) – to his only known mentee and current performer Wallace Roney who continues to play with them on occasion.32

Fig. 1.1 Davis' green and black Martin Magna, his gift to the Institute of Jazz Studies33

So, whether etched in stone, placed underground, hanging in glass or actually being played, Miles Davis' colored trumpets have clearly become dynamic and important

---

Display without a mouthpiece, the caption also explains that the mouthpiece Davis used is buried with him in New York.


objects through which people continue to remember him. They were identified – chosen by either Davis himself, members of his immediate family, or colleagues in the music business – as potent symbols of his legendarily prolific, innovative, and influential artistic legacy, a life in music that spanned nearly 50 years and seemed to transcend just as many genres. Of course, the colored trumpets alone can only tell us but so much about Davis and his music; as material and performative objects directly associated with him, they had and still have a lot of company, much of which is explored in this dissertation.

While Davis seems to have been the first jazz musician known for playing uniquely-colored horns, neither the concept of colored instruments in general nor the actual playing of unique instruments (let alone trumpets) within the jazz community were wholly new. Yet, by the time Davis began playing with colored trumpets, plenty of evidence existed to suggest that they would draw a lot of attention his way. Davis exhibited a long-term commitment to performing with them which, when coupled with his popularity, suggests that they were not only important to him as expressive objects but had achieved a high rate of visibility as well. It can even be said that, since Davis’ passing and in several ways specifically because of him, his colored trumpets have taken on a life of their own, becoming more visually and aurally accessible to the public in ways previously unimaginable. Indeed, for decades, Davis seems to have been practically begging the public to take notice of them. Yet, during his lifetime and since,
very few people, including Davis himself, ever mentioned or attempted to make sense of them.

This work, therefore, represents an initial attempt to begin breaking that silence, hopefully in some meaningful and constructive ways, by approaching Davis' colored trumpets as objects uniquely situated at the intersection of his personal and artistic identities. Thinking of them in this way offers a convenient way to tell an important, yet untold story about Davis while maintaining a comfortable narrative balance between the personal and artistic. However, as with this dissertation's other chapters, Davis' example provides a valuable opportunity to explore the trumpets in broader contexts. In this chapter, I will first attempt to provide some historical context for the trumpets by looking at them as unique instruments, exploring both the most well known use of unique trumpets that preceded Davis and the prevalence of unique instruments, particularly within the genres of free / avant-garde jazz, during the bulk of Davis' career. I will then transition to focusing on the horns' colors in an attempt to better understand not only what Davis was trying to tell us with them but what the colored trumpets themselves tell us about Davis as well. In my attempt to make sense of the colors specifically, I will look first at the symbolic value of the color pattern as a whole before eventually focusing on one of the colors in particular, approaching it as a choice made by Davis independent of the others. I will conclude by considering how the horns facilitated Davis' penchant for straddling the lines of visibility/invisibility while, at the same time, helped him constitute a sense of individualism within the world of jazz.
Dizzy and the Upturned Bell: A New Angle on Unique Trumpets

By the late 1940s, fans of bebop (including, arguably, the entire beat generation) had begun to conflate a constellation of material objects with not only Dizzy Gillespie, the style’s most influential trumpeter, but with the music itself. In an ad for a Gillespie performance at Atlanta’s City Auditorium in 1948, it was stated that “All ‘Boppers’ who appear replete in glasses, beret and goatee, will be admitted for $1.00.”\(^{35}\) Noting his widespread influence on the material culture of jazz the following year, the *Chicago Defender* remarked: “Any move Dizzy makes automatically is adopted by his fans as ‘law.’ When he decided to grow a goatee to cover a shaving wound on his chin, Dizzy became responsible for thousands of goatees blossoming forth in New York. When he started wearing a beret and shell-rimmed glasses, he caused a run on the beret and shell-rim markets.”\(^{36}\) One company, the Chicago-based Fox Brothers Tailors, even moved quickly to capitalize on this trend by selling “Dizzy Gillespie Berets or Bebop Caps.”\(^{37}\)

In less than a decade, however, bebop would inspire new forms of jazz and, with them, new trumpet stars (including Miles Davis and Chet Baker) who threatened Gillespie’s reign, both stylistically and musically, as the main trendsetter of modern jazz. Impresario Norman Granz worked tirelessly during the 1950s to re-establish Gillespie’s name as a soloist and was aided in his efforts by the U.S. State Department which decided, in 1956, to make Gillespie its first officially-sponsored jazz ambassador by sending his band overseas on a goodwill mission to South Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. It was amidst this resurgence in his career that another material object

---

which Gillespie would become well known for surfaced: a trumpet with an upturned bell at 45 degrees.

According to biographer Alyn Shipton, who has worked more diligently than any other to trace the origins and meanings of the trumpet in Gillespie’s career, Gillespie began performing with the unique horn in 1954. The trumpet would go on to become “a symbol of Gillespie as immediately identifiable as his spectacles and goatee,” noted Shipton, and it was one that, unlike Gillespie’s aforementioned facial/cranial adornments, he continued to consistently associate himself with until the end of his career nearly 40 years later. During that long period, printed images of Gillespie with the horn or just the horn itself appeared in such places as album covers, advertisements for both upcoming gigs and the horns’ manufacturers (The Martin Band Instrument Company and King, both of which custom-made them for Gillespie), as well as photographs accompanying interviews. Its uniqueness as an instrument inevitably limited the number of potential Gillespie-copiers to the musician community, lending a sense of exclusivity to the horn, but there were at least a few jazz trumpeters – including Lee Morgan (who can be seen playing the same kind of horn on at least three album covers for the Blue Note label in 1956 and at a photo session during a 1957 recording), Chuck Mangione (who actually played one of Dizzy’s old horns in 1960), and Maynard Ferguson (who designed a similar-looking horn called the “Firebird” in the 1970s) – who either followed directly in his footsteps or were apparently inspired to plod a similar path. Gillespie’s

39 Graham Marsh and Glyn Callingham, *Blue Note Album Cover Art: The Ultimate Collection* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2002), 100, 101, 144, 280. The three albums are *Lee Morgan* (1541), *Hank Mobley Sextet* (1540), and *Lee Morgan Indeed!* (1538). The photograph mentioned above was taken during the recording of John Coltrane’s album, *Blue Train*, in September 1957. However, the cover of Morgan’s 1957 album, *Lee Morgan Vol. 3*, as well as his subsequent album covers – if they show his trumpet – show
special horn was even stolen on two occasions between 1956 and 1957 which served to further highlight its uniqueness. Reporting from the first of these incidents – in which the horn was eventually recovered – noted that it was “said to be the only one of its kind in the country.” Reporting on the second incident – at which time the horn had not been recovered – inspired more dramatic language, describing the horn as “the jazz equivalent of the Mona Lisa or nabbing the Jonker diamond.” “Dizzy’s trumpet is spectacularly unique,” the article continued, featuring a “mad, world-of-the-future design....The poor crook who has it can’t abandon it in the anonymity of a pawn shop, play it in public, or sell it.”

As a result of its uniqueness and Gillespie’s long association with such a horn, he received numerous questions as to why and how he came to play it, none of which he answered to Shipton’s satisfaction. “If the question could be sidestepped, it usually was,” wrote Gillespie’s biographer, noting that the “dozens” of responses Gillespie made over the years were both “evasive” and “generally unhelpful.” Most common among them was the story that the horn’s bell had become bent at a party in 1953 as the result of an accident and that, upon attempting to play it in that shape, Gillespie approved of its sound and requested they be custom-made for him from then on. Shipton, however, felt that the likelihood of the bell becoming bent at such a dramatic angle as the result of an accident

---

40 Gerald Kessler, “Dizzy’s Dizzy Horn Sends 3 to Jail,” Daily News, February 21, 1956, 16. This article notes that the horn wasn’t the sole object of the theft but “among $8,000 in loot and $100 in cash” that was stolen from his home in Queens on February 4. The robbers had entered the home while Gillespie was at a gig several hours away, tied his wife Lorraine to a chair, and preceded to spend “two unhurried hours ransacking the house.” When he returned from the gig, Gillespie provided the cops with a detailed description of the horn which they used to track it down when they heard that such a horn was being offered for sale nearby. The three men who were subsequently arrested later admitted to committing the theft as a means of supporting their drug habits.

41 Article dated either April 4 or 11, 1957 with no author, page number, or publication info noted – found within the Dizzy Gillespie Vertical Files, January-July 1957, at the Institute of Jazz Studies in Newark, NJ.

42 Shipton, Groovin’ High, 258-259.
was “remote.” Instead, he proposed that Gillespie had long known about the idea, having been introduced to such a horn by an English trumpeter in 1937, and chose to “introduce” it seventeen years later as a means of re-stating his identity as an influential musician. In any case, Gillespie often claimed that the horn’s design had a host of practical benefits. In an interview published in 1958, Gillespie stated that “It’s a good horn. The bell way up there really takes the edge off my playing. There’s no loss of tone. It seems to diffuse the sound. And I don’t have to blow so loud to hear myself....Lots of young trumpeters want them and I think it helps make the job easier for a horn man in a small group.”

For at least two years, while Gillespie headed up a 17-piece band that featured five trumpeters each playing the specially-designed horn, Gillespie also thought they were a good idea for groups. Commenting on that, Gillespie stated “It looked good. It sounded nice too. Guys play down into the music stands and you don’t get full value with ordinary horns. And trumpet is a piercing instrument. It’ll bust your ear drum if you’re up close and there are four or five of them coming at you at one time.”

Given Gillespie’s resurgence of popularity in the mid-1950s, it can therefore be suggested that Miles Davis took notice of the manner in which both Gillespie’s early popularity had been established and later re-established, including the role his unique trumpet apparently played in the process, and planned to imitate it at a later point in his career. In addition to the fact that Gillespie had greatly influenced Davis’ style of playing as his star rose in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the two trumpeters had both signed endorsement deals with The Martin Band Instrument Company during the same time period. Since both of them were with Martin when Gillespie debuted his trumpet with

---

the upturned bell, Davis would have been aware of the company’s willingness to custom-
make unique trumpets for its artists and that, should he decide to embrace one himself,
he’d have access to a willing manufacturer. Furthermore, by the time Davis began using
colored trumpets, his overwhelming influence as a jazz trumpeter (and bandleader) had
been firmly established though it, too, was beginning to be called into question by the
emergence of free jazz, a style which he would not embrace for several years and one that
helped spawn a more widespread usage of unique instruments among jazz musicians.

**Free Jazz / Instrumentation**

It is, perhaps, to be expected that styles of music which defy a multitude of
musical conventions and open up new avenues of expression among musicians, lend
themselves well to the playing of unique instruments. Along with the challenges free
jazz posed to Western notions of musical form, harmony, scales, and tonality came a less-
ever present, but nonetheless notable challenge to the idea of what a jazz band’s
instrumentation consisted of. The 1950s had already seen a handful of musicians adapt
instruments, such as the harp (Dorothy Ashby) and accordion (Tommy Gumina), rarely
(or never before) associated with jazz to the music. As free or avant-garde jazz began to
take hold between the late 1950s and into the 1960s, however, more and more musicians
continued in this vein as a means of aurally complementing the music’s expanding
boundaries. Rufus Harley, who began playing jazz on bagpipes in the 1960s, is likely the
best example of this.\(^4\)\(^5\) However, perhaps because saxophones and trumpets continued to
dominate the frontlines of jazz bands during the 1960s and 70s, avant-garde jazz groups

---

tended to utilize variations of them more often than others. The following examples remind us that the use of unique instruments in jazz, both before and after Davis began playing colored trumpets, became a hallmark of musical experimentation within jazz during the 1960s and 1970s while helping the instruments’ practitioners stand out from the crowd.

Saxophonist Ornette Coleman’s 1959 album, *The Shape of Jazz to Come*, which is often credited with ushering in the style of free jazz, features a photograph of Coleman on the cover holding a white plastic saxophone, a horn that he claimed was able to produce “purer” notes and offered less resistance than metal horns.46 Scholars, such as David Ake, have noted that the uniqueness of the instrument, particularly its material make-up, paralleled broader challenges that Coleman’s diet, hair, clothing, demeanor, and supposed sexual orientation posed to jazz’s close association with traditional forms of masculinity and heterosexuality, forms that Ake argues were exemplified at the time by Davis.47 Roland Kirk had begun performing with three saxophones at once, including the tenor coupled with the much rarer manzello (forerunner of the soprano saxophone) and stritch (forerunner of the alto saxophone) in the mid-1950s and his unique talent garnered him national attention in the press during the 1960s.48 Compared to Coleman, Kirk’s decision to play these unique instruments (not to mention in a unique way) was far less practical. Speaking to a reporter in 1972, Kirk explained: “One night I dreamed I was playing three

48 Kirk’s first known album on which he plays the three horns is *Triple Threat*, recorded in November 1956. An ad for Kirk’s performance in a March 1960 issue of the *Chicago Defender* notes, in all caps, that he plays “3 SAXES AT ONCE.” Ads for his performances in the same paper in 1962 show images of Kirk performing on the three horns. His unique talent was also at the center of a feature story on Kirk in the May 1966 issue of *Ebony*, entitled “Roland Kirk: Modern One-Band; Blind virtuoso is master of 45 musical instruments including manzello, stritch, and flute” (pp. 181-184, 186).
instruments at once. The next day I went to a music store and tried all the reed instruments. Then they took me to the basement, to show me what they called the scraps. That is where I found the manzello and the stritch. Despite the apparent impracticality of his decision, Kirk’s multi-instrument performances offered him the opportunity to show off his extraordinary breathing technique, play multiple melodies, rhythms, and harmonies at once, and complement his unique sounds with a battery of auxiliary instruments including (but not limited to) a gong, pedal-operated cymbal, nose flute, and a whistle called a rokon which Kirk claimed to have invented. “I’m not trying to change music around,” Kirk stated in 1973, “I’m just contributing to what I think can be done .... [and] use miscellaneous instruments to do it.”

Coleman’s and Kirk’s unique adaptations of the saxophone were but one of the challenges posed to traditional jazz instrumentation between the 1950s and 1970s. Coleman’s trumpeter on The Shape of Jazz to Come, Don Cherry, began a long-standing association with the pocket cornet in the late 1950s, an instrument that was just as long as a traditional trumpet (in terms of tube length) but considerably shorter (roughly 8” from mouthpiece to bell compared to almost 24” for traditional trumpets) and, thus, more compact. According to David Ake, the horn’s size was a perfect complement to Cherry’s tone, which was “thin, pinched, [and] wavering,” and further paralleled Coleman’s aforementioned challenges to masculinity. The uniqueness of Cherry’s pocket trumpet (which he claimed to have purchased in India) was coupled in the mid-1960s by the four-valved trumpet designed by white trumpeter / bandleader Don Ellis with the American-

51 Ake, Jazz Cultures, 71.
based instrument company Holton. The fourth valve of Ellis’ trumpet allowed him to play quarter-tones, or notes between each of the half-steps of the Western scale, and thus more accurately perform non-Western styles of music. Ellis became known, between the latter half of the 1960s and into the 1970s, for layering his unique trumpet's capabilities with an unusually large band (as big as 21-pieces which included multiple bassists and drummers), that performed pieces in odd time signatures (such as 19/8 and 27/16), and as a progenitor of “third stream,” a blending of jazz and classical styles.

While the example of Gillespie’s upturned horn was likely the single biggest influence on Davis’ decision to begin performing on a unique horn, it may not have been the only one. In a 1995 interview with Ben Sidran, trumpeter Don Cherry recalled Davis having shown repeated interest in, and even having played with, Cherry’s pocket trumpet. Cherry had first met Davis in the mid-to-late 1950s when Davis’ quintet came to Los Angeles to perform. During one of the group’s nights off, Davis came to the Renaissance where Cherry was playing with a trio. Said Cherry, “we were in the second set and all of a sudden somebody tapped me on the shoulder. On the bandstand. And I turned around and it was Miles. And he had his hand out, he wanted to try my trumpet.... so he [Miles] played something on my horn. And then I played some and

52 At the time Ellis designed the four-valve trumpet, he was leading both a big band and a smaller group called the Hindustani Sextet which included a sitar player. According to Los Angeles Times reporter, Charles Weisenberg, Ellis’ work with the latter group represented “the first to attempt a combination of Indian music and instruments within a jazz group” (“Static Jazz at the Pilgrimage Theater,” June 1, 1966, C12).


54 In the same interview, Cherry lists the players in Davis’ group at the time which narrows down the time period in which they could have met to the mid-to-late 1950s. During that period, Davis’ quintet was known to have performed in LA in December 1956 (Shrine Auditorium, as part of Irving Granz’s “Jazz a la Carte” series) and February 1960 (same location, co-headlining the bill with the Modern Jazz Quartet). If not, it would appear most probable that the two met in late 1956.
then we both played and so he spent the whole night.” In the same interview, Cherry also recalled a similar interaction with Davis years later at the Five Spot in New York: “he [Davis] would come in and he would have the waiter bring a little note up. And he says, ‘Can I play your horn...Miles Davis.’ And he would come in and sit in with the group with Ornette.”

The timing of The Ornette Coleman Quartet’s (which included Cherry) earliest performances at the Five Spot – debuting in November 1959 and returning both the following spring and in July 1961 – bookends that of what is thought to be the debut of Davis' colored trumpets (June 1960, see following section), making it difficult to discern just how influential Davis’ prolonged interest in Cherry’s horn was on his decision to play with a colored trumpet. Yet, it’s worth noting that despite the fact that Davis publicly denounced Coleman’s music, he was nonetheless curious enough about it to attend the group’s performances and sit-in with the band; Davis, it seemed, was at least intent on being an informed critic. Furthermore, Keith Waters has noted that Davis’ sidemen, between 1965 and 1968, were influenced by avant-garde jazz and that the band incorporated some of its elements into their music, including the occasional absence of piano comping behind soloists. This factor alone, according to Waters, “suggested to many listeners a response to Ornette Coleman’s pianoless recordings of the late 1950s.”

The examples of both Dizzy Gillespie and the free jazz musicians noted above, particularly Don Cherry, frame Davis’ decision to play with colored trumpets as a highly

---

55 Ben Sidran, *Talking Jazz: An Oral History* (New York: Da Capo, 1995), 412. The second of Cherry’s recollections is further supported by an interview he had done in 1989 in which he stated that Davis had come to hear him play with Ornette Coleman’s quartet at the Five Spot. “He [Davis] wanted to try the pocket trumpet and he played practically all night,” Cherry stated.

informed one. If Davis recognized his own musical innovations as threats to Gillespie’s reign as jazz’s preeminent modern trumpeter, he might have also interpreted free jazz as a similar threat to him, even if he didn’t initially claim to like the music. Whereas Gillespie may have been using his upturned bell as a way to reignite public interest in his career/persona and free jazz players were using unique instruments to both visually and aurally complement their musical experimentations, Davis’ reasons for using of the colored trumpet appear to have been firmly in between the two. Davis had established a solid reputation as a trendsetter by the end of the 1950s and any perceived failure of his to respond to the latest trend in jazz could have risked upsetting that reputation. Placed in such a context, Davis’ colored trumpet can be understood as a device of cultural compromise, one that was novel enough to remind audiences of his capacity for change while, at the same time, traditional enough to signal a less-than-full embrace of the latest trends in jazz. But what role would/could the colors of the trumpets themselves have played in this process and how might they have reflected on Davis as an African American more specifically? Before addressing that question, it’s worth taking a step back and establishing some basic information on the horns themselves, or what I’d like to call a “hornography.”

*Miles: The (Colored) “Hornography”*

Miles Davis was first noted as having a colored trumpet (in this case, green) on June 17, 1960 while performing at Los Angeles’ second annual jazz festival. Although

---

prior to that year Davis had endorsed two other trumpet manufacturers – Vega and Besson – available evidence suggests that all of his colored trumpets were manufactured under the name of the Martin Band Instrument Company and were most often the Committee, Martin’s top-of-the-line model. While this isn’t known to be the case for all of his colored trumpets, Davis’ black one required four coats of lacquer which was, at least in part, intended to provide him with both the added weight and darker sound (i.e. round and mellow) he preferred. All of the colored trumpets, however, appear to have been custom-made for Davis and they tended to feature elaborate, flowery etchings as well as Davis’ name engraved along the left-side of the bell.

had to track down the exact issue, author, and page numbers myself. Despite such a shortcoming, Vail’s book is useful in the sense that it appears to include every performance review of Davis’ that appeared in *Down Beat* during this time and before. Since none of them mention a green trumpet, I consider the mentioning in reference to the L.A. jazz festival the first known but hold out the possibility that there may be earlier mentions that I simply have yet to come across. One potential mention comes from an online interview with Finnish musician Trevor Watts in 2005 (Bill Shoemaker, “A Wider Embrace: Trevor Watts in Tampere,” November 5, 2005 in Tampere, Finland - http://www.pointofdeparture.org/AWiderEmbracePart2.html). In it Watts mentions having seen Davis “during his green trumpet period with Trane [saxophonist John Coltrane]. It was a triple bill with a full Count Basie band and Stan Getz.” Given Watt’s ethnicity, it is likely that his memory is of a performance of the Miles Davis Quintet while on their European tour between March 21 and April 10, 1960 which would make the “debut” of the green trumpet several months earlier than I have suggested. However, while Coltrane was with Davis for that tour (the last time they performed together) and it featured a triple bill that included the Stan Getz Quartet, the third act was not the “full” Count Basie band but the Oscar Peterson Trio. Although Basie and Peterson were both African American jazz pianists and bandleaders, I find it difficult to explain how one could mistake the two groups on account of their size and sound alone. According to Vail, the three bands Watts remembers seeing were never known to have performed together prior to that tour. All things considered, because something is askew with Watts’ recollection, I have chosen not to accept it as fact.

Looking through the pages of *Down Beat* and *Metronome*, Davis appeared in at least one ad for Vega in 1949 and then several ads for Besson between 1955 and 1958. Interestingly enough, between those two periods, Davis endorsed Martin. His earliest ad for them appears in the February 1951 issue of *Metronome* (p. 35) and he continued to be featured in Martin ads until the February 9, 1955 issue of *Down Beat* (“Up Beat,” p. 12) suggesting a possible four-year contract. Davis’ ads for Besson first appear in the December 28, 1955 issue (p. 27) and continue until the December 11, 1958 issue of *Down Beat* (p. 60) suggesting a possible three-year contract. However, despite how exclusive this latter “contract” might have been, Davis appeared in six ads for Martin that ran alongside his Besson ads during 1957 and 1958. While half of these ads were reprints from Davis’ earlier period with Martin, three of the ads that appeared in 1958 (January 9, p. 41 [*Down Beat*]; January 23, p. 3 [*Down Beat*]; and February 1958, p. 19 [*Metronome*]) were new, including one in which Davis is referred to as a “Martin artist,” suggesting Davis had signed a contract with them as well that year. In any case, from that point on, Davis appears to have remained exclusively with Martin.
From 1960 until 1974, a multitude of sources confirm Davis' continued association with green trumpets. Interviewing Davis for *Playboy* in 1961, Alex Haley observed him at his apartment in New York City having "grabbed two green-tinted Martin trumpets and took turns running rapid chromatic scales from the bottom to the top C." A review in *Variety* of a benefit concert Davis had performed for the NAACP, SNCC and CORE on February 12, 1964 (at Philharmonic Hall in New York City) noted that, as opposed to the "rock 'n' roll shenanigans at Carnegie Hall which tied up 57th Street the same night" (one of the Beatles' first American performances), "a different order of enthusiasm was evoked by Davis from his green-gold trumpet." Davis gave The Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University, as a gift, a "green and black spray-painted finish" Martin Magna that featured his name inscribed in gold-uppercase letters along the left side of the bell which, according to its serial number, 707737, was likely made during or soon after 1964. In his 2002 biography of Davis, *So What: The Life of Miles Davis*, John Szwed mentions a concert Miles was performing in 1970 at Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C., run by members of the Daughters of the American Revolution, before or during which "Miles hit one of the white-haired ladies on the head with his green trumpet" when they began to object to the sound of his band. *New York Times* interviewer Rita Reif noted many in his New York City home when she interviewed him in July 1970 and mentioned that he had used one recently at both the Schaefer Music Festival in Central Park and the New York Pop Concerts on Randall's Island. In fact, as late as 1972, an image of a large green trumpet even appears on the cover of his album *Big Fun* (Columbia/Legacy C2K 63973).\(^5^9\)

\(^{59}\) On Haley's interview, see John Szwed *So What: The Life of Miles Davis* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 223. Though Szwed's endnote, on p. 429, only cites the interview as having been titled
However, thanks in large part to a multitude of YouTube videos, Davis’ transitioning away from such a seemingly exclusive association with them can be seen to begin as early as 1969, the same year Davis became famous for his experiments in jazz fusion. In that year, he is shown performing an original composition entitled “Bitches Brew” on what appears to be a black or black and red trumpet (depending on the stage lighting). As noted earlier, it is thought that Davis was photographed with a blue trumpet in 1970. Yet, in that same year, at England’s Isle of Wight Jazz Festival (late August) as well as in footage claimed to have been from 1971, Davis had switched back to a black trumpet. There’s even a clip of Davis performing at the Jazz Festival in Berlin from 1971 showing him with what appears to be a red trumpet and, while no footage of Davis’ activity from 1972 appears to exist on the video broadcasting website, another video of him, from the same site, performing in Vienna in 1973 (with a group that would remain in existence until 1975) also displays red as the instrument color of choice and what would prove to be a fortuitous one at that.


Miles Davis Quintet (Philharmonic Hall, N.Y.),” Variety, February 19, 1964, 61; http://newarkwww.rutgers.edu/IJS/instrumentsB/miles-davis.html - this site is part of the Institute’s digital collections exhibit and includes several color photographs of the horn hanging in a display case as well as a general description. In a recent interview with the National Endowment for the Arts’ Molly Murphy and Kate Kaiser (http://www.nea.gov/national/jazzjazz07/morgenstern2.html), Institute Director Dan Morgenstern revealed he “[didn’t] think he used it very much”; on the horn’s serial number dating, see www.dallasmusic.org (also see Note 1). However, the list appears to be only for Committee models as opposed to the Magna. Regardless, the list of Committee numbers ends with 1964 having started the year at 700000. Though a list of Magna serial numbers does not appear to be available, I based my assumption that Davis’ horn was made during or soon after 1964 on the idea that its serial number system was not much, if at all, different than that of the Committee models; Szwed, So What, 317; Rita Reif, “Miles Davis’s Home Is a Study in Curves,” New York Times, July 18, 1970, 26.

“A vivid image of Davis,” he mentions, on p. 226, that the interview was published in the September, 1962 issue of the magazine; “Concert Review – Miles Davis Quintet (Philharmonic Hall, N.Y.),” Variety, February 19, 1964, 61; http://newarkwww.rutgers.edu/IJS/instrumentsB/miles-davis.html - this site is part of the Institute’s digital collections exhibit and includes several color photographs of the horn hanging in a display case as well as a general description. In a recent interview with the National Endowment for the Arts’ Molly Murphy and Kate Kaiser (http://www.nea.gov/national/jazzjazz07/morgenstern2.html), Institute Director Dan Morgenstern revealed he “[didn’t] think he used it very much”; on the horn’s serial number dating, see www.dallasmusic.org (also see Note 1). However, the list appears to be only for Committee models as opposed to the Magna. Regardless, the list of Committee numbers ends with 1964 having started the year at 700000. Though a list of Magna serial numbers does not appear to be available, I based my assumption that Davis’ horn was made during or soon after 1964 on the idea that its serial number system was not much, if at all, different than that of the Committee models; Szwed, So What, 317; Rita Reif, “Miles Davis’s Home Is a Study in Curves,” New York Times, July 18, 1970, 26.

“Miles Davis – Bitches Brew – 1969 (1 of 6)” (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xczGCvAAorY)

“Miles Davis at the Isle of Wight [Jazz Festival] ’70 – Call it Anything – 4/4” (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wiHJJ1zZ8); “miles davis 1971” (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xrPQKH9nO9k).

“Miles Davis and Keith Jarrett 1971” (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KxdnlfD2Vlo); “Miles Davis Live: “Ife” part 3 (with Mtume waterdrum solo), Vienna 1973” (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yclo- chbPgg)
Fig. 1.2 Davis with a red trumpet in Paris, July 6, 1991

Footage shown during a 1982 interview with Bryant Gumbel on NBC's Today Show that may well have been taken from that or the previous year as well as that of Davis performing a tune entitled "New Blues" in 1988 on YouTube show Davis

performing with a black trumpet. These two clips, however, seem to be more the exception than the rule. From a 1985 performance of “Time After Time” in Montreal, an interview done that same year in Japan, a performance at the Amnesty International’s 10th Anniversary benefit concert in 1986 and a Tokyo performance that following year, to a cameo as a “starving” street musician in New York City in the 1988 film Scrooged playing a jazzed-up version of “We Three Kings” (a tune he had performed on the December 11, 1987 broadcast of David Letterman as well – this might have been around the same time as the film shooting), a performance of “Wrinkle” at the 10th Paris Jazz Festival the following year, one of “Summertime” at the 1991 Montreaux Jazz Festival and on the cover of his 1991 album Doo-Bop (Warner Bros. 9 26938-2), visual proof of Davis performing with a red trumpet is remarkably consistent, the most since his association with green ones began in 1960.

Thanks as well to information recently unearthed from the National Music Museum in South Dakota, we know that there were a few exceptions to this overall pattern. For instance, Davis was known to have performed with at least one dark blue trumpet in the late 1980s and had requested several other unique trumpets be made for him including one that was to have “red on top, green on the bottom and brown valves,” one “with patch-work colors like the map of the United States,” and one with black lacquer that featured “gold crescent moons and stars etched in.” However, whether it

---

64 “Miles Davis interview, 1982” (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHeYG9SNaS0); “Miles Davis ‘New Blues,” described as being in 1988 (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hM6e5700dw0I)
65 “Time After Time – Miles Davis Live in Montreal 1985” (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNP9OuCVJ5); “I Remember Miles – Part 1” (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMWXBEijHoE). Though Davis was likely the first to play a green trumpet, he may not have been the first to play with a red one. The cover of trumpeter Lee Morgan’s 1966 album Charisma (Blue Note - 4312) contains an illustration showing Morgan playing on a red trumpet.
66 On the dark blue horn, see Leblanc Memo from “Larry R.” to “Leon & Vito,” dated July 22, 1991. This memo explains that Davis and organist Joey DeFrancisco [sic] had recently shared a billing and that, after
was because of personal preference or sheer manufacturing practicality/capability at the time (and I suspect both were at play), green, black, and red trumpets were Davis’ primary colors.

**Kind of Red, Black, and Green**

Knowing that Davis preferred the colors green, black, and red, anyone familiar with African American history might argue that this suggested a connection between Davis and the tenets of Black Nationalism or Marcus Garvey in particular, a Caribbean-born Pan-Africanist perhaps best known for founding the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and advocating the return of African Americans to Africa, what is often referred to as the “Back to Africa” movement, during the 1920s. Garvey officially unveiled what was called the Universal African Flag at a UNIA rally in 1920. At the time the flag was introduced, red and black were to represent the blood and skin color of African people, respectively, while green was to symbolize the “green pastures of Africa.” It is a flag that would not only go on to influence the flag designs of several newly independent African countries in the 1950s and 1960s but continues to represent the UNIA to this day.

Though some scholars claim Davis’ father was a Garveyite, in which case Davis’ introduction to these colors and their political significance would likely have taken place at an early age, Davis did not choose to *explicitly* associate himself with them until the

---

noticing Miles’ “dark blue” horn, DeFrancesco inquired as to how he could get one for himself. On the red, green, and brown horn as well as the “patch-work” horn, see Leblanc Inter-Office Memo entitled “Phone Call from Miles Davis,” from Sandy Sandberg to Vito Pascucci, dated December 1, 1970. On the “gold crescent moons and stars” horn, see Sarah Stoll, “Leblanc fondly recalls the charms as well as the talents of Miles Davis,” *The Leblanc Bell* (Winter 1992): 7. As it turns out, this horn was actually made. Davis is pictured with it on page 18 of the June 1983 issue of *Down Beat*, part of Greg Tate’s “The Electric Miles Davis: Part One.”

early 1970s, by which time the colors had also become identified with the youthfulness, militancy, and anti-colonialism of the black power movement. With roughly the same band, Davis released an album in 1972, *On the Corner*, whose cover features three characters displaying the colors on their clothing, and appeared in at least one live performance in 1973 with the colors painted to the outside of his band’s electronic equipment. Speaking of this time in his career, Davis biographer John Szwed commented that “Davis now had a band that was fully in tune with the racial climate and moving with a black nationalist wind at their backs.”68 It was also a band whose music reflected the modernism of the times through a unique fusion of free jazz, rock, and funk.

By this time, for African American jazz musicians, the practice of overtly celebrating one’s African heritage had become increasingly common. The collective practice of doing so went back at least several decades and had since manifested itself in a variety of ways including the adoption of the Muslim faith and name, applying the word “Africa” or African words to song and album titles, wearing African or African-inspired clothing as well as including African instruments and/or instrumentalists into band lineups, several factors of which Davis and his band had also embraced at that time. It had, in a sense, become a hip thing to do fueled in large part by the twin forces of the African decolonization and American civil rights movements.

However, if we are to consider Davis’ association with these colors, and thus his trumpets, as evidence of his racial pride, we would need to demonstrate a connection between them and Davis prior to the green trumpet’s debut in 1960. If we rewind about

---

68 Szwed *So What*, 317. It is worth noting here that in the 2004 Documentary film *Miles Davis Electric: A Different Kind of Blue*, former Davis sidemen Carlos Santana and Herbie Hancock give credit for Davis’ dramatic changes in public appearances and sonority around this time to his relationship with Betty Davis (whom Santana described as “a real ferocious black panther woman”).
15 years, it seems as though we might have found just that. In February and March of 1958, the Miles Davis Sextet recorded sessions which resulted in an album for Columbia Records entitled *Milestones*. Musically, the album was significant as its title track marked the introduction of what's known as modal jazz, a composition and performance technique that bases a song's harmony and melody around scales within a single key as opposed to traditional chord changes that occasionally feature notes outside the fundamental key. Visually, however, the album cover stands out in this context.

On the cover, Davis is wearing a green shirt and black pants while sitting on a red chair and against a red background. Even despite the fact that, at the time the photograph was taken, the floodgates of African decolonization had begun to open, on its own, this may seem like a coincidence. However, Davis was not the first popular African American musician to appear in such a way on an album cover around this time. That honor, it seems, goes to singer Harry Belafonte and the cover of his 1956 RCA-Victor release, *Calypso*.

To be sure, the two records were produced by different companies and their covers were shot by different photographers but it is interesting to note that what links both albums is the fact that their musical content was directly influenced by African culture. While this is certainly done more explicitly in Belafonte's case -- it was an album of West Indian and Trinidadian folk songs -- according to Davis' autobiography, he was influenced to experiment with modal jazz after watching a performance by an African ballet troupe, impressed with their continuous ability to develop unique moves over a firm rhythmic foundation.69

69 Miles Davis and Quincy Troupe, *Miles: The Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 225. To be sure, it's possible that both Davis' recollection on this matter and Troupe's later assertion of
Assuming that’s true, it’s important to note that Davis would continue to experiment with the technique in 1959, eventually producing an entire album’s worth under the now well-known title *Kind of Blue*. If Davis’ artistic mindset continued to be inspired by African culture, several other events that year would seem to bring his feelings on American race relations into high relief, framing it as an especially important one for Davis in this regard. Between August and October of that year, Davis would not only be savagely beaten by two white police officers outside of the New York jazz club Birdland, but would make his first two appearances in civil rights benefit concerts as well, a tradition of sorts that he, along with virtually the rest of the professional jazz world, would continue well into the next decade.

In 1960, the same year Davis began playing a green trumpet, broader issues of race and individual freedom made themselves felt within the jazz community. Likely inspired by the student sit-ins that had breathed new life into the civil rights movement earlier in the year, African American jazz musicians, Charles Mingus and Max Roach, protested that summer’s Newport Jazz Festival with one of their own at the nearby Cliff Walk Manor Hotel marking one of the earliest and most assertive collective attempts on

---

this was historically inaccurate. Although the exact year Davis witnessed the influential ballet performance isn’t entirely clear in the autobiography, it is implied as having taken place during or after the spring of 1958. However, in his article, “From *Kind of Blue* to *Bitches Brew*” (in Gerald Early, ed. *Miles Davis and American Culture* [Missouri Historical Society Press: 2001], 122), Troupe states that this occurred in 1957. Searching for “Les Ballets Africains” (the name of the group Miles saw) in ProQuest’s database of newspapers between 1957 and 1959, it doesn’t appear as though the group performed in the U.S. until early 1959. As far as its New York City performances were concerned, ads from the *New York Times* show that the group was to perform at the Martin Beck Theatre from February 16 – 28 (February 1, 1959, p. X3) as well as the Lunt-Fontanne from March 14 – 28 (March 15, 1959, p. X2). A blurb in the *New York Amsterdam News* (Jesse H. Walker, “Theatricals,” March 21, 1959, p. 14), however, mentions that the group “toured Harlem on Monday” (presumably the 16th) during which time Davis was completing a week’s engagement at Harlem’s Apollo Theater. Considering the fact that the group’s other U.S. tour stops were in cities at which times Davis would not have been there, I feel it is most likely that Davis remembered seeing one of the New York shows in 1959, perhaps the Harlem show in particular, and that this would have ended up influencing his decision to continue with modal playing than begin experimenting with it on “Milestones.”
behalf of black musicians to claim ownership or managerial control over their art. The success of their efforts eventually soon resulted in the founding of an organization called the Jazz Artists Guild which, in its short life-span, facilitated the recording of an album, *Newport Rebels*, on the Candid label.\(^7\) In August and September of 1960, Max Roach would also record an album on Candid entitled *We Insist! Freedom Now Suite* (which featured an AP photograph of a sit-in on the cover), the first of its kind explicitly linking the sound of modern jazz with the urgent mood of both the American civil rights and African decolonization movements. Among the handful of “Newport Rebels” was even Ornette Coleman whose album *Free Jazz*, recorded in December 1960, helped usher in a new musical genre of the same name centered around individual musicians’ freedom from traditional aesthetic constraints.

If June 17, 1960 was indeed the actual date of the green trumpet’s debut, rather than parallel an important shift in artistic direction for Davis, it seemed to coincide with a period of artistic stasis and indecision marked first by the loss of long-time Davis sideman, saxophonist John Coltrane, and Davis’ lack of patience with subsequent saxophonists in his band, as well as his several-year long resistance to the burgeoning free jazz movement. As it turns out, Davis didn’t care for that kind of music (at least not right away) or Ornette Coleman’s playing in particular. While he had been a friend of Mingus and Roach for many years, he was not featured on *Freedom Now Suite* nor was he anywhere near Rhode Island when the alternative Newport Festival took place. However, the important point is that Davis had proven willing to associate his name,

\(^7\) Todd S. Jenkins, *I Know What I Know: The Music of Charles Mingus* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006), 81. Jenkins notes that the Guild “didn’t last more than a year because of dissent and lack of direction,” but stated that its role in coordinating the *Newport Rebels* recording was “one of its better accomplishments.”
image, and music with broader racial issues and in context of the period’s racial climate, it doesn’t seem too far-fetched to suggest that the green trumpet, especially thought of as a literal greenhorn, or the start of something new, could have been part of this as well.

But what if it wasn’t, at least not the entire time? What if, by looking at the color pattern as a whole, this analysis has lost sight of Davis’ decisions to employ individual colors, or simply colors in general, for other effects? We know that the use of red, black, and green in direct association with his name and music in the early 1970s paralleled that of Davis’ first and only known period to feature all three colored horns at once. It was indeed the same period in which he had requested the aforementioned horn featuring the colors red, green, and brown, suggesting that he had become quite eager to align himself with the tri-colors’ own racial identity. But what took so long for Davis to make this obvious? In my next and final section, I’d like to argue that while Davis’ use of the green trumpet in the late 1960s and early 1970s may have been consciously employed as part of this color sequence, such a specific view doesn’t appear to adequately address the issue of why he chose the color green in the first place.

*The “Green” Miles*

In 1958 and 1961, both shortly before and soon after Davis began performing with green trumpets, he gave statements to the press in which he equated the color green not as part of a specific, racialized pattern but instead with a state of racelessness or one of generalized “otherness.” In the first one, he referred to calling someone “a green m.f.” as a result of their race being impossible to discern and in the second one, he mentioned an anonymous club owner who tended to be more interested in making money than discriminating amongst his clientele; such a man, Davis said, is “gonna fill his joint up
even if he has to find 100 green girls to put in there.”\textsuperscript{71} Expanding the analytical scope beyond Davis and even the jazz community, it turns out that he was not the first to attach such meanings to the color.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the earliest usage of the phrase “little green men” to describe “otherness” was in 1906 with Rudyard Kipling’s \textit{Puck of Pook’s Hill}, but such usage of the phrase appears to have become most prominent around the middle of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century when matters of race, science, and ideology shared headlines in very new and often violent ways; this was indeed a time when Americans began to wrestle with what it meant to be citizens in an increasingly globalized postwar society. Whether it came in the form of race riots that played an important role in President Truman’s decision to desegregate the Armed Forces, our use of atomic energy and the subsequent space race during the Cold War which signaled new scientific capabilities to both destroy and discover new forms of life, or the perceived threat of a Communist takeover of America in the 1950s that resulted in the loss of countless jobs and heightened levels of public surveillance, these were highly-charged times. In such a context, it should perhaps come as no surprise that a color like green, with no specific association to any particular group of people, would often be adopted as a symbol of Americans’ collective anxiety and used in a wide variety of ways.

In the world of American popular culture, this was poignantly done in the 1948 anti-war movie, \textit{The Boy With Green Hair}. In it, the hair of a young war orphan named Peter mysteriously turns green over night prompting a barrage of criticism from the local

community. Though the criticism initiates a phase of confusion and self-loathing for Peter, he ultimately decides to transform the attention he receives into a platform from which he can preach a gospel of peace and love. What makes this movie so important in the context of my dissertation, is not only the variety of ways in which green was employed as a symbolic device – framed at different times as virtually everything from an alien force worthy of eradication to peace, rebirth, and everything in between – but its soundtrack as well. Chosen for the movie’s theme was a song entitled “Nature Boy,” which had been written in 1947 by Eden Ahbez, made famous the following year by Nat King Cole, and recorded by none other than Miles Davis in 1955.

To be sure, The Boy With Green Hair did not prove to be an incredibly popular film and there is no evidence that Davis actually saw it. So, it remains entirely possible that Davis’ decision to record “Nature Boy” was wholly unrelated to its connection with the movie and the color green; afterall, Cole’s recording of the song shot to number one on the Billboard charts in 1948 and remained there for eight weeks, suggesting Davis more likely associated the song with popularity, Cole, and/or the eccentric lifestyle of the song’s composer.72 But, what we can say with a degree of certainty is that because the song was conceived and made popular as a vocal piece, Davis was likely familiar with its lyrics and may even have sympathized with the song’s main subject, a “very strange enchanted boy” who traveled long distances reminding those he met “to love and be loved in return,” a plight, as it turns out, quite similar to Peter’s. In this context, by the time Davis chose green as his first colored trumpet, he could have done so confident not only that it was a color capable of catching the public’s attention but that that attention, in

turn, could facilitate the spreading of his music and/or image, whether in loving, non-violent terms or otherwise.

Although in a slightly different sense, Davis confirmed a close connection between the color of his green trumpets and attraction to his music. During a 1970 interview with the New York Times, Davis provided his only known quote regarding why he played with green trumpets:

I don’t want to play a gold horn... You look at a brass horn and all you see is the horn. When you play a green horn, it sort of disappears and all you are aware of is the music.\(^7^3\)

Green trumpet aside, Davis had made similar statements many years earlier suggesting that his supposed disrespectful behavior towards live audiences was done, not to draw attention to himself (as it most certainly had), but to instead emphasize the seriousness of his music by not “Tomming” or somehow pandering to audiences’ historical expectations of black performers, a tendency to which his most important predecessors on the jazz trumpet, Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie, he felt had ultimately succumbed to. However, if in Davis’ mind such things as flashing a broad smile and acknowledging applause were among the main culprits in distracting audiences from the seriousness of jazz and the black image in the 1950s, in the years leading up to the 1970s, Davis was confronting a much bigger issue: jazz’s decreasing appeal to popular audiences.

Therefore, in the context of Davis’ quote, it would seem as though the green trumpet had been invented as a device to help do what turning his back on audiences no longer could,

\(^7^3\) Reif, “Miles Davis’s Home Is a Study in Curves,” 26.
at least on their own. Knowing that both Davis and American culture generally
considered green to be a highly visible symbol of “otherness,” it seemed as though he had
found yet another unique way to balance the forces of visibility and invisibility in such a
way as to maintain a high level of attention on both himself and his music at the very
same time.

Conclusion: Can we “see” for Miles?

If we broadly define the terms “visible” and “invisible” to mean a felt and unfelt
“presence,” a sense that he was both everywhere and nowhere at the same time, in
addition to their visual components, we can begin to see how this tension manifested
itself in numerous ways during Davis’ life and career. In both physical and material
terms, Davis was highly visible through the dissemination of his image on numerous
album covers, in magazines, newspapers, television appearances, and at live concerts. He
became known for his taste in expensive cars, lavish brownstone in Manhattan’s Upper
West Side, dating beautiful women, and wearing modern, sometimes flashy clothing
onstage. Yet, such specific “hypervisibility,” was just as often countered by a relatively
small physique, his oft-noted tendencies to turn his back on concert audiences, walk
offstage when not playing, not announce the names of songs, or bend over forward
while playing (in all cases not looking at the audience), take several years off from
performing at a time (or threaten to), and (again, mainly during the latter half of his
career) wearing larger than life sunglasses. In terms of aurality, Davis’ fame sustained
throughout a long, successful career as a performer helped facilitate the continued
presence of his music on the American and, indeed, the global landscape. Yet, his
immense creativity, which manifested itself in seemingly endless experimentations with
different band personnel and sounds, made it increasingly difficult for his collective audience to predict what kind of music he was going to play next. Layered within that constant change in collective sound, of course, was Davis’ individual voice but it was one that became known as much for its lyrical use of space as it did for its cracked notes, understated technicality, and filtration (whether through the traditional stem-less harmon mute or his innovative use of the wa-wa pedal).

Taken together, these physical, material, and aural characteristics helped frame Davis as someone who enjoyed basking in the limelight of his celebrity as much as he did protecting himself from it. They were characteristics that, at the same time, managed to be both mechanisms for self-assertion and self-defense. Recognizing how each mode of visibility and invisibility often operated in tandem during Davis’ life, we can begin to see them less as binary opposites and more as tools with which he worked to maintain a sense of self-determination, to negotiate the benefits and pitfalls of celebrity life as much on his own terms as possible. I would even argue that it was his ability to so deftly incorporate the two realms into his own life that not only allowed Davis to carve out a portion of individual expressive space amidst a seemingly omnipresent gaze from the outside world but significantly contributed to the opinions of those who looked on (and still look on) that Davis, colored trumpets and all, was mysteriousness personified, that he may well have given birth to the “cool.”

74 I say this, of course, in reference to his acclaimed album Birth of the Cool (recorded in 1949 but wasn’t released until the mid-1950s and is sometimes credited as having set the foundation for the “cool jazz” genre) and a general persistence to connect his name to the “cool” concept over time, one that has most recently manifested itself in a DVD, Miles Davis: Cool Jazz Sound (2004), 2006’s compilation album Cool and Collected: The Very Best of Miles Davis (whose cover consists of an image of large black sunglasses) and rock band Gaslight Anthem’s 2008 song entitled “Miles Davis and the Cool.” In the realm of popular film, perhaps the most well known (not to mention comical) contemporary manifestation of this connection came in 1995’s Billy Madison where main character Billy Madison (played by Adam Sandler) pretends to have wet himself and claim it was the “coolest” thing to do in order to protect the feelings of a younger boy
Davis' colored trumpets appear to have performed a set of complex and, at times, contradictory functions. Despite Davis' innumerable musical innovations and attempts to redefine himself in the public eye, as unique instruments they can be seen, paradoxically, as simply perpetuating an established tradition of sorts within the jazz community. Musically, it appears, they were intended to not only provide Davis with the specific kind of sound that he wanted but to help maintain the audiences' attention on his music. However, such usages, as I also hope to have shown, existed alongside Davis’ intent to express broader notions regarding his racial identity and the possibility that the horns functioned to direct attention towards himself as well, acting as a metaphorical weapon in his battles for continued cultural relevancy.

With such a battle in mind, it is worth considering Davis' colored horns in the context of individualism which, particularly in terms of one’s sound, has often been thought of as a hallmark of jazz and jazz culture. Playing with a unique sound is thought to perfectly complement the often improvisatory nature of jazz as a mode of self-expression, defining jazz musicians as individual artists, and setting the music apart from other forms, such as Western classical music, that privilege the performance of compositions. Davis’ use of colored trumpets – as well as the remaining subjects of this dissertation’s chapters – exist as evidence that jazz musicians occasionally strove to underscore the importance of individual sound by using material objects to express themselves more fully, whether as racialized subjects or otherwise. Such actions serve as

who had actually done so. After many of the boy’s fellow elementary school students are persuaded by Madison to do the same, the scene cuts to an elderly woman who announces “If peeing your pants is cool, consider me Miles Davis.”

75 See Paul Rinzler, *The Contradictions of Jazz* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008) for a good example of how this argument is made. Rinzler quotes both jazz scholars and musicians on the importance of having a unique sound, ultimately referring to it as “the central ambition for a jazz musician.” Rinzler, quoting Andy Hamilton, also argued that the use of unique performance techniques further distinguished jazz from classical music on account of jazz’s comparative lack of “technical orthodoxy.”
reminders that the musicians themselves defined their identities in a multitude of ways that transcended their roles as artists and ultimately challenge their audiences to more broadly define the ways in which these musicians perform.

Davis' few and cryptic statements regarding why he played with colored trumpets makes it difficult to discern their intended function from his point of view. Given the fact that Davis transformed the instrument's practicality into a multi-layered expressive medium, there appears no single answer for why he played with them. Often dubbed the "prince of darkness," Davis often seemed intent on making sure the rest of the world was as much in the dark as they perceived him to be when it came to understanding who he really was. With this look at Davis' many colored trumpets and what they can teach us about the man behind the horn, perhaps the darkness attributed to him wasn't so dark after all. Perhaps, with a closer look, it contained many shades of blue, green, black, and red.
CHAPTER TWO

Miles Runs the Zoot Suit Down: “Coolness,” Jazz, Race, and the Politics of High Fashion during the Civil Rights Movement

Introduction

When it comes to assessing the nature of Miles Davis’ direct relationship with the civil rights movement, little stands out compared to his contemporaries in the world of jazz. Like the majority of professional jazzmen, Davis never wrote music in direct response to the movement, became a member of one of its organizations, or joined activists on its frontlines. As perhaps the world’s most successful and popular combo leader between the late 1950s and mid 1960s, it is quite possible that he was able to afford performing in benefit concerts for civil rights organizations more often than the majority of his contemporaries considering the fact that such gigs did not often pay. But, the four benefits he was known to have performed between 1959 and 1965 – arguably the busiest years for civil rights benefits – amounted to less than half of what individual groups led by drummer Max Roach, pianist Dave Brubeck, and fellow trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie did in the same period. Clearly, there were plenty of other jazzmen who felt more compelled than Davis to engage directly with the movement and in more ways than one.

This is, of course, not to say that Davis was not concerned with matters regarding racism or racial prejudice; if nothing else, having been a victim of a racially-motivated

---

76 Locating specific information on such concerts is not always easy. The numbers of benefit concerts referenced for each musician noted between 1959 and 1965 reflect only the ones they definitely played and does not reflect the much larger number of concerts they were either asked to play and turned down, were just considered for as performers by the organization, or scheduled to perform that only might have taken place. In the cases of Roach and Brubeck, if all of those concerts were taken into account, they would be around 20 each or approximately four times the number of Davis’ benefit performances.
beating at the hands of two white police officers in 1959 helped ensure he’d be outspoken on the subject for many years to come. But, to me, it’s interesting to note that Davis’ comparative lack of engagement with the civil rights movement between the late 1950s and mid 1960s did not stop him from becoming a symbol of racial pride for many young African Americans during that same period, an important fact that reminds us to consider the relationship between jazz and race as multifaceted, one that encompasses both matters of direct engagement and more abstract forms of symbolism.

In this chapter, I will be exploring one of those forms by focusing on the role of dress suits in connecting the worlds of jazz and the civil rights movement between the late 1950s and mid 1960s. By wearing suits during that period, I argue, black male jazz musicians and civil rights activists not only continued a long tradition of dressing up in order to affirm a sense of self-worth and counter common assumptions about the black body, but uniquely politicized the attitude of coolness that pervaded postwar America as well. To be sure, members of both groups wore suits to advance unique agendas, but it was an aesthetic of coolness that ultimately bonded them and, thus, allows us to understand them as having participated together in a broader set of racialized struggles.

**Racial Dimensions of “Coolness”**

According to Robert Farris Thompson, the linguistic and historical roots of “coolness” can be traced back to Africa where it occupied a sacred cultural realm capable of signifying both “composure in the individual context [and] social stability in the context of the group.” Authors Dick Pountain and David Robins, however, note that in postwar America, “coolness” had transformed into a secularized form of personal

---

expression and mass phenomenon. In its American form, the authors argue, coolness is
best defined as “an attitude,” one that can only be imposed on objects by others and is
rebellious in nature, “an expression of a belief that the mainstream mores of [one’s]
society have no legitimacy and [do] not apply to [them].”78 For many whites in the 1950s
and 60s, a stronger economy and increased opportunities for leisure placed a premium on
conformity while providing a model against which many attempted to define themselves.
Coolness-as-rebelliousness became synonymous with challenges to the mores of
lawfulness and monogamy and tended to define itself in exclusion from the mainstream
by fetishizing the cultures of marginalized peoples such as African Americans and the
working class.

Listening to jazz while smoking a pipe or wearing black leather jackets and blue
jeans at midcentury had come to symbolize more than just one’s level of sophistication,
self-indulgence, or disregard for obeying the rules, they symbolized the extent to which
white Americans had the privilege of choosing whether or not and on what terms their
identities could shape and be shaped by mainstream society. For actual marginalized
people, such as African Americans, this type of choice simply was not an option. Yet, in
donning suits during the 1950s and 1960s, black jazz musicians and civil rights activists
expressed a rebel-laden coolness all their own. In doing so, they were taking part in a
much longer history of African Americans dressing up as a form of resistance, acts that,
while rebellious in their own right, reflected more of a general desire for social inclusion
than exclusion even as they accommodated individual taste.

For many slaves in the United States, attending church service on Sundays was the only opportunity to escape their work clothes and define themselves outside of the realm of hard labor and servitude. Many middle class African Americans around the turn-of-the-century placed an emphasis on the well-dressed black body as both a catalyst for racial uplift and evidence of racial equality, signifying on white cultures’ overreliance on the visual to support claims of superiority. African Americans who served honorably during both World War I and II returned home only to find that the uniforms they wore did not grant them access to equal rights. Those on the home front, and primarily youth, during the 1940s aligned themselves with Latinos in donning “zoot suits” as a means for attracting attention and assigning dignity to otherwise marginalized bodies. Amidst a culture of wartime sacrifice, the zoot suits – with their characteristic wide shoulders, ballooning pants, extreme tapers, and wide-brimmed hats – were seen by some outsiders as symbols of unpatriotic excess and those who wore them occasionally became targets of violence.79

**Jazz, Race, and Fashion**

As material items, zoot suits were an integral part of black working class youth culture, a signifier of “hipsterdom” that included big band swing, dance, drugs, and jive. Though they tended to be worn more often by patrons of jazz clubs – in part because of how the suits’ construction lent itself well to dancing – zoot suits were occasionally worn by jazz bandleaders as well, including, most famously, Cab Calloway. However, their

---

emergence within jazz circles during the late 1930s and early 1940s hardly marked the first intersection of jazz, race, and sartorial flare.

In his 2007 book, *Subversive Sounds: Race and the Birth of Jazz in New Orleans*, Charles Hersch argues that, in spite of segregation, the “inherent indeterminacy” of race that was particularly prevalent in turn-of-the-century New Orleans helped give birth to jazz by providing African Americans an opening in which their culture could play a role in defining that of the nation. As he notes, such indeterminacy was reflected by liminal spaces or “heterotopias” such as night clubs in which marginalized members of the black lower classes celebrated by dressing sharply and partying late into the night, refusing to be defined by the 8-hour workday. On the other end of the bandstand, some black jazz musicians were also taking pains to dress well, though less often it seems in resistance to their lives as laborers but rather in celebration of it. Recalling the life of New Orleans pianist Jelly Roll Morton, Howard Reich and William Gaines point out that being a skilled keyboardist in New Orleans during the early 20th century could grant you access to a world of “expensive dope...wealthy, exotic independent women,” the respect of your peers, and “bundles of sweet cash,” a world in which one’s access was symbolized by wearing the “finest clothes.”

Yet, as jazz traveled north from New Orleans along with the Great Migration of the 1910s and 20s, some black musicians soon realized that what might have been fashionable in the Crescent City was hardly the case in the Windy City. Fellow New

---

80 Charles Hersch, *Subversive Sounds: Race and the Birth of Jazz in New Orleans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 34-41. Hersch goes on to point out that such a refusal to be defined by time was, in turn, complemented musically by syncopation which emphasized the off-beats. Altogether, it was a culture that embraced a more fluid sense of time. Hersch’s use of the word “heterotopia” is borrowed from French philosopher Michel Foucault.

Orleans native and jazz trombonist Preston Jackson, remembered how trumpeter Louis Armstrong appeared when he first arrived in Chicago in 1922: "I'll never forget the day he came into town...He wore a brown box back coat, straw hat and tan shoes." As evidenced by the memory of pianist Lil Hardin, Armstrong's future wife, Louis' sense of fashion at that moment was in desperate need of an update: "After I started going out with Louie, I said, 'No, no. You don't look right. You got to change your clothes'....Everything he had on was second-hand." Hardin soon bought him a new overcoat and measured him for a hat but when Louis tried the hat on, he complained that it was too big because, according to Hardin, "in New Orleans they was used to wearing the hats sittin' right on top of the head." Though the two got in a "big argument" about the hat, Armstrong eventually took Hardin's fashion advice (though only after he picked out a differently colored hat) much to the approval of his musical peers.

Hardin's story recalls the racial politics of identity that were played out on the bodies of many black migrants from the South who settled in the urban North. As numerous scholars have shown, by the 1910s and 1920s, many southern blacks had come to associate movement with freedom and were eager to leave behind aspects of life that reminded them of their lower racial and class statuses. Yet, southern blacks arriving in Northern cities often encountered discrimination from "old settlers," or Chicago natives, who conformed to Victorian notions of respectability and were anxious about associating with newcomers who fit the stereotype of southern bumpkin. Hardin wasn't exactly an

---

82 "Preston Jackson Recalls First Gig – And Satchmo’s Box Coat and Tan Shoes," Down Beat, November 1, 1942, 23.
83 Transcribed from Lil Armstrong, "Satchmo and Me," Riverside RLP 12-120.
“old settler” – she had moved to Chicago from Memphis in 1917 – but her criticism of Armstrong’s New Orleans-ian sense of style, the “big argument” that ensued, and Armstrong’s choosing of a differently colored hat suggest how complicated the identity negotiation process could be; so-called southern bumpkins weren’t always eager to shed every aspect of their identity let alone give in completely to the criticisms of others. Moreover, the fact that she insisted his clothes be new indicates how intertwined notions of modernity and consumption were for many African Americans; one’s notion of freedom, it seems, had as much to do with migrating away from the South as it did being an active, equal participant in the emerging commercial marketplace. Like the black lower classes of New Orleans, black migrants from the South, including jazz musicians, were using fine clothes to express their identities as modern consumers as opposed to just laborers.85

Publicity photographs of both black and white jazz bands from the 1910s and 1920s often show musicians in matching suits or tuxedos emphasizing uniformity. However, many of those same photographs also depict the individual musicians in a variety of different poses tempering the sense of uniformity with that of individual expressive agency, one that was also reflected in the improvisatory nature of the music itself. Yet, for all of the freedoms associated with jazz, performing it was often still understood as a form of labor. In addition to his “brown box-back coat, straw hat, and tan shoes,” Louis Armstrong arrived in Chicago with a “ragged” threadbare tuxedo that

---

85 Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 52-54. As Cohen notes, the most potent manifestation of this practice erupted in Chicago during the late 1920s in the form of the “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaigns that demanded the hiring of black workers by white store owners if they wanted to do business with the black community.
he called “my old Roast Beef.” Photographs of him working on riverboats prior to his arrival depict him and his band in tuxedoes as well suggesting that, at least for jazz bands, the tuxedo had become more a signifier of labor than a symbol of individual wealth. Armstrong’s nickname for his tuxedo aptly reflects the association between jazz musicians and male members of the servant class, waiters or butlers especially, that survived the northern migration even if his idea of how a hat was supposed to fit did not. For black male jazz musicians in particular, such an association was not a far cry from what African American servants had been expected to wear, and is a reminder of both jazz’s unstable position as a respectable art form in the 1910s and 1920s as well as the jazz musician’s assumed role as an entertainer.

Even with the onset of the Swing Era in the 1930s and 40s, which established swing as the nation’s popular music, much of these same associations were held over as whites continued to exercise control over the industry. Advertisements for uniform companies like Angelica and Hoover – both of whom had established themselves as providers for the service sector long before they attempted to market themselves to the jazz community – as well as tailors such as J.B. Simpson sprang up to meet the demand from the explosion of big bands, and littered the pages of *Down Beat* in the late 1930s and early 1940s (arguably during the peak of swing’s popularity). Often depicting illustrated white male models (or just no one at all), these ads continued to associate the uniform of jazz with that of the waiter through their interchangeable usage of the terms “swing,” “orchestra,” and “mess jackets.” However, with a noticeable emphasis on such descriptors as “smart” and their tendency to depict images of men in control of

---

themselves and others (part of how they marketed their products to bandleaders), the ads evoked a sense of sophistication to jazz suggesting it was not only dominated by whites but civilized by them as well.\textsuperscript{87}

On the bandstand, big band uniforms were often seen alongside matching music stands that, together, emphasized a sense of uniformity and cohesion among the band. Unlike the aforementioned publicity photographs of early jazz bands, photographs of big bands tended to emphasize similarity among the band members in both clothes and pose. However, such uniformity was paralleled by the sound of big bands which often featured taut horn lines in unison and improvisations from a select few players. With such little room for individualized expression, the experience of playing in big bands felt, to some, like an "assembly line" or "just like the army."\textsuperscript{88} According to trumpeter Billy May, who played with the Glen Miller band, musicians had to have uniforms, socks, neckties, and handkerchiefs "just right or you'd be fined."\textsuperscript{89} Much about big bands had, indeed, become modeled after what Joel Dinerstein referred to as "the nation's driving engine and ideological obsession: the machine."\textsuperscript{90}

For all of their machine-like qualities, big bands were not without a wealth of expressive options when it came to deciding on which kinds of uniforms to buy; some

\textsuperscript{87} The notion that whites' "job" was to civilize jazz had existed for years by the start of the Swing Era. As the popularity of jazz grew alongside, and in part because of, new technologies that spread it farther and faster than ever before, many whites felt that its "primitive" sounds would inspire lewd behavior including interracial sex. Thus, it became the realm of the supposedly more sophisticated and civilized white musicians to counter the "hot" sounds of African American jazz with "sweet" sounds of white jazz. Exemplifying this approach in both name and music was bandleader Paul Whiteman whose self-proclaimed goals were to "remove the stigma of barbaric strains and jungle cacophony" and "make a lady of jazz."

\textsuperscript{88} Daniel Belgrad, The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 186. The assembly line was quoted from saxophonist Sonny Criss while the "army" quote came from Tony Frusella, a trumpeter with Charlie Barnet's band.

\textsuperscript{89} Lewis Erenberg, Swingin' the Dream: Big Band Jazz and the Rebirth of American Culture (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 187.

\textsuperscript{90} Joel Dinerstein, Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology, and African American Culture between the World Wars (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 200.
bands, such as Jimmie Lunceford’s, were known to have several sets of uniforms. But, because a sense of cohesion was an important visual effect of the uniforms, the kinds of uniforms that bands wore were thought to have important effects on the audiences. In the June 1939 issue of *Down Beat*, Cy Leeds published “Clothing Tips – For Bands,” the magazine’s first and only known article exclusively on big band fashion during the Swing Era. Flanked by ads for four different uniform companies (three of whom had been advertising in *Down Beat* for two years), Leeds’ article stressed the importance of wearing the “proper clothes for certain jobs” and argued that the “appearance of the ork” was “one of the most important aspects in showmanship” and “almost as important as the music itself.” According to Leeds, a band’s dress had “a psychological effect” that was capable of winning over a “tough audience” if properly chosen for the occasion. Within six years, however, the “golden age” of big band uniforms would pass; bandleaders themselves would constitute a “tough audience” for uniform companies as shifting musical tastes and wartime rationing threatened the industry’s once thriving share in the music business. By 1945, anyone scouring the pages of *Down Beat* interested in purchasing band uniforms was forced to rely primarily on Al Wallace’s classified ads for “slightly used” orchestra coats and other assorted apparel.

Two years earlier, however, a noticeable change in the magazine reflected the country’s shifting musical tastes as Harold Fox began advertising his Chicago-based tailoring company, Fox Brothers. Though they occasionally marketed themselves as a

---

91 Eddy Dtermeyer, *Rhythm is Our Business: Jimmie Lunceford and the Harlem Express* (University of Michigan, 2006), 151. Dtermeyer quotes from two veterans of the Lunceford band, trumpeter Gerald Wilson who claimed they had seven uniforms, and alto saxophonist Benny Waters (who joined the band after Wilson left) who claimed they had eleven.


93 Wallace’s classified ads had begun in August of 1943, the same month *Down Beat* began its Classified section, and appeared regularly through 1948. In addition to orchestra coats, Wallace advertised tuxedo suits, as well as the occasional sash, belt-back, “cellophane hula,” and “striptease, rumba costume.”
company that made big band uniforms, Fox Brothers created ads that often stressed the individuality of their suits, sartorially reflecting the gradual shift from big band swing to the more small ensemble- and improvisational-based genre of bebop. Emphasizing the company's "knowledge of musicians' tastes," Fox Brothers ads were also the first of their kind in the magazine to regularly feature endorsements from, and photographs of, actual jazz musicians, including many African Americans. Such exposure signaled a sharp turn away from the "white-washed" ads of earlier uniform companies and marked the jazz clothing industry as one that would, at least for a while, be more beholden to black desires and styles.

In 1948, during the peak of bebop's popularity, Fox Brothers marketed themselves as "progressive tailors" whose styles befit "progressive jazz." By this time, the zoot suit had gone out of style. The fact that bebop was not conducive to dancing and had rejected the notion of jazz-as-entertainment helped frame the suits as antiquated signifiers, one set of negative associations that was also supported by the U.S. government's banning them on account of fabric rationing (during World War II) and the violent outbreak of "zoot suit riots" in 1943. Though he claimed to have invented them, Harold Fox had turned his back on the zoot by the spring of 1948, being careful to

---

94 Fox Brothers ads first appeared in the June 15, 1943 issue of *Down Beat*. While the first ad featured an endorsement from white bandleader Stan Kenton, subsequent ads would feature such African American bandleaders as Fletcher Henderson, King Kolax, Count Basie, Louis Armstrong, Lionel Hampton, Nat Towles, and Jay McShann. The balance struck between white and black musician endorsements in these ads seemed to reflect Fox's personal beliefs in racial equality that were exemplified in the interracial make-up of his own big band which he led under the alias Jimmy Dale. In addition to marketing to black customers, Fox Brothers ads from this period in *Down Beat* were also the first of their kind to regularly market to women. Though women were rarely featured in the photographs that often accompanied the company's ads, it was commonly noted at the bottom of each one that Fox Brothers "specialize[d] in ladies' mannish suits or slacks." An ad featuring an endorsement from female singers June Christy and Sarah Vaughan didn't appear in the magazine until the April 7, 1948 issue and even then was placed alongside the endorsements of seven men.
advertise a new Stan Kenton model suit as “sharp but not zoot.” It had become clear that the association between “progressive jazz” and “progressive tailoring,” in the eyes of Fox Brothers, meant capitalizing on the popularity of bebop and its black stars. Using slang terms and rhymes that had become common among black jazz musicians, Fox Brothers ads addressed their customers as “cats” and “bruz,” suggesting they come into the store or order the latest Dizzy Gillespie “bebop cap” (berets) and Chubby Jackson “bop bow tie” (floppy, polka-dot bow ties). An ad that was pictured in Lewis MacAdams’ book, Birth of the Cool: Beat, Bebop and the American Avant-Garde, stated “Bop in here and let Fox build you a crazy box!” (suit). Making reproductions of individually endorsed clothing items available to the general public, let alone items endorsed by black jazz musicians, was a drastic change from the days of big band uniform ads when “who” the company outfitted was most often kept a secret.

Fox Brothers’ signature endorsements from black musicians helped claim a segment of the music industry for the African American community, one that had been dominated by images of whites for many years and paralleled bebop’s foundation in black musical aesthetics. Beboppers, in particular Dizzy Gillespie, had helped establish the new sartorial stylings that became associated with the music. His characteristic beret, goatee, and horn-rimmed glasses helped symbolize the new emphasis on the individual instrumentalist that went along with the downshift in modern jazz from the big bands to

---

95 See ad in Down Beat, April 7, 1948, 16.
97 J. B. Simpson, Inc., a Chicago-based tailor that had advertised in Down Beat between 1934 and 1944 was only known to have used a musician endorsement once in 1940 with Bob Crosby and his band (May 15, 1940, p. 8). Aside from that, most other uniform companies, like Angelica and Hoover, satisfied themselves with vague statements about their clientele. An ad for Angelica in the April 1937 issue of Down Beat (p. 21) was typical of this approach in stating that its uniforms had simply “won hundreds of musicians” to the company.
small ensembles and helped establish what would turn out to be a long association between jazz and bohemian culture. The emphasis placed on the individual musician's technical and improvisational abilities in bebop effectively reversed the swing era standard of collective musicianship and dictated that the audience's role would be more passive than participatory. Such a "freezing" of the audience in the wake of the swing era, helped initiate the rise of what Harold Fox called "the icicle look" which symbolized a new "cool" attitude towards the music. For the first time in jazz's history, the newest music was not meant to be danced to but appreciated on its own. In addition to such a gulf being forged between musician and audience, high cabaret taxes that forced establishment owners to pay as much as 30 percent of their ticket sales to the Federal Government in order to allow dancing, played a major role in the closing of dance halls across the country during the 1940s.

Epitomized by Gillespie's violent reaction to Cab Calloway's resistance to the new music in 1941, beboppers were among the first to reject the zoot suit and its attendant cultural trappings. However, Gillespie would go on to form his own big band

98 Carolyn Eastwood, *Near West Side Stories: Struggles for Community in Chicago's Maxwell Street Neighborhood* (Chicago: Lake Claremont Press, 2002), 98. Eastwood's book is the most comprehensive look at Fox's life and career, dealing with both over the course of two chapters and supplementing much of the anecdotal evidence discussed in most jazz histories.

99 Scott Yanow, *Jazz on Record: The First Sixty Years* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 287. In early 1947, a cover story in the *New York Amsterdam News* reported that business in Harlem's night clubs was "in a nosedive" as a result of a 20 per cent cabaret tax. The reporting, which credited research conducted by the American Guild of Variety Artists, stated that there was only "one large Harlem club" left open – Small's Paradise – and predicted more clubs would soon close if the Federal Government failed to reduce the tax. See "Harlem Nite Clubs Dying; Only 1 Left," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 25, 1947, 1.

100 Donald L. Maggin, *Dizzy: The Life and Times of John Birks Gillespie* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 126-128. Gillespie had been a member of Calloway's band and, to the bandleader's chagrin, had used it to experiment with musical ideas that would become associated with bebop. After a spitball was thrown from the bandstand and in Calloway's direction at a gig in September 1941, Calloway immediately blamed Gillespie. This led to a heated exchange whereby Calloway slapped Gillespie in the face and Gillespie stabbed Calloway in the buttocks with a knife, staining his "elegant white suit." Needless to say, Gillespie was fired on the spot.
several years later and maintained a sense of showmanship – including comedians, dancers, and vocalists – with his performances into the 1950s. Coupled with the fact that “bebop caps,” fake beards, and “bop” glasses had eventually become fashionable, associating an anti-assimilationist art form with the more mainstream world of mass commodities, the radical nature of bebop’s musical and cultural revolution, from an audience’s point of view, seemed a mere parody of itself within a decade of its emergence.101 Though beboppers had helped establish a sense of “coolness” at the heart of the jazz aesthetic, it would take someone like Miles Davis to embody it.

Miles Runs the Zoot Suit Down

Soon after Miles Davis emerged on the jazz scene in the mid-1940s, it became clear that while he had been nurtured by bebop players including Gillespie and saxophonist Charlie Parker, his career would take a strikingly different path. Compared to their high-flying technical virtuosity, Davis’ style seemed much more reticent. As he developed his sound over the next decade – incorporating space in his solos while staying primarily in the middle register with his famous muted, vibratoless tone – Davis helped initiate what cultural historian Krin Gabbard has called a “post-phallic” style of playing, a general rejection of simply playing loud, high, and fast, and one that became a central component of post-bop jazz.102 At the forefront of such new styles as “cool” and “hard bop,” armed with a recording contract with Columbia records from 1956 and having organized one of the most popular and important small ensembles in jazz history, Davis...

101 On the fake beards and glasses as commodities, see Alyn Shipton, Jazz Makers: Vanguards of Sound (New York: Oxford, 2002), 133. Though Shipton doesn’t refer to them as “bop” glasses, there were advertisements for them in Down Beat as such well into the 1950s.
had become the face of modern jazz during the latter half of the 1950s. His response to bebop helped usher in a new wave of modernism in jazz and placed him at the center of overlapping discourses that increasingly associated the music with both racial and national identity, as well as intellectualism and sophistication.

By the mid-1950s, the sense of sophistication and intellectualism that had become associated with jazz was paralleled by a wave of Ivy League fashions. The epicenter of the new fad was the Andover Shop in Cambridge, Massachusetts and, according to its owner, Charlie Davidson, Miles Davis’ embracing of the style – his stocking up on tweed and madras coats, chinos, button-down shirts, striped ties, and weejun loafers – gave jazz’s new “cool” sounds a sartorial parallel that was followed by both white and black players including Chet Baker, Dave Brubeck, Roy Haynes, and the Modern Jazz Quartet. Given the fact that Davis had come from an upper-middle class family that prided itself on professionalism, it’s not surprising that he would embrace a fashion trend that bespoke a sense of privilege and accomplishment. Still, it wasn’t without a tinge of irony that an African American had done this in the 1950s.

Despite the G.I. Bill’s efforts at democratizing access to higher education for soldiers who returned home from World War II, segregation policies on many college campuses dictated that African American veterans would not benefit as equally as their white counterparts let alone attend Ivy League schools. Though the bill has been credited with “pav[ing] the way for an assault on discrimination and legalized racial segregation,” authors Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin acknowledge that “the gap in education attainment (and income) between blacks and whites grew wider in the late ‘40s

---
and '50s.' As such, Ivy League fashions were not only defined by white standards but by the concepts of ostentation, irreverence, and impracticality driven by a sense of class and racial privilege. Unsightly madras coats and loafers without socks, for instance, represented a celebration of one's privileged status along with disdain towards more conservative fashion standards and were likely perceived as "cool" because of their rebellious qualities.

Not everyone agreed on the "coolness" of Davis' Ivy League wardrobe, including George Frazier, a staff writer for *Esquire*, who accused him instead of showing off. For Davis biographer, John Szwed, however, the acts of showing off and being cool, at least with respect to Miles Davis, are not to be thought of as mutually exclusive. Szwed notes that Davis' "coolness," with respect to his Ivy League clothes, had a lot to do with their uniqueness and how he incorporated them into his performance practices:

...as always with Miles, there was something extra about his clothing, something that the discerning could spot and know that he was set apart from the obvious.

For one, his coats were cut with a ¾ inch higher rise in the back so as to gracefully accommodate the slump he assumed when he played. The chest was cut close, as were the waist and back of the coat; the pockets were piped and slightly slanted; and the buttons on the sleeves buttoned and unbuttoned, allowing for freedom of movement when playing the trumpet, but also exposing their silk lining when turned back. His shirts were high-collared and skin-tight, just as his

---

trousers were slim and close, so close that some wondered aloud about whether those intentions could be sustained by his physique. But he had their attention.\textsuperscript{105}

Such an emphasis on the uniqueness of Davis’ suits and their being symbolic of his wealth and upper class status was very different from the days of Louis Armstrong and his “old Roast Beef.” Along with the transformation of jazz from entertainment to art music that was forged by bebop, came a change in attitude among black musicians regarding their roles on stage. Armstrong’s characteristic wide grin and oft-sweating brow, made all the more noticeable by his signature white handkerchief, bore witness to a time when the lines between jazz, entertainment, and publicly accommodating white stereotypes were blurry. In light of his precarious financial state upon arriving in Chicago, Armstrong’s threadbare tuxedo represented a utilitarian and racialized uniform of labor, evidence that the job of jazz, however enjoyable it may have been for some, often involved a great deal of hard work (not to mention humility).

Davis’ Ivy League suits, in contrast, were expensive and to be handled with care; humility was anything but the point. By embracing the style and uniquely adapting it to fit both his body and worldview, Davis was signifying on its supposed exclusive relationship to privileged whites. At a time when jazz was more often taught via apprenticeship than in colleges, one could interpret Davis’ embrace of Ivy League fashions as an argument for both a racial and spatial redefinition of a high-quality education: that it was just as likely to take place among black musicians on the bandstand

as for whites inside a classroom. In addition, the fact that he wanted people to notice certain aspects of his outfits exploited the fact that, unlike Armstrong’s tuxedo, Davis was freer to wear whatever he chose onstage, that the days of black jazz musicians being expected to don clothes stigmatized by their associations with the laboring class had passed. Moreover, the distinctive features of Davis’ clothes, especially those that could only be noticed under certain circumstances, symbolized Davis’ desire to have greater visual control over his body by making sure the audience only saw what he wanted them to see.

Exercising such visual control over his body with his clothes was ultimately complemented by a unique set of physical performance practices that, in their own way, also rejected the association of jazz with entertainment and labor. As early as 1957, Davis had become known for turning his back on audiences, not announcing the names of songs, walking offstage when others were playing, and not acknowledging applause. Predictably, many a club owner, concert promoter, and audience member got upset at his lack of engagement and Davis was increasingly thought of as a “dark, brooding, wandering loner” whose no-nonsense take on the world made him “difficult” to deal with and hard to understand. Such individualistic and rebellious interpretations of Davis no doubt contributed to others’ tendencies to compare him with such notable “cool” rebels

---

106 To be sure, Davis did briefly attend the prestigious Juilliard School for music in the mid-1940s, an opportunity that, at the time, was open to few black jazz musicians. Davis’ relationship to a fashion trend named after the most exclusive echelon of higher education in the United States could thus be interpreted as being one of direct association as opposed to mere signification. However, Davis’ brief enrollment at Juilliard, his negative experiences while there, and his ultimate preference for learning music from his peers suggests otherwise.

of his time as James Dean and Marlon Brando. However, the physical control Davis exercised over his body on stage can also be thought of as uniquely rebellious in the context of the civil rights movement as activists resisted whites' overt attempts to control the spaces which black bodies could inhabit.

With the rise of "free jazz" between the late 1950s and 1960s, highly individualized forms of expression appeared to be reaching a zenith within the jazz community. Though Davis would artistically resist the comparatively structure-less music until the mid-1960s, his popularity remained high as he too continued to move in the direction of more individual expressive agency and defining himself as a man of distinction. By the summer of 1960, Davis began performing with custom-made colored trumpets and while he wasn’t the first jazz musician to become known for playing a unique horn (see Chapter 1 – Gillespie, for instance, had been performing on a trumpet with an upturned bell since around 1953), the colored trumpets became a trademark of his until the end of his life in 1991. Frustratingly few sources document Davis’ use of colored trumpets, both then and now, but at least a year before the colored

---

108 On comparisons between Davis, Dean, and Brando, see David Ake, Jazz Cultures (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 99; Szwed, So What, 198; and George Goodman, “Sonny Rollins at Sixty-Eight” in Douglas Wolk and Peter Guralnick, ed. Best Music Writing 2000 (New York City: Da Capo Press, 2000) as notable examples. To be sure, this comparison was also suggested in Miles Davis’ co-authored autobiography with Quincy Troupe, Miles: The Autobiography (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), which could have fueled the fire.

109 Davis’ popularity between the late 1950s and 1960s was unmatched. With the exception of 1961-1963 (when Dizzy Gillespie had come in 1st place and Davis came in 2nd), Davis topped the “Trumpet” category in Down Beat’s International Jazz Critics Poll every year from 1958 to 1970. In the same category of the magazine’s annual Reader’s Poll, Davis came in 1st every year from 1957-1972, having come in 1st in 1955, 2nd in 1956 (to Gillespie), and 2nd in both 1973 and 1974 to Freddie Hubbard. Though his bands did well in both polls as well during the same period (often placing somewhere between 1st and 3rd place), their popularity was not as consistent as Davis’ as an instrumentalist.

110 The first known instance of a critic mentioning Davis’ colored trumpets appears to have taken place with John Tynan’s review of Davis’ performance at the Los Angeles jazz festival on June 17, 1960. Tynan’s review, “The Box Office Blues: Bowl Fest,” which appeared in the August 4, 1960 issue of Down Beat took note of Davis’ green trumpet, a color that Davis would continue to choose throughout the decade. From the early 1970s on, however, the colors and patterns on Davis’ horns tended to change more rapidly but most often including the colors black and red.
trumpets’ debut, Davis forged new expressive ground with his wardrobe as well, trading in his Ivy League tweed for more expensive Italian threads, and grabbing the attention of the press.

In anticipation of a Miles Davis performance at the Brooklyn Paramount Jazz Extravaganza in October 1959, both the New York Amsterdam News and the Chicago Defender published articles not about the music he was to play but the clothes he was to wear. “Miles Davis...will be a resplendent sight,” both newspapers claimed, adding that his “especially designed jazz suit made in Italy of special lightweight material...[and] new 6-inch wide trousers” were “expected to start a new style trend.” Less than two years later, Davis would be awarded Fashion Personality of the Month in the May 1961 issue of Gentleman’s Quarterly. The brief article that accompanied his award paid particular attention to the construction of his suit jackets, noting that it was of a type “never seen before” by the magazine’s editors and designed by Davis’ New York tailor Emsley. George Frazier even recalled an encounter with Davis after a 1965 gig in Indiana whereby the trumpeter was more interested in hearing about how his suit looked than the sound of his horn.

Such a high level of concern with his onstage appearance again emphasizes how conscious Davis was about his style of self-presentation and suggests that his suits continued to be as much a part of his performances as the music he played. As it had been with his Ivy League clothes, Davis’ new Italian suits were individually tailored

112 Gentleman’s Quarterly, May 1961, 60
allowing him to remain in control of his outward appearance while performing and focused attention on himself as a unique individual. The widespread understanding that Italian tailors had long held an international reputation for luxurious, high-quality clothes sustained Davis' preference for dressing and being seen in expensive, modern clothes that fit his deservedly high-minded sense of self.114

In light of these numerous similarities with his Ivy League clothes, Davis' Italian wardrobe contained a unique set of clues as to Davis' racial identity, clues that were woven into the very fabric of the suits themselves. To begin with, the fact that some of them were known to have been made of "lightweight material" added a literal element to Davis' desire to keep cool on stage by actually helping to regulate his body temperature, further distancing himself from the sweaty, antiquated image of Armstrong. Arguably more important, however, is the "continental" space which the fabrics represented.

Since at least the 1920s, the countries of Europe had been a popular destination for African Americans eager to escape the suffocating atmosphere of racism in the U.S. Many artists in particular, including writers Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and James Baldwin, as well as jazz musicians Sidney Bechet and Dexter Gordon sought respite on the continent (most commonly in France). There, they often found a more relaxed racial environment more accepting of them as people and their art, helping to establish Europe, at least in comparison to the United States, as a more open, racially-progressive place. Though he never moved there, Miles Davis also found this to be the case on his first trip abroad while touring France with Tadd Dameron's band in 1949. While there, Davis fell in love with a white existentialist and singer named Juliette Greco and later recalled "the freedom of being in France and being treated like a human being.

114 Valerie Steele, The Berg Companion to Fashion (New York: Berg, 2010), 431
like someone important.” All things considered, one can interpret Davis’ embracing of the “continental look” as transcending its ability to represent wealth and complementing the free expressive space that he helped transform the bandstand into being.

In any case, considering the unique cut of Davis’ tailored suits and the fact that they were meant to be noticed, one could suggest that Davis had merely “zooted” the business suit. After all, as Szwed points out, Davis’ Italian fashions were so modern, he was teased by friends back home in East St. Louis for wearing such tight clothes and having “highwater” pants; he was even mistaken for a tap dancer while being fitted for a new suit in Massachusetts. But thinking about Davis’ suits in the context of his collective turn away from audiences and towards one-of-a-kind trumpets, they become an important symbol of Davis’ desire for more individual expressive agency as a black jazz artist. Though much about Davis’ expressive practices tended to emphasize him as a unique, or exclusionary, “cool” individual, justifying comparisons between him other well known white “rebels” of his day, I also hope to have shown that it’s possible to interpret those same expressive practices as having been done with a unique, racial agenda in mind, one that ultimately argued for the equal inclusion of African Americans into the American social and cultural narrative. In the next section, I plan to take that argument one step further by not showing that, the civil rights movement which provided the most important historical backdrop to this period with regards to race, also politicized the “cool” individual while making a broader argument for the social inclusion of all

115 Davis and Troupe, Miles, 126. While on the same trip, Davis noted that drummer Kenny Clarke was as taken in by France as he was and even decided to remain there after the band went home. Deeply saddened by leaving France and Greco behind, Davis turned to heroin upon his return and nearly died years later.
116 Szwed, So What, 201
African Americans and thus provides a new context with which to consider Davis’ manifestations of “coolness.”

The Civil Rights Movement

After organizing a successful bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama between 1955 and 1956, 27-year-old Martin Luther King, Jr. emerged as the most powerful leader of the modern civil rights movement. A Southern Baptist minister by training, King had come to see the methods of nonviolent protest, practiced by Mahatma Gandhi during the first half of the 20th century, as representing a fulfillment of Christian doctrine and a powerful method by which racism in America could be contested. King would go on to establish the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which spearheaded the practice of what became known as passive resistance, or nonviolent direct action, among many other leading civil rights organizations. Driven by the theory that it had the power to win the hearts and minds of racist oppressors, passive resistance manifested itself as a technique in many forms including sit-ins, bus rides, boycotts, and marches establishing it as the central philosophy of the civil rights movement between the mid 1950s and mid 1960s.

During that same period, the rise of the modern civil rights movement was paralleled with the democratization of television in America, a technological revolution which contributed to a greater cultural reliance on the visual to represent reality. Scholars who have studied the effects of visual imagery on the civil rights movement have often noted how the publication of gruesome and terrifying photos or television footage on the national stage shocked the country, helped shift moral authority towards the movement.

---

and provided it with momentum by inspiring future generations of activists. From that standpoint alone, it becomes easier to understand how the movement, as bell hooks has stated, “could be characterized as a struggle over images as much as it has also been a struggle for rights [and] equal access.”

But, in looking at photographs from the movement, we can see more than just the gruesomeness of violence and begin to see how intrinsic an attitude of “coolness” was to the practice of passive resistance and success of the movement. Images from such national stories as the 1957 integration crisis in Little Rock, the wave of sit-ins that began in 1960, as well as the 1965 Selma-to-Montgomery march show how “coolness” manifested itself primarily through a sense of calmness, determination and moral certitude, helping civil rights activists cope with the brutal realities of racism. Especially when pictured in juxtaposition with angry whites, the attitude of coolness helped civil rights activists “visualize” the rightness or necessity of their cause, to show that in the face of violence and prejudice cooler heads would indeed prevail.

But it wasn’t just the heads that had to be cool. Often after having been arrested, civil rights activists would let their bodies go limp, forcing policemen to carry them to the paddy wagon and thus confront the full weight of their bodies. In these instances, we can see coolness in the form of complete relaxation, as a force that transcends the mind by shutting down the body and making it appear lifeless. Looking at these images through the prism of “coolness,” we can get a sense of how powerful, or at least, flexible the technique of passive resistance could be – capable of both reinforcing an activists’ humanness, or live presence, and even mimicking death in order to make its point.

As such images attest one did not need to be dressed in a suit in order to participate in nonviolent protest and make it work; this was, of course, a movement that involved untold thousands of men and women of differing economic means and backgrounds. Since “coolness” was privileged most as an attitude or way of being among the activists, it was bound to manifest itself in a variety of ways, paralleling its numerous incarnations in African culture as a representation of “patience and collectedness of mind.” However, the fact remains that many did dress up to protest, including men in suits – not the least of which was Martin Luther King, Jr. himself, the movement’s most recognizable figure – all of which added a unique element to the practice of passive resistance, reinforcing the “coolness” inherent to the philosophy.

Knowing how central a role the church played in organizing protest activity and developing a sense of community, the act of dressing up to protest during the civil rights movement can be interpreted as a way activists blended the space of the sanctuary with the outside world, reflective of how they thought of the “higher calling” of God and the ending of racism as two sides of the same coin. In any case, I have come to see the act of civil rights activists dressing up as having reinforced the calmness, determination, and moral certitude that went along with being “cool” and ultimately helped define the civil rights movement as one of actual civility.

**Conclusion**

In his 2002 book *Jazz Cultures*, ethnomusicologist David Ake investigated the “nexus of sound, body, and meaning” in an attempt to understand the various ways in which the identity of post-bop pianist Bill Evans was defined by a sense of depth or

---

119 Gena Dagel Caponi ed., *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin’, and Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 73
intellectualism. In addition to his “brainy” looks, his tendencies not to engage the audience, and infuse his playing with classical influences, Ake noted Evans’ characteristic hunch over the piano as an important contributing factor. Comparing it with other “images from the world of secular and religious paintings and sculpture” that framed the bowing position as one “of deep thought, profound piety, or heartfelt sadness,” Ake suggested the possibility that Evans’ audiences interpreted his physicality in context of these images whether they realized it or not.\(^{120}\) In this paper, I have come to suggest, similarly, that a confluence of a racialized attitude of “coolness,” the long history of African Americans dressing up as a form of resistance, and the materiality of suits established an important interpretive framework through which black audiences saw both Miles Davis and many civil rights activists.

**Fig 2.1** A suited Davis coolly turns his back to the audience, ca. 1958\(^{121}\)

\(^{120}\) Ake, *Jazz Cultures*, 97-98

At a time when African Americans were systematically denied equal treatment, Davis' individual wealth, high levels of success, immense creative skill, and defiant attitude were undoubtedly powerful examples of what African Americans could achieve in this country and contributed to his status as a racial icon. Building on the foundation set by his predecessors that jazz was more an art form than popular entertainment, Davis established himself as a proud African American who could be successful without sacrificing a firm set of racial principles. For scholars who have attempted to understand

Davis’ relationship to racial matters, the image of him turning his back on white audiences has served as a potent symbol of how this was done.\textsuperscript{123}

In doing so, however, scholars dichotomize Davis’ performance practices with his material possessions, framing the act of turning his back on whites as the sole controversial element and Davis’ expensive suits and sports cars as products of a simple material fetishization. This interpretation, I argue, privileges the white audiences’ point of view and ultimately fails to take into account how the materials themselves could have possibly added a unique, racialized element to Davis’ physicality, transforming him into a Wittgensteinian duck-rabbit figure and exposing its “aspect lurking” qualities.\textsuperscript{124}

Thinking instead about the combined act of “coolly” turning his back while in a suit, especially in the context of images from the civil rights movement that demonstrate well-dressed black activists in states of calm defiance, we can see Davis as having participated in a codified set of behaviors that expressed less a sense of exceptionalism than one of racial unity.


\textsuperscript{124} W.H. Lhamon, Jr., \textit{Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 137-139. Lhamon likens the minstrel mask to the duck-rabbit image, noting what he calls its “aspect dawning” and “aspect lurking” qualities which mediate minstrelsy’s aesthetic reception. Whereas the “aspect lurking” component of the duck-rabbit lies in our ability to see it as containing both images depending on the context in which it’s presented, I felt it constituted an appropriate comparison to Davis given the nature of my argument.
CHAPTER THREE

"Those funny things that only a Ferrari can do": Miles Davis, Race, and the Issue of Mobility

Introduction

In February 1983, Miles Davis flew to Los Angeles to accept a Grammy for the album *We Want Miles* and perform on the awards show. Reflecting his well-developed taste for the finer things in life, Davis stayed at the elegant L’Ermitage hotel in Beverly Hills. Though it had long been inoperable, Davis even had his white Ferrari flown in from New York (and towed from the airport) just to be parked in front of the hotel; according to *Rolling Stone* interviewer David Breskin, the sports car was simply a “stage prop” that made Davis “feel good.”

As the aforementioned story makes clear, for Davis, his Ferrari retained a symbolic value even while its practical value (i.e. drivability) was nil. Yet, identifying that symbolic value, even under such specific circumstances, is difficult as there are numerous reasons why such a display could have incited his supposed reaction. Being 3,000 miles from New York, for instance, the car could have simply been a reminder of home. This might have been compounded by the fact that, while his skin color may not have marked him as a regular at the hotel, his expensive car could have communicated a sense of belonging to the otherwise potentially skeptical occupants. Since Davis had recently re-emerged on the music scene after a several-year hiatus, the car could have also been a symbol of revival, a public reminder that the innovative trumpeter was back.

---

and continuing to thrive. Furthermore, Davis had recently suffered a stroke that threatened his ability to play and get around on his own. In that context, the fast, powerful car could have symbolized his renewed mobility, a reassurance to his fans that he was physically alright. Like any “stage prop,” Davis’ car was and is capable of meaning any number of things depending on the context in which it’s placed.

In a broader historical context, the first Ferrari was produced in Italy in 1947 amidst the post-World War II economic boom in America which was driven, in part, by a significant increase in the production and consumption of automobiles. Few American consumers could afford the Ferrari’s high price tag but its close association with speed and luxury clearly resonated among them, though in a variety of ways. Magazines, such as *Playboy* (which began publication in 1953), framed sports cars like the Ferrari as part of a luxurious consumer- and leisure-oriented lifestyle ideal for bachelors in a world that was supposedly becoming increasingly dominated by women. *Playboy* could boast both a black and white readership during the 1960s, but socio-economic disparities between the two often meant that attaining such a lifestyle was more out of reach for black consumers. Yet, for the latter group, car ownership, whether with a Ferrari or otherwise, had long symbolized an important opportunity to assert themselves as full citizens. Black and white consumers, in other words, shared a desire for Ferraris (or other expensive sports cars) even while their understandings of the cars’ symbolic

---

126 Robert Genat and David Newhardt, *American Cars of the 1950s* (St. Paul, MN: MBI Publishing Company, 2008) and John Gunnell’s *Standard Guide to 1950s American Cars* (Iola, WI: Krause Publications, 2004) note that the egg crate grilles on the front of both the 1955 Chevrolet Nomad and Bel Air were inspired by Ferrari. Craig Cheetham also claims that the name of Pontiac’s 1960s muscle car, the GTO, was copied from the Italian phrase “Gran Turismo Omologato,” used by Ferrari to mean “grand touring racing car.” See Cheetham, *American Cars Through the Decades: American Cars of the 1960s* (Pleasantville, NY: Gareth Stevens Publishing, 2007), 28.

significance were quite different. Miles Davis’ consumption of Ferraris, I argue, can be understood as having straddled both worlds while, at the same time, reflecting the varied connections between his identity as a consumer and a musician/bandleader.

Because this chapter explores the subject of Davis as a car owner, it situates him within a broader realm of consumption than his colored trumpets and tailored suits, as well as in the context of an object that had a comparatively less obvious impact on his music and/or live performances. Important connections between Davis’ Ferraris, his music, and career as a bandleader are to be made, as I argue throughout, adding new dimensions to consumptive practices which have heretofore primarily been understood as reflections of his materialism. Breskin’s theatrical metaphor of the Ferrari as a “stage prop” at once prompts us to think about Davis’ cars as having participated in his musical performances, but his unconventional definition of the L’Ermitage parking lot as a stage also acts as a reminder that Davis’ public performances weren’t always music-related.

For my purposes, Breskin’s terminology functions as a microcosm of the many worlds in which Davis’ Ferrari existed. Indeed, because the car straddled the lines between Davis’ more public life as a performer/bandleader and his private life as a citizen, it was subjected to a wider set of audiences (i.e. viewers) than either of the subjects of this dissertation’s previous chapters. In that light, the idea that it made Davis “feel good” not only suggests a personal satisfaction on Davis’ behalf but one that was founded in an acknowledgement that others were looking on as well.

As a result, this chapter features a widened contextual framework in order to assess the Ferrari’s meaning from both Davis’ perspective and that of a variety of audiences from both within and outside the jazz community. Identifying the exact reasons
as to why the presence of Davis' Ferrari made him "feel good" may ultimately be impossible. But, this chapter approaches the relative unanswerableness of that question not as a roadblock but as an opportunity to elucidate the broader relationship between African Americans and transportation, a subject matter that noted sociologist and African American popular culture scholar Paul Gilroy considers "a bigger issue than historians...have let it be." In doing so, I hope to not only highlight the long association African Americans have made between mobility and freedom but also to emphasize how that association has played out specifically for entertainers and jazz musicians for whom access to transportation has been crucial in sustaining their very livelihoods.

*Miles' Ferraris, Trumpets, and Music*

Whatever reason Davis desired to display his broken-down Ferrari in Beverly Hills, his love for luxury cars, and Ferraris especially, was consistent throughout the majority of his professional career, beginning as early as the late 1950s. According to Davis biographer John Szwed, the trumpeter purchased his first Ferrari around 1957 after having traded in his Mercedes for a Jaguar; the Jaguar, Davis complained, didn't have enough power to drive the way he wanted to around New York. Although he was unable to afford a new one, Davis shelled out $8,500 – approximately $65,000 in U.S. dollars as

---

129 Beyond the 1950s, there are only a few cars Davis is known to own/drive that aren't Ferraris. In 1964, he told an interviewer he was driving a Masserati. In late 1969 he was noted as having a Volkswagen bus (which he supposedly used to transport his quintet's electric piano) and in 1970 a Lamborghini. The interviewer that actually rode in the Lamborghini with Miles implied that the only reason he was driving it was because his Ferrari was "full of bullet holes" after an attempt on Davis' life the previous fall.
of 2010 – for a used white Ferrari.130 Over the course of his career, the prices he paid (or he was at least thought to have paid) for subsequent Ferraris were occasionally noted but always expensive: $14,000 in 1959 (ca. $105,000 in 2010), $17,000 in 1970 (ca. $95,000 in 2010), $15,000 in 1972 (ca. $78,000 in 2010), and $56,000 in 1981 (ca. $134,000 in 2010).131

Fig. 3.1 Davis posing with one of his beloved Ferraris, 1969132

130 John Szwed, So What: The Life of Miles Davis (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 158. On the $65,000, see http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/relativevalue.php (accessed on January 18, 2012). The website, “MeasuringWorth,” is run by two Economics professors, Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, at the University of Illinois at Chicago and is also referenced by Williamson’s Eh.net, the official website of the Economic History Association. “MeasuringWorth” bases its calculations on a formula that multiplies the amount of money from a certain year by the percentage increase in the Consumer Price Index since then.


132 Photo accompanying a blog post by car enthusiast Jake Erlich entitled “...Classic Celebrity Car Coolness – Miles Davis 1967 Ferrari 275 GTB/4,” posted January 25, 2013. Photo was accessed online at
In addition to being symbols of his wealth, they served as symbols of his masculinity. Literary and cultural studies scholar Jerry Passon has noted that a close association of cars and masculinity in America over the past 50 years has occurred because of a society that both values patriarchal power and has increasingly conflated manhood with “self-determination and social, sexual, and creative power.” Sports and luxury cars, Passon argues, further emphasize that conflation through their speed, power, and comfortable accommodations, signifying not just any man but a “strong, virile male, regardless of his physical size, sexual prowess, or personality,” and one who uniquely possesses the means to purchase them.\(^{133}\) The sports car, as such, comes to symbolize a whole host of male desires as they relate to success, desires clearly shared by Davis as well. Responding to an interviewer’s question in 1962 as to whether or not Davis was “one of the financially best-off popular musicians,” Davis included his wife and ownership of a Ferrari as two of several things (the others being music and friends) he had that constituted a list of “everything a man could want.”\(^{134}\)

As a lover of sports cars, boxing, and many women— not to mention someone who was wealthy, creative, misogynistic, and influential— Davis has been a popular subject for those seeking to understand how masculinity has been constructed or performed in postwar America. However, his association with masculinity was not without its complications. Jazz scholar Krin Gabbard has noted that while Davis’ instrument of choice, the trumpet, has had a long history of masculine / phallic


\(^{134}\) Gerald Early, ed. *Miles Davis and American Culture* (St. Louis, MO: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2001), 207.
signification, the way he often played it (i.e. muted and minimally as opposed to loud, high, and fast) can be understood as counterhegemonic, or an attempt to complicate notions of heteronormative masculinity. “Miles Davis,” Gabbard argues, “surely developed the most flamboyant revision of the trumpet as masculine signifier by seeming to reject the heights of jazz virtuosity, preferring instead to strive for a broad range of emotional expression.”  

Davis’ Ferraris, in other words, weren’t the only material objects with which Davis defined and performed masculinity. Yet, perhaps because they weren’t musical instruments (or ever used as such), their relationship to Davis’ artistic life has heretofore gone unexplored. Journalists and Davis scholars alike have often made note of Davis’ love for Ferraris but only attempted to make sense of them in the context of his other material possessions. Writing in 1972, for instance, interviewer Leonard Feather saw them (as well as his expensive townhouse in Manhattan and designer wardrobe) as evidence of Davis’ hypocrisy on racial matters, proof that while he publicly “denounces white American society,” he still manages to “emulate its most materialistic values.” In his 2004 biography of Davis, John Szwed used them to understand Davis on a deeper, more insightful level but similarly limited his analysis to their material context: “He wore his cars like his clothes – expensive, imported, stylish, and unique.” To be sure, in addition to the fact that he never treated his cars as musical instruments, Davis never wrote/recorded/performed a song about his beloved sports cars, appeared with them on

---

136 Leonard Feather, “Miles,” in Maher, Jr. and Dorr, 99-100. The original interview was published in Feather’s 1984 book *From Satchmo to Miles*. Feather’s statement is not just dismissive of Davis’ consumer choices but also suggests that only white people should be materialistic.
137 Szwed, *So What*, 201.
stage, or had them featured on album covers. However, a look into the roles they played in his life suggests that Davis' musical and material choices overlapped significantly. In other words, we can learn a great deal about Davis the artist, in addition to Davis the male consumer, by exploring the many connections between his Ferraris and his music.

To start by stating the obvious, Davis' Ferraris provided him transportation to and from gigs (and, presumably, recording sessions) and occasionally provided him a way to pick up musicians from out of town. Therefore, it's possible to argue that, at least on some occasions, without the Ferrari there likely would have been no music. Whether or not that was true on a consistent basis, it was thought to have been so on at least one occasion. As part of his first contract to perform at the Montreux Jazz Festival in 1973, Davis demanded a "Dino Ferrari" for his personal use. The promoter, Claude Nobs, immediately agreed to the condition before realizing that not one such car was to be found among all of the city's dealers. Fortunately, a friend of the promoter's came to the rescue and agreed to let Davis borrow his Ferrari. But, upon learning that the car was red – which both the promoter and friend assumed Davis would like – Davis surprised them by saying "She-it. I wanted silver." Regardless of whether his disapproval was genuine or not, Davis allowed the promoter and his friend to breathe a sigh of relief as he "graciously accepted the key and made the sleek sports car a silver streak between Montreux and Brigue every night" (an 81km drive that took approximately 1 hour and 45-minutes each way).138 Though it would be another 11 years before Davis performed at Montreux again, he would miss the festival only once (1987) between 1984 and the

---

end of his life in 1991, becoming a mainstay and helping to establish the festival as one of the best in the world in the process. Today, Davis’ legacy as an important musician and regular performer at the festival is uniquely highlighted by both the display of a red trumpet (custom-made by Martin at the request of a Montreaux representative just three years after Davis’ death) and a performance stage that bears his namesake. To argue that none of that would have happened if Davis hadn’t gotten his Ferrari in 1973 is, of course, merely speculative but possible nonetheless. On the other hand, to think that without music there would have been no Ferrari is also merely speculative but possible. Alex Haley, who interviewed Davis for *Playboy* in 1962, recalled that Davis drove a Ferrari “because one day as Miles stood in Time Square his tuned ear picked out one car honking in B flat – and it was a Ferrari. Miles went out and bought one that afternoon.”

Setting aside the aspect of being imported, Szwed’s aforementioned comparison between Davis’ Ferraris and his clothes could also be made between his cars and trumpets. In other words, we might say that for most of his life and career, Davis chose his cars like his trumpets: from a single maker, high quality, colorful, and for their unique performance capabilities. Unlike the many changes that Davis’ wardrobe would undergo throughout his career, his deep, long-term commitment to driving Ferraris paralleled that of his relationship with Indiana-based trumpet manufacturer, Martin, and its top-of-the-line Committee model. Like his trumpets, Davis had an interest in his Ferraris being custom-made. As early as 1961, he had “the Ferrari factory attempting to work out a Berlinetta-based, Chenetti-designed body on a 250 GT frame and rear end.”

---

139 Lenore Washington, “It was like a dream,” *Daily Northwestern* [Evanston, IL], October 11, 1978, 4.
140 Al Auger, “Turn One: Jazzman Davis Ferrari Addict,” *The Daily Review* [Hayward, CA], April 26, 1961, 13. At the time of the article, Davis owned a Ferrari 250 GT. A Berlinetta was a different sports car altogether and Luigi Chenetti owned a Ferrari shop in New York City. Visiting Chenetti’s shop, according
his trumpets, not only did the colors of his Ferraris fluctuate (he was known to have had them in white, red, yellow, and silver) but evidence suggests that at least two of the specific colors held significance.

Commenting on having been arrested by a New York policeman in 1970 for “carrying brass knuckles, improper registration, not having a license plate up front and missing an inspection sticker,” Davis said “It wouldn’t have happened if I hadn’t been a black man driving a red car.” Perhaps because of its close association with speed, red has long been the color of choice for sports car owners and thus, when applied to them, signifies the pinnacle of desirability. As such, Davis’ theory could have simply been based on a long history of white resentment towards well-to-do blacks, not to mention a history that has included resentment shown specifically towards black entertainers’ ownership of expensive cars. But, in addition to signifying speed, Psychology professor Andrew Elliot describes red as a “danger cue,” one that is suggestive of anger or an impending threat while, at the same time, capable of stimulating sexual attraction. This is proof, Elliot argues, that “color affects us in many ways depending on the context.” Arrested in the contexts of both the Black Power movement and a host of recent urban riots that had been touched off by issues of race and police abuse, the danger and sex appeal implied by Davis’ red Ferrari (not to mention the fact that he was with a

to Auger who interviewed Davis between sets at the Blackhawk in San Francisco, was one of Davis’ “favorite pastimes.”

141 Hubert Saal, “Miles of Music,” in Maher, Jr. and Dorr, 71. The original interview was published in the March 23, 1970 issue of Newsweek.
142 On white resentment towards black entertainer’s expensive cars, see Mezz Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe, Really the Blues (New York: Kensington Publishing Corporation, 2001 [original published in 1946 with Citadel Press]), 207. The authors describe two instances in which this occurred. The first involved Buck, of Buck and Bubbles, who spent one night in jail for “challeng[ing] the supremacy of the white race by passing a couple of white trash in a dinky old rattletrap Ford” while in his “big Cadillac.” The other involved pianist Fats Waller who had “sand poured into his crankcase and the tires slashed” on his “big Lincoln sedan” while touring the South.
white woman at the time and wearing a “red turban, sheepskin coat, [and] cobra skinned pants”\textsuperscript{144}, together with the brass knuckles charge in particular, could have compounded long-standing fears of black assertiveness (whether physical, sexual, political or otherwise) from within the white community and, to the policeman, represented more a threat to white male supremacy than the legitimacy of the law.

Davis claimed to have been similarly targeted as the driver of yellow Ferraris as well. In a 1981 interview, Davis said that because he drives a $56,000 yellow Ferrari, “white people look at me like I’m crazy.” When asked by the same people if he was indeed Miles Davis and/or an entertainer, Davis claimed to have rebuffed them bluntly by saying “I’m a janitor.”\textsuperscript{145} However, on at least one occasion, he claimed that the color actually detracted attention, stating “I drive my yellow [Ferrari] in New York, police don’t bother me ‘cause it looks like a cab. Wssshhhhhhhhhhhhhhhht! They figure, Oh shit, that’s just a taxi.”\textsuperscript{146} As Davis implies, just as it had supposedly been with the green trumpet that “disappears and all you are aware of is the music,” Davis’ yellow Ferrari occasionally operated as a cloak of invisibility that freed him to drive, or express himself, as he pleased, regardless of whether it endangered himself or others.

In the same way Davis chose the Martin Committee for its particular performance capabilities, he preferred Ferraris for the same reason, or, has he once put it, to do “those funny things that only a Ferrari can do.”\textsuperscript{147} Speaking to fellow jazz musician, Art Taylor,

\textsuperscript{144} “He’s Free,” \textit{New York Amsterdam News}, March 7, 1970, 2 [photo caption].

\textsuperscript{145} Goodman, Jr., “Miles Davis: ‘I Just Pick Up My Horn and Play,’” 13. Several years before this interview, Davis claimed that an electrical worker who came to his expensive home in Manhattan assumed Davis was the janitor and demanded to speak to the owner of the house. This incident may or may not have influenced Davis’ response in the story referenced in the text but speaks to the fact that Davis took advantage of opportunities in a variety of circumstances to use his expensive material commodities to challenge whites’ assumptions about blacks.

\textsuperscript{146} Szwed, \textit{So What}, 202.

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
in 1968, Davis stated “I like driving a Ferrari. I don’t like to drive anything else. That’s a good, fast car.” The following year, Davis went so far as to compare the act of judging music based on how it sounds (as opposed to the race of the performers) to the evaluation of cars: “That’s the way you judge a car, man, when you start it up. It’s just the same thing. I mean, I drive a Ferrari – not to be cute, but because I dig it. I’d rather drive a ten-year-old Ferrari than one of them new things – they don’t go.”

Even looking at the ways in which Davis made his Ferraris “go” (or didn’t make them “go”), one can detect a parallel with his music. Just as Davis became known for pushing the boundaries of music – in terms of not only the variety of styles he played, but the musicians he played with, as well as his own sound – throughout his career, he too ran cars “to their limits,” whether by reckless speed, on-a-dime stops, or making them spin. According to Szwed, such technique at the very least had a positive effect on Davis by “allow[ing] him to focus on the moment, to be free of time, of past and future, free of the body and pain, caught up in the ecstasy of pure speed.”

This is, of course, not to say that experimentation was without its consequences. Many jazz historians and Davis scholars have noted the widespread alienation among his fan base which greeted Davis’ increasingly abstract musical explorations in the late 1960s/early 1970s and were soon followed by a five-year hiatus from live performance and recording; the Miles Davis brand/sound, which had been a reliable barometer of popularity and produced so much music for so many years, in other words, still managed

---


149 Les Tompkins, “Talking to Les Tompkins,” in Maher, Jr. and Dorr, 60. The original interview was published in the December 1969 issue of Crescendo.

150 Szwed, So What, 202
to “stall out.” Likewise, despite the Ferrari name, Davis’ cars were no strangers to the occasional mechanical break-down. In addition to the aforementioned story at the outset of this chapter, a 1959 blurb in the *New York Amsterdam News* reported that Davis’ “$14,000 foreign car” had broken down on 7th Avenue requiring Davis to call a truck to come and “push” it to safety, proof, according to the author, that “price is not always the factor.”\(^{151}\) Whether as a result of the way in which he drove them or not, operating such cars represented physical perils as well that occasionally interrupted his career. A car accident in 1972, which resulted in 12 stitches and both of his legs broken, prompted Davis to tell a reporter the following day “I’m alright. I’ll just have to stop buying those little cars.”\(^{152}\) The idea of no longer buying or driving them, however, was clearly not entertained. While recovering from hip replacement surgery in 1984 and claiming “it won’t be long” before he was able to return to work, Davis lamented to interviewer Leonard Feather that the surgery would also keep him from driving his beloved sports car because of the clutch. “The doctor said I’d have to get another car with an automatic,” Davis said, “An automatic Ferrari – they do have ‘em, you know.”\(^{153}\)

Miles didn’t mind taking risks whether musical, physical, or material (and thus monetary); indeed, pushing boundaries was simply a way of life for him. To be sure, it can be argued that Miles’ fame and wealth meant he could afford to take such risks more (and more often) than most. Whatever the case, he was determined to take them with equipment (Ferraris and Martin Committee trumpets) and music specific to his choosing. At first glance, this would suggest that by taking risks in such a way, it was understood

---

that he alone would be responsible for any failure he met. But, taking his cars and
trumpets into consideration, it’s also worth suggesting that Davis felt to not take
advantage of such high-quality items’ unique qualities, to not utilize them to their full
potential, would be to do them a disservice, tantamount to making them go to waste.

Davis’ Ferraris were clearly deep sources of personal pleasure for him. Yet, as
the subjects of each of this dissertation’s chapters argue, Davis possessed an acute sense
of history, particularly in terms of race, which allowed him to “spin the discourses”
associated with a variety of objects and create things that were wholly and excitingly
new. But, as an African American and jazz musician, what histories could Davis have
been signifying on in relation to his Ferraris? The next several sections attempt to answer
that question by noting that African Americans, as both consumers and
musicians/entertainers, shared struggles related to racial discrimination and transportation
even while they weren’t always positioned similarly in relation to them. Considering the
history of those struggles and the differences between each group’s positions together
allows for both a fuller picture of the roles that transportation/mobility played in the lives
of African Americans while highlighting the uniqueness of the entertainer/musicians’
perspective.

**Segregation, Transportation, Entertainers, and Jazz Musicians**

Robert D. Bullard and Glenn S. Johnson, editors of *Just Transportation:*
*Dismantling Race and Class Barriers to Mobility*, have argued that “the modern civil
rights movement has its roots in transportation” as evidenced by the Montgomery Bus
Boycotts of 1955-56 and the Freedom Rides of 1961. Indeed, as those two “moments” show, racial discrimination continued to greatly affect the mobility of African Americans long after the end of slavery and, for my purposes, while Davis drove himself around in luxury automobiles. However, large-scale protests over racial discrimination as they pertained to transportation extended as far back as the turn of the twentieth century. Between 1900 and 1906 a southern streetcar boycott movement erupted across the South affecting more than twenty-five cities. The movement protested laws enforcing segregation on streetcars – most of which were passed in the wake of the Supreme Court’s 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* which upheld state laws pertaining to segregation – and in many ways was highly effective. For southern blacks, walking became one of several alternative travel solutions that included “press[ing] carriages, drays, and hacks into service.” As August Meier and Elliott Rudwick have shown, blacks’ organized long-term refusal to ride segregated streetcars was known to have cost some streetcar operating companies tens of thousands of dollars. On at least three occasions, the hard-hit companies successfully pressured southern city councils to cease enforcing the law.

Though the two authors’ groundbreaking research on the movement claimed that it was fundamentally conservative on account of having been led by an accomodationist black middle class, more recent scholarship from historian Blair L.M. Kelley suggests otherwise. Her 2010 book, *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy v. Ferguson*, acknowledges the middle-class leadership

---


while noting mass involvement from the working class as well, a group that was often at odds with the middle-class’ adherence to uplift ideology. Kelley places the movement in the contexts of the immediate post-war protests of segregated transit seating – prompting local authorities to pass strict laws which turn-of-the-century protesters ultimately challenged – and the turn-of-the-century racial climate that framed African Americans as second class citizens. For many African Americans who were already being denied voting rights, access to a quality education, and “hunted like sport,” segregation on public forms of transportation at the turn-of-the-century was not only humiliating but annoying as black southerners’ dependence on streetcars grew. Those that protested the segregation laws, Kelley argues, were keenly aware of the past: “Southern blacks remembered that bondage robbed their forebears of not only their labor but also their mobility, self-determination, and dignity….Hundreds of black rail passengers avoided Jim Crow cars, and thousands of southern blacks resisted streetcar segregation, affirming that slavery was over.” In the end, the streetcar boycott movement of the early 1900s failed on account of both ideological conflicts within the black community and the passing of stricter laws. Yet, given the continued resistance to segregated transportation within the black community over the next several decades, Kelley feels that the story of the boycott movement deserves to “take its place as a valiant part of a longer struggle for civil rights and the recognition of black citizenship.”156

Finding alternate forms of transportation or avoiding trains and streetcars altogether may have been an important way in which southern urban blacks combatted racism but it was a tactic that black entertainers at the same time could simply not afford

---

to use. For the first half of the twentieth century, black entertainers and jazz bands relied heavily on being able to travel the country (including the South in particular), often for weeks and even months at a time; without access to trains, and later buses, most would have been out of a job. Though some troupes were lucky enough to have private train cars which allowed them to avoid the humiliations of segregated seating, the nicer accommodations never guaranteed a respite from racism. According to Mark Knowles, author of a history on tap dancing, “there are stories of a train engineer, transporting one black minstrel troupe from town to town, who purposely jerked the train every morning so the minstrel’s coffee would spill on them.”

Noted composer W.C. Handy, traveling with Mahara’s Minstrels at the turn-of-the-century, even had to lie flat on the train’s floor as it passed through Orange, Texas as “white locals” fired upon the train car with rifles. To be sure, such specific instances should be considered somewhat exceptional in the sense that they didn’t occur so often as to regularly require pre-planning or preventative action on the entertainers’ part. However, the presence of what was often called a “bear wallow” aboard minstrel trains was a brutal reminder that some black entertainers expected the worst.

For W.C. Handy and other traveling black entertainers during the same time period, a “bear wallow,” or secret compartment in a train car, was a space that reflected the inherent dangers of turn-of-the-century racial prejudice and symbolized a potentially life-saving enclosure. While traveling with Mahara’s Minstrels in Tennessee during the 1899-1900 season, Handy stopped a white man from killing a fellow trouper by knocking

---

the white man over but then hid in the train’s “bear wallow” assuming (correctly) that the man would organize a lynch mob to come after him. Thankfully, Frank Mahara, the head of the troupe, was able to talk the local sheriff out of continuing the search for Handy that very night by convincing him that he did not know where Handy was and, in the event he found out, “would make even shorter shrift of [him] than the sheriff intended.” We might say that Handy was triply lucky in this case for not only having his life spared (on account of his boss’ willingness to lie) but also for not having to have stayed in the “bear wallow” for too long and having to risk his life in self-defense. In his 1941 autobiography, Handy noted that “in this secret hold we carried reserves of food, not to mention a small arsenal,” implying that one could have reasonably expected to remain there for days at a time and had to fend for themselves if discovered. 159 While urban blacks in the South at the turn of the century found a respite from racism by avoiding trains and streetcars, black entertainers occasionally found it by embedding themselves deep within them.

Train cars packed with fifty or more men and women would spend months at the turn-of-the-century traveling between theaters throughout the country. Noting the criticism some traveling theater companies received for “gambling, crap-shooting and expectorating” on trains, Karen Sotiropoulos has stated that “life on the road inherently challenged the conventional separation between public and private spaces.” Indeed, for many black entertainers, the train car represented more than just an occasional safe haven from racial violence but a home as well. This was true not only because of the vast amount of time they’d be forced to spend on them but also because “Jim Crow conditions

159 Mark Berresford, *That’s Got ‘Em! The Life and Music of Wilbur C. Sweatman* (Oxford, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2010), 36
made …scrambling for friendly accommodations difficult." Though the train car-as-home scenario did not prevent the entertainers from involving themselves in what many considered questionable behavior, it does highlight the one major thing that turn-of-the-century black entertainers/musicians and urban southern blacks had in common, and the one thing that would not change for either group for at least four decades: a dependence on reliable transportation to support their livelihoods and sustain their understanding of themselves as free and equal citizens.

In his seminal 1994 work, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*, Robin D.G. Kelley looked at the experiences of working class blacks on segregated public buses in Birmingham, Alabama during World War II. The fact that such conditions led to numerous examples of resistance on behalf of the workers was no surprise to Kelley who noted that not only were the buses flooded with African Americans (recently hired to work in the city for the war effort), but that, as public spaces, buses were harder to police than one’s workplace where acts of resistance could result in fines, or even the loss of a job. In any case, because such acts took place under well-lighted conditions and in the presence of numerous spectators (not to mention spectators who paid to be there, were often seated, and facing the same direction), Kelley likened the buses to “moving theaters” and thus resisters to performers.

At the same time that these folks were “performing” resistance on public buses in Alabama, black musicians throughout the country were being denied the ability to perform due to issues involving segregation and transportation. Kelley’s theatrical

---


metaphor allows us to think of both groups as performers, but the two groups were nonetheless positioned quite differently from one another in terms of their relationship to money, with the working class protesters paying to ride and the musicians having to ride in order to be paid. The added difference of the two groups’ reliance on public vs. private transportation highlights the unique challenges traveling musicians faced during the 1940s. In an effort to conserve rubber and gas during World War II, the Office of Defense Transportation (ODT) threatened to ban the use of all chartered buses for working bands in 1942. White band managers Joe Glaser and Moe Gale who, as The Billboard noted, “control[led] most of the top Negro band names,” reacted initially by planning a merger to keep their collective artists working mainly at Savoy Ballrooms (owned by Gale) across the country. While their combined list of artists did include some of the most well known names in the industry – Louis Armstrong, Lionel Hampton, Lucky Millinder, Andy Kirk, and Ella Fitzgerald just to name a few – it was speculated that if a black musician or bandleader wasn’t lucky enough to be on that list or be in either the Duke Ellington, Count Basie, or Cab Calloway bands, that the ODT ban might well drive them out of business.162

With the option of using buses for transportation assumed to be all but gone, many turned their attention to cars and train travel as alternatives but found little solace. Highlighting the danger and tragedy of automobile travel, a car accident outside of Chattanooga, Tennessee in August 1942 involving members of the famous Erskine Hawkins band, resulted in one of the members’ deaths (trumpeter Marcellus Green) and injuries for four others (three band members and the valet). Outraged, the New York Amsterdam News reported the accident on its front page and blamed the event squarely

162 “Gale and Glaser Plan Merger and Ballroom String,” Billboard, June 20, 1942, 21.
on the ODT, noting “witnesses agreed that this kind of accident could hardly have happened if the band had been touring by bus.” As for trains, some booking agents began to demand that promoters provide transportation for artists from the train station to the theater based on fears of railroad ticketing getting rationed, crowded cars, and especially late trains. Performers, as it turned out, feared much the same.

Along with Walter White and Frank Reeves of the NAACP, Cab Calloway travelled to Washington, D.C. on June 25, 1942 and urged the ODT to make an exception for lesser-known black bands. Calloway estimated that the average black band spent eight to ten months a year performing one-night stands. Forcing them to rely on public transportation, especially in the South, it was argued, would not allow many of them to make it from gig to gig on a daily basis as such gigs were often in small towns not connected by trains. Furthermore, as White pointed out, presumably hoping to play on the ODT’s sense of patriotism, black bands had recently performed many times for black soldiers on Southern and “out-of-the-way” army camps where there was a “lack of community facilities.” Responding independently to the threatened ban, trumpeter and bandleader Cootie Williams predicted a “dark age [was] coming on in the music world,” one marked by bandleaders being forced to desert their bands (as Williams had planned to do in August) and even facing a difficult time finding steady work in New York City, in part, because of Gale’s monopolization of the Savoy. “The situation for colored bands is nothing short of desperate,” wrote Down Beat’s Mike Levin, adding that “Jim

166 Dolores Calvin, “Bands Face Disaster, Says Cootie,” Baltimore Afro-American, August 8, 1942, 11.
Crow must be licked once and for all in the south. Where are we fighting the war anyhow?\textsuperscript{167}

In light of the NAACP's protest and just one week after the car crash that took Marcellus Green's life, the ODT announced that it would allow five buses to be used for black bands touring the South. As part of the office's decision, the buses were only to be doled out during a three-month probationary period, from October 1, 1942 to January 1, 1943, and to groups who agreed to periodically perform at army camps and USO centers. In the meantime, a committee made up of music business representatives was assembled with the charge of deciding who should get the buses and when. Initially, reception to both decisions among black musicians appeared to be good. \textit{Billboard} magazine reported that "most of the boys were satisfied" with the make-up of the committee and have "adopt[ed] the attitude that five [buses] are better than none."\textsuperscript{168} Even members of the Jimmie Lunceford orchestra, who didn't get one of the five buses, "[took] it with a grin" when the 18-piece outfit "arranged a half-hour sit down schedule in alphabetical order" upon discovering that only one member of the band was able to find a seat on their 300-mile train ride between New York City and Syracuse.\textsuperscript{169}

However, not everyone took the ODT's decision with supposedly such good humor. In two separate articles, \textit{Down Beat} writer "H.E.P." railed against the office, charging them with "side-stepping" the real problem of fighting racism in the South and comparing the region with Nazi Germany. Instead of allotting the buses, H.E.P. argued, what the ODT "should have done is unceremoniously ordered the southern railroads to carry colored bands with the same facilities and treatment according white bands – and

\textsuperscript{167} Levin, "Bus Situation," 23.
\textsuperscript{168} "ODT Springs Five Busses for Negro Orks Touring South," \textit{The Billboard}, August 29, 1942, 23.
\textsuperscript{169} "Lunceford Group Find SRO on Train, Take Turns," \textit{New York Amsterdam News}, October 17, 1942, 11.
stuck by its guns.” Jazz, claimed the author, “is the most democratic of the arts but more than that, it goes a long way towards slugging intolerance in other fields.”\textsuperscript{170} As if H.E.P. didn’t think the ODT had dealt with the real problem adequately enough, the government also found ways to shortchange bands lucky enough to get one of the five buses. With many ration boards not considering their work vital to the war effort, such bands “received only basic gasoline rations and had to travel in old chartered buses that left a high degree of uncertainty to scheduled arrivals.”\textsuperscript{171} For better or for worse, the ODT ended up extending the initial probationary period which, at the very least, allowed such lesser known groups as Irving Miller’s Brownskin Models and Buddy Johnson’s orchestra to keep their jobs and continue their southern tours during the spring of 1943.\textsuperscript{172}

As predicted, the ODT ban did not drive the country’s most successful black big bands out of business but it still managed to negatively affect how they traveled. Harry Carney, trumpeter for the Duke Ellington orchestra, recalled that during the war, with their private Pullman (train) cars requisitioned by the army, “we had to travel just like everybody else, sometimes in a railroad car, sometimes by bus. The trains were so packed some times we had to sit in the aisles. We really missed those Pullman cars.”\textsuperscript{173} For members of both the Ellington and Calloway bands, private Pullman cars represented the peak of luxury, symbolized the band’s success, and were remembered fondly for good reason. According to Ellington percussionist Sonny Greer, even during the Depression, the band traveled in two Pullman cars, one for sleeping and eating and the other for

\textsuperscript{171} Lawrence McClellan, \textit{The Later Swing Era: 1942 to 1955} (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 2. “To top it all,” states McClellan, “the draft started to deplete the bands’ personnel, and leaders competed fiercely with each other for competent musicians, which resulted in some strained relationships.”
\textsuperscript{172} “ODT Extends Bus Permit to Irving Miller’s Crew,” \textit{Baltimore Afro-American}, March 27, 1943, 14.
baggage. “That way,” Greer stated, “we didn’t have to face the enmity of looking for a
place to stay. No other band travelled as well…” \(^{174}\) Calloway bassist Milt Hinton
remembered the luxurious accommodations as convenient hosting space after gigs on the
road when musicians wanted to spend time with women and not compete for their
attention at bars with local men. Having a private Pullman car and their own porter (who
would run errands for the musicians while they played), allowed the post-gig festivities to
be set up in advance. Said Hinton, “The ladies who were our choice came down, and
when the party was over we’d thank them for their gratuities, and they got off the train,
and the train would pick us up and take us on to the next town.” \(^{175}\)

The end of World War II paralleled that of the big band era as the postwar years
witnessed a return of small jazz combos to popularity. With them came a reduction in the
use of buses and trains for transportation and an increased dependence on private
automobiles to and from gigs. The use of private automobiles meant that musicians were
no longer subjected to governmental decisions that threatened their livelihoods or forced
them to experience the demeaning treatment of segregated seating while in transit. It also
meant that individual musicians occasionally had more freedom to go where they pleased
when not on the bandstand, a freedom previously reserved for only the most successful
and wealthy big band leaders. \(^{176}\) The threat of musicians dying in car accidents remained
as evidenced by both the deaths of three musicians (traveling members of Richard

\(^{174}\) Sonny Greer interviewed by Whitney Balliet in *The Duke Ellington Reader*, ed. Mark Tucker (New

\(^{175}\) Ira Gitler, *Swing to Bop: An Oral History of the Transition in Jazz in the 1940s* (New York: Oxford,
1985), 12.

\(^{176}\) Bassist Milt Hinton once recalled that, while travelling by train with Cab Calloway’s band, Calloway
had his green Lincoln Continental in the band’s baggage car. “When I looked into the baggage car,”
Hinton exclaimed, “my eyes nearly popped out….Everywhere Cab went he took that beautiful car with
him, and when he got into a town the rest of us would get taxis, but Cab would roll that old Linc down off
the train, with his coonskin coat on and a fine Homburg or derby, and drive off into town looking for the
action.”
Green’s orchestra) in 1949 and the high-profile deaths of 25-year-old trumpet prodigy Clifford Brown and pianist Richie Powell in 1956 (traveling in the same car) while on their way to a gig in Chicago.\textsuperscript{177} Still, the heavier use of private automobiles as a means of band travel in the postwar years coincided with the emergence of a consumer-driven postwar economy to frame the kinds of cars individual musicians drove as symbols of both their success.

\textit{Smaller Bands, Smaller Cars}

Between the late 1950s and mid-1960s, a handful of album covers from the Blue Note record label featured images of black jazz musicians or models with automobiles. In several cases – such as the cover of trumpeter Donald Byrd’s 1958 album, \textit{Off To The Races}, on which Byrd is leaning against the hood of a car with the Mercedes Benz logo on the grill in the forefront, organist Jimmy Smith’s 1963 album, \textit{I’m Movin’ On}, which features his head next to a wheel rim with the word “Jaguar” on it, and saxophonist Hank Mobley’s 1965 album \textit{A Caddy For Daddy}, which shows a female model standing on a white Cadillac – the manufacturer of the luxury car is made explicit.\textsuperscript{178} As these covers suggest, Davis’ decision to drive expensive cars was made in the context of an existing

\textsuperscript{177} Russ Cowans, “3 Musicians Killed In Collision,” \textit{New York Amsterdam News}, February 26, 1949, 1. The collision occurred outside Memphis between a bus, carrying members of Green’s orchestra, and “an automobile transport.” In addition to the three deaths – Marcellus Durham, 25; Rufus Watson, 26; and Leonard Campbell, 21 – four others were injured: Richard Green, 21; Phineas Newborn, 40; Ben Branch, 21; and Clinton Waters, 41. On the deaths of Brown and Powell, see “Turnpike crash kills 2 musicians, wife,” \textit{Baltimore Afro-American}, July 7, 1956, 1-2. The wife mentioned in the headline was Nancy Powell who was married to Richie.

\textsuperscript{178} Graham Marsh and Glyn Callingham, \textit{Blue Note Album Cover Art: The Ultimate Collection} (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2002), 238 – 239, 241. These three album covers are among nine shown in the book between 1958 and 1965 suggesting that positioning artists or models with cars was a consistent practice at Blue Note during this period. What these covers do not make explicit is whether or not the cars are actually owned by the musicians. While this may never be proven either way, it is known that in 1960, fellow Blue Note artist Lee Morgan owned a blue Triumph sports car – see Thomasina Norford, “Hey Girls – 345 More ‘Man Shopping Daze,’” \textit{New York Amsterdam News}, February 20, 1960, 1.
association between jazz, wealth, and sophistication that had come to include black musicians' ownership of luxurious automobiles. If the private Pullman car represented the peak of success for big bands before the war, the Ferrari, or similar luxury cars, could be understood as having represented the same for band leaders of small groups afterwards.

The shift towards smaller band sizes and modes of transportation during the postwar years did not impact jazz musicians' continued need to travel regularly in order to make a living. A handful of popular jazz musicians began to tour the world often during this period, necessitating a reliance on planes (at least initially) to reach their overseas destinations. But when it came to domestic travel, automobiles were often the mode of choice for a band's transportation. The relative luxury with which a musician traveled under these circumstances, of course, often relied upon the bandleader's agenda and resources. Saxophonist John Coltrane's famed quartet from 1962-1965, for instance, was said to have toured the U.S., complete with band gear, in Coltrane's Chrysler station wagon. Coltrane biographer, J.C. Thomas, noted that the saxophonist enjoyed driving, but included a story told by his bassist Jimmy Garrison that revealed the fact that bandmates would occasionally take turns at the wheel. Sharing the responsibility of operating the car, doing so amidst such cramped quarters, and in automobiles priced for

---

179 See Bill Crow, *Jazz Anecdotes* (New York: Oxford, 1990). Crow's book contains an entire chapter entitled "On the Road" in which a variety of musicians, most of them members of big bands, recall stories of what life was like for the bands when on tour. In his brief introduction to the chapter, Crow puts it succinctly, "Most jazz musicians have found it necessary to keep moving in order to make a living," citing the need of club owners to maintain a fresh line-up of talent as the main reason for this.

180 Ashley Kahn, *A Love Supreme: The Story of John Coltrane's Signature Album* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 64. Kahn refers to the Chrysler as the band's "principal mode of transport" and suggests Coltrane owned it as early as 1962 and used it at least through 1964.

181 J.C. Thomas, *Chasin' the Trane* (New York: Doubleday, 1975). Thomas reveals that, prior to the Chrysler, Coltrane had owned a 1958 Plymouth sedan and 1960 Mercury wagon. The Mercury, Thomas claims, was used by Coltrane's quartet on a cross-country tour during the first year they were together and constituted the saxophonist's "version of a band bus for four."
the middle class, were experiences that Coltrane and his bandmates likely shared with many a lesser jazz combo at the time.

Coltrane’s choice for such modest transportation conditions obscured a personal, more private taste for luxury automobiles that, by the end of 1965, resulted in his buying a Jaguar XTE coupe. The capacity of the Chrysler to carry the band and their gear likely precluded the idea of ever using the Jaguar as such and Coltrane was never known to have made his ownership of/association with a sports car a public spectacle, unlike the aforementioned Blue Note artists and Miles Davis; Coltrane simply did not share some of his fellow musicians’ high level of self-consciousness or penchant for ostentation.\textsuperscript{182} Time and again, Coltrane chose to abandon the Jaguar, and thus the experience of luxurious transportation, when hitting the road with his band. While Coltrane’s choice of vehicle may have highlighted the similarities between the traveling experiences of his and other small jazz bands in the postwar years, the fact that Coltrane could have instead chosen to drive himself in a luxurious sports car highlighted a freedom that many of those same band members simply couldn’t experience. Of course, Miles Davis was not among such a group.

Frustratingly few details exist regarding Davis and his bands’ chosen mode(s) of transportation between the 1950s and 1960s. However, if the memoirs of Chris Murphy – who both traveled with and worked for Davis in a variety of capacities between 1973 and 1983 – serve as any indication, Davis never faltered in his consistent desire for luxurious modes of transportation. According to Murphy, when Davis elected not to drive his Ferrari to gigs, his chosen method of travel came in a wide of variety of forms that

\textsuperscript{182} Ben Ratliff, \textit{Coltrane: Story of a Sound} (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 101, 166. To be clear, it is also Ratliff who notes that Coltrane owned the Jaguar by the end of 1965.
paralleled the sports car’s luxuriousness and exclusivity including private jets, a 53-foot
yacht, and even his own double-decker bus. In each of these cases, Murphy notes, Davis
would travel separately from the rest of the band, who were forced to utilize inferior
modes of travel. This had the ultimate effect of creating a divide between Davis and his
bandmates that was rarely ever crossed. As an artist famous for musical
experimentation, Davis often grew restless with his bands’ line-up. He saw to it that the
turnover rate within his groups remained consistent and that he was nearly always
surrounded by younger musicians so as to maintain a high level of creative energy. This
is not to say that Davis avoided establishing close, meaningful relationships with his
bandmates altogether, but these examples serve as evidence of how Davis incorporated
modes of transportation into his approach to being an effective bandleader by using them
to reinforce a hierarchical dynamic within his groups.

In this context, particularly in light of Coltrane’s choice between the Chrysler and
Jaguar, it seems possible that Coltrane opted for the less luxurious automobile as a way of
facilitating the opposite effect of Davis’ approach. Certainly, by packing everyone and
everything into a station wagon for a cross-country trip, Coltrane positioned himself more
as a close family member than a distant employer to his band, exemplifying the nurturing
and compassionate approach to being a leader, for which he became well known. The
differences between how each of them chose to travel with their bands not only reflected
their distinctive, yet effective approaches to being bandleaders, but reflected a lasting
cultural precedent they set within the jazz community. As authors Farrah Jasmine

---

183 Chris Murphy, *Miles To Go: Remembering Miles Davis* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2002)
Griffith and Salim Washington recently noted, "many contemporary jazz musicians still affect either the hip posture of Miles or the ascetic, spiritual posture of Coltrane."\(^{184}\)

Given the regularity with which jazz musicians had to travel in order to make a living during the days of Davis and Coltrane, it should come as no surprise that bandleaders recognized their bands' modes of transportation as having created opportunities to establish/reinforce their desired inter-group dynamic, whether it be hierarchical or more communal in nature. In doing so, however, Davis and Coltrane exhibited a level of self-determination when it came to traveling that was rare in the annals of both African Americans, generally, and musicians, specifically. As with the aforementioned historical examples, both men did this in the face of continued challenges to African Americans' mobility, which helped frame them as exceptional individuals and the idea of becoming a jazz musician as a lofty pursuit. At the same time that Coltrane and Davis' opposing approaches to transportation helped re-write the boundaries of cultural authenticity within the jazz community, the two men were providing much-needed images of African Americans as virtuosic, intelligent, outspoken, urbane, and successful.\(^{185}\) The socio-economic landscape in which these images became a part -- explored in the following section -- highlights the mixed messages African American consumers received in terms of consumption and citizenship, particularly in terms of limited mobility.

\(^{185}\) Griffith and Washington, *Clawing at the Limits*, 224.
Race, Mobility, and the Urban Plantation in Postwar America

Jazz combos, as it turns out, weren’t the only people relying heavily on cars in postwar America. The economy had been diverted to the military from the consumer during World War II but radically reversed course in the years that followed. Americans had long since conflated the act of consumption with democracy and freedom but had been denied a life of material abundance for roughly fifteen years due to the Great Depression and government-led rationing efforts. During the 1940s and 1950s, however, government aid facilitated a growing rate of home and interstate construction which, in turn, fueled a high consumer demand for things such as home appliances and cars. By the end of the 1950s, soon after Davis purchased his first Ferrari, a fully-modernized kitchen symbolized the dominance of American capitalism and nearly 74 million Americans owned cars, an increase of about 25 million people (or 33%) in just ten years. African American consumers played a big role in that increase and their high rate of car ownership by the mid-1950s was touted as evidence that the American market was indeed a facilitator of universal citizenship and that owning a car “bespoke membership in a fully modern and elite order of humanity housed exclusively in the ‘free world.’” America emerged from the war a newly minted “superpower” largely because none of the fighting had taken place within its borders. But the subsequent level of domestic manufacturing and spending helped ensure that America the superpower would also be a consumer’s paradise.

187 Cotten Seiler, Republic of Drivers: A Cultural History of Automobility in America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 114. Seiler, in this quote, is summarizing an argument made by former president Herbert Hoover in a 1955 article he authored entitled “Saying Something Good About Ourselves.” In his article, Hoover doesn’t provide specifics but considered it a triumph that “our 14 million American Negroes own more automobiles than all the 200 million Russians and the 300 million Negroes in Africa put together.”
As a handful of scholars have recently shown, however, that paradise was not experienced by everyone, most notably African Americans. The housing boom that followed the war, for instance, was underwritten by the Veterans Administration and the Federal Housing Authority who denied loans to non-whites and advocated that properties were to be occupied “by the same social and racial groups.” Therefore, much of the new settlement that took place over the next several decades consisted of white-only suburban neighborhoods, forcing black residents to remain within the confines of the city and excluding them from the promise of material (and spatial) abundance. Denied loans to buy new homes and credit to improve existing ones, many African Americans found themselves confined to decaying space as well which soon became the target for “urban renewal” projects that aimed to “redevelop black neighborhoods primarily to the advantage of the city’s white community.” As if all of this wasn’t bad enough, the sharp decline in the value of the property they did live on also set the stage for yet another setback: interstate construction.

Planning and construction for a national interstate system had begun much earlier in the 1900s but received its biggest boost under President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956. Having served in Germany during the war, Eisenhower was said to have been inspired by its national interstate system, the Autobahn, and concerned about the mobility of American citizens in the case of a nuclear threat. Under his leadership, the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 was passed authorizing the construction of 41,000 miles of

---

interstates over a 13-year period. The initial cost was set at nearly 25 billion dollars and was to be paid for by car owners themselves, largely through the collection of federal taxes on gasoline consumption. The Act also gave the government the authority "to condemn and purchase land for rights-of-way for interstate highways and provided funding to make land purchases."190 Given the cheapness of land in black neighborhoods and the need for white suburbanites to have easy access to urban jobs and shopping, it is no wonder that much of the interstate construction throughout the country ultimately tore through black neighborhoods destroying tens of thousands of homes in the process. To make matters worse, while many black urban residents were forced to relocate because of the construction, state governments had no legal obligation to assist in their relocation efforts forcing an untold number of poor blacks to fend for themselves. Wrote one such displaced resident in Detroit, "I think it would have been so much nicer to have built places for people to live in than a highway & just put people in the street."191 With their wealth and mobility in check at the expense of whites, some blacks in postwar America referred to their cities as "exploited colonies" and "urban plantations."192 Davis, in his Ferrari on the streets of New York, might have felt like a runaway slave indeed.

As this history suggests, the average African American consumer in the postwar years was not positioned as well as some jazz musicians to experience all of the benefits associated with car ownership. For both groups, the ownership of a car was understood as an important component of their economic livelihoods, but the fact that the places in which jazz musicians worked were spread across the country (as opposed to being in one

city/suburb) allowed them to disproportionately benefit from interstate construction.

Successful black jazz musicians were among the few blacks who were able to either maintain homes in the city or move to the suburbs (see Chapter 4) after the war, further distancing themselves, as consumers, from the experiences of most African Americans.

*Ebony*, the primary media outlet of the black middle class, began publication in 1945 and regularly touted the benefits of consumption via multiple advertisements and profiles of wealthy blacks’ lavish lifestyles. The magazine’s advertisements for cars, which were primarily for moderately-priced domestic automobiles and often featured white models, promoted a middle-class lifestyle whose tastes in commodities and aspirations overlapped with those of whites’. Ownership of luxury automobiles was a subject primarily relegated to celebrity profiles but nonetheless framed as an access point to full citizenship. Foreign luxury cars, like Davis’ Ferrari, didn’t receive as much attention on the magazine’s pages as did Cadillacs, which had long been popular among black celebrities. But to the extent that *Ebony* equated black consumers’ ownership of high-priced commodities with their full and equal citizenship – an association the magazine made directly with Cadillacs\(^{193}\) – one can assume that Ferraris held a similar position in the eyes of both the magazine’s editors and readership. A pair of ads for Paper-Mate that the magazine ran in 1961, equated the luxury of owning a Ferrari with that of a tropical island while, at the same time, suggesting that pens made by Paper-Mate

\(^{193}\) The September 1949 issue of *Ebony* ran an article entitled “Why the Negro Drives a Cadillac” and argued that the ownership of a Cadillac proved that blacks were just as good as whites. Said the article: “The fact is that basically a Cadillac is an instrument of aggression, a solid and substantial symbol for many a Negro that he is as good as any white man. To be able to buy the most expensive car in America is as graphic a demonstration of that equality as can be found.”
constituted the writing utensil equivalent for both. Earlier that same year, Davis was profiled by the magazine which noted his ownership of both a Ferrari and “fleet, white Jaguar.” In response to the prevalence of racial discrimination across the country, Davis told the interviewer that “if I knew how to fix my Ferrari I’d live on an island….An artist’s first responsibility is to himself.” The timing of Davis’ profile and the Paper-Mate ads suggests the possibility that Davis’ aforementioned comment could have directly influenced the advertisement’s message. In any case, Davis clearly recognized that the ownership of such a car, whether on an island or on the road, clearly distinguished himself from African American consumers and musicians, that facilitating a sense of isolation for himself and admiration among his peers were also among the many “funny things that only a Ferrari can do.”

**Conclusion**

In 2006, the Galleria Ferrari, “the official Ferrari museum in the Italian supercar maker’s hometown of Maranello,” honored its connection with the latter group with an exhibit entitled “La Ferrari e la musica,” or Ferrari and the Music. Over the space of three rooms, items were displayed from over thirty musicians who drove the luxury cars. Among the items was a guitar that belonged to rocker Eric Clapton, opera singer Placido Domingo’s Othello scene costume, and one of Miles Davis’ trumpets. Displaying information about Davis’ career and ownership of Ferraris alongside one of his trumpets

---

194 The Ferrari - Paper-Mate ad ran in the June 1961 issue while the Island – Paper-Made ad ran the following October. In both cases, the text of the ad suggested that by giving gifts of each item, along with a Paper-Mate pen, there would be no discernible difference in their quality.


offered a unique opportunity to consider the aforementioned relationships between Davis the musician and Davis the consumer and remember that the two were often one and the same.

Though Davis was the only African American represented in the exhibit, let alone jazz musician, he was certainly not the only African American musician to own a Ferrari during his lifetime (soul singer Sam Cooke also owned one prior to his death in 1964, for instance) or African American celebrity to become known for having expensive cars. But, if one was to suggest that Davis knowingly took part in a long “tradition” of the latter, it could be argued that his decision was influenced by boxer Jack Johnson.

Nicknamed the “Galveston Giant” after his hometown in Texas, Johnson (1878-1946) became the first African American to win the World Heavyweight Title in 1908 and retained it for nearly seven years. On its own, his boxing record caused racial consternation as his numerous victories over talented white fighters questioned the latter race’s assumed superiority. Outside of the ring, he continued to stir up racial controversy via a love of white women, tailored clothes, and fast, expensive cars, none of which whites felt he deserved especially during the height of Jim Crow. Over the course of his long career as a professional boxer, Johnson owned a variety of expensive sports cars and was fond of both attending and participating in car races. The most notorious of these came in October 1910 when the seemingly invincible boxer challenged veteran white speedster Barney Oldfield to a race. Three months earlier, Johnson had defeated white boxer (and Oldfield’s friend) Jim Jeffries to retain the World Heavyweight title in what was termed the “Battle of the Century.” Jeffries, who had no interest in fighting an African American for the title, reluctantly came out of retirement for the bout; white fans
eager for him to defend the race’s superiority dubbed him the “great white hope.” With those “hopes” dashed, however, pressure was placed on Oldfield to do what Jeffries could not. In two five-mile races, Oldfield easily defeated Johnson prompting one newspaper to proclaim “White Race Saved” and the broader white community to draw the lines of racial inferiority/superiority around driving and mental acuity. According to Paul Gilroy, as a result of Johnson’s loss, “The inferiority of the inferior races could now be communicated through the idea that they were bad drivers.” Whether or not they were attempts to reverse that stereotype, Johnson would continue to involve himself with car races long after his high-profile loss to Oldfield but it would tragically be his undoing. Johnson died in a car accident in 1946, one year before the first Ferrari rolled out of the factory.

To be sure, Davis wasn’t the best, or at least safest, driver on the road – indeed, he, too, almost died on account of reckless driving – and he wasn’t known to have challenged whites to car races. So, it can’t be argued that he worked hard to reverse the stereotype of African Americans as bad drivers. But, in Johnson’s strength, success, and boldness when it came to challenging white supremacy, Davis saw a hero emblematic of the current Black Power movement. Davis honored him as such in 1970 with an entire album, entitled A Tribute to Jack Johnson [Columbia 30455 – released in 1971], which doubled as the soundtrack for a documentary on the boxer’s life. The album contains only two songs – “Right Off” (26:56) and “Yesternow” (25:37) – performed by a sextet and continued the electric jazz-rock fusion sound popularly established by Davis with the previous year’s enormously successful album Bitches Brew [Columbia GP26 – released in 1970]. In light of its abstract melodies, the album was intensely rhythmic as Davis

hoped to not only fuse Johnson's historic image with the prevailing mood of black pride but, in so doing, appeal specifically to black consumers. Said Davis about the album, "the question in my mind after I got to this was is the music black enough, does it have a black rhythm...would Jack Johnson dance to that?"  

In addition to the mutual love (and talent) for boxing, Davis likely saw much of himself in Johnson: fiercely independent, successful black man, lover of tailored clothes, white women, and, of course, expensive sports cars. For both men, living during times of extreme racial inequality, "cars acquired a special significance in their complex counter-cultures as signs of insubordination, progress and compensatory prestige." That African Americans would even be drawn to purchasing cars as signifiers of racial progress in the first place is not surprising to Gilroy:

For African-American populations seeking ways out of the lingering shadows of slavery, owning and using automobiles supplied one significant means to measure the distance travelled toward political freedoms and public respect. Employed in this spirit, cars seem to have conferred or rather suggested dimensions of citizenship and status that were blocked by formal politics and violently inhibited by informal codes....Needless to say, once they were officially allowed to do so, American blacks bought cars as readily as their economic circumstances permitted.

However, to have done so, he argues, is to have risked conflating one's identity with a commodity and, in turn, a company that has worked to establish the very racial hierarchy the consumer has hoped to deconstruct. The consumer marketplace, in other words, is no substitute for human society; material goods, on their own, cannot solve social ills. While the idea of them solving social ills may be a bit of a stretch, Davis’ example demonstrates that material goods such as his Ferraris and other luxurious modes of transportation that he utilized while on the road with his bands were capable of doing much more than simply highlighting his wealth. In addition to being incorporated as an element of Davis’ leadership style, his Ferraris – along with his many other expensive commodities – artfully blended the worlds of material goods with jazz to form a “hip posture” that continues to be adopted among jazz musicians to this day. Outside of the realm of jazz, as long as we are to think of Davis’ Ferrari as a symbol of luxurious, self-determined mobility, as opposed to a mere commodity, we might surmise that the sight of his Ferrari outside of the Beverly Hills Hotel in 1983 would have made just about any African American who had ever lived in this country “feel good” as well.

199 Gilroy, “Driving While Black,” 86, 94.
CHAPTER FOUR

“Interesting Places. Interesting Men”: Jazz, Race, and Home Space

Introduction
In a 2000 interview, Benjamin Cawthra sat down with noted jazz pianist Ahmad Jamal to talk about his relationship with Miles Davis. Davis’ interest in Jamal as a musician has been well-documented, going back to 1953 when Davis first heard him as part of a trio at the Pershing Lounge in Chicago. “He knocked me out with his concept of space, his lightness of touch, his understatement,” Davis would later recall. By the end of the decade, Jamal’s continued influence on Davis’ music had become apparent by the trumpeter’s recording of a couple of Jamal’s songs, his penchant for reinterpreting jazz standards as more simplified musical forms, and even in his own muted, space-filled solos.200 Despite having such a deep influence on Davis’ music, the two never played in the same group and rarely shared the bill for performances. Even as fellow residents of Manhattan’s Upper West Side during the late 1970s, when they lived less than two blocks from each other, the pianist remembered only visiting Davis’ home twice. Nevertheless, Jamal recalled those two encounters as “brief but close” and emphasized that their relationship was defined more by quality than quantity. When asked by Cawthra what he felt ultimately stood out about their friendship, Jamal replied: “The thing that I think about is his place on Seventy-seventh Street….Interesting place. Interesting man.”201

For Jamal, and many others, Davis’ Upper West Side home was at the center of how Davis has been remembered during the latter half of the 1970s. For Davis, it was a period largely devoid of musical activity and more defined by drug use, physical pain,

200 Ashley Kahn, Kind of Blue: The Making of the Miles Davis Masterpiece (New York: Da Capo, 2000), 36.
201 “Sensational Pulse”: Ahmad Jamal.” Interview by Benjamin Cawthra, in Miles Davis in American Culture, ed. Gerald Early (St. Louis, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 80.
run-ins with the law, and solitude. Because he had voluntarily withdrawn from gigs and only made a few trips to recording studios, interacting with Davis during this period most often meant going to his home where he spent the majority of his time. Visits from fellow-musicians were too seldom, in Davis' view – which might explain why Jamal recalled the time spent with him fondly – and his own recollections, though disputed, of living like a "hermit" in a "filthy" "dungeon" of a house while rarely sober have helped shape the perception of him from that period as a brooding and misguided genius who had temporarily abandoned his craft.202 With such stories in mind, we can begin to think about the myriad ways in which Davis' house reflected his life and career, one small aim of this chapter. But, as is often the case with Davis, his unique example helps shed light on broader yet related issues within the black jazz community which create important opportunities to understand the confluence of music and culture in new ways.

Jazz and its musicians, as I argue here, have a long, varied, and important residential history outside the realm of the marketplace. Though this chapter begins and, to an extent, ends with Davis' Upper West Side home, jazz musicians' residential history includes both the private spaces in which they lived and those of others that they visited as performers. Looking at each type and how they were used, particularly through the lens of race, helps illuminate how these spaces became cauldrons of innovative artistic expression and, at times, symbols of social progress. Perhaps due to their private nature, such spaces have largely been ignored by jazz scholars and historians to whom public

202 Miles Davis and Quincy Troupe, *Miles: The Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 335. On his recollections being disputed, see George Cole, *The Last Miles: The Music of Miles Davis, 1981-1991* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 31. Cole quotes Mark Rothbaum, who became Miles' manager in 1978 and spent a fair amount of time at Davis' home. Though he acknowledged that Davis was sick and in pain at the time, Rothbaum dismissed his autobiographical recollections as "bullshit." Instead of seeing the filth and cockroaches that Davis described, Rothbaum stated simply "This was a guy that was eating his hamburgers and watching football."
spaces, such as clubs and recording studios, have been privileged as sites of performance. However, as I argue here, such a public-centered approach is taken at the expense of understanding the relevance of private residential space to both the experiences of jazz musicians and the music’s lasting legacy.

**312 West 77th Street**

For those interested in learning about Davis’ home and time at 312 West 77th St., thankfully, there is a wealth of resources. The majority of them – recollections from visiting journalists, friends, family members, business partners, and fellow musicians – are especially helpful in detailing the kinds of activities Davis took part in while there as well as the home’s unique interior design and layout. Many such details, which were noted multiple times by different visitors, read now as legendary – the curved walls, blue-tiled bathtub, basement gymnasium, sunken living room with its blue carpet, the enormous closet filled with the latest in expensive fashions, animal skin rugs, a solitary framed photo of John Coltrane, television sets that were on 24 hours a day, the house-wide intercom system, jam sessions in the lush fenced-in backyard, the jazz musician-critics summit of 1961, and Davis’ culinary skills in the kitchen – all of which provide vivid descriptions that unite the senses and bring his time there to life for those unable to have been there in person.

Less frequently, however (and occasionally with less accuracy), is information regarding Davis’ broader association with the home and the history of the home itself. Davis biographers have been unanimous in noting the home’s previous usage as a Russian Orthodox church and one of them, John Szwed, has attributed Davis’ ability to
purchase the home to recent increases in performance fees and money borrowed from Columbia Records. In addition to agreeing that Davis lived in the home for about 25 years, the fact that he had it remodeled soon after buying it is also a product of general consensus among Davis scholars. However, trouble arises when attempting to establish even some of the most basic information regarding Davis' association with the home. Szwed's claim, for instance, that Davis paid "over $100,000" for it clashes with another report of $75,000 and, depending on the source consulted, the exact year that Davis moved in has either been claimed as 1958, 1960, the "early 60s," or not mentioned at all. Such discord is compounded when searching for information on the home itself which often lists its completion as 1891 or 1920, neither of which is true. Furthermore, while it is true that the home had most recently been used as a Russian Orthodox church before Davis moved in, only mentioning that it had been a church – precisely where Davis scholars' interest in the home's prior history tends to end – obscures the home's lengthy pre-church life as a residential structure whose inhabitants had provided both the home and neighborhood with an identity that Davis would not only inherit but help transform. What follows, then, is an attempt to establish some basic information about the home in order to place what is known about Davis' association with it in the broader contexts of a developing urban neighborhood, an increasingly mobile and affluent black population, and the world of jazz.

203 John Szwed, So What: The Life of Miles Davis (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 221.
204 Szwed, So What, 221; on $75,000, see Jesse H. Walker, "Theatricals," New York Amsterdam News, October 8, 1960, 16; on 1958 as the move-in date, see Ashley Kahn, Kind of Blue; on 1960, see Walker, "Theatricals," 16; on "early 60s," see Christiane Bird, The Da Capo Jazz and Blues Lover's Guide to the U.S., 3rd Edition (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001), 131; on "not mentioned," see Szwed, So What, 221-223 and Jack Chambers, Milestones: The Music and Times of Miles Davis (New York, Da Capo Press, 1998), 298. To be sure, Chambers comes close to stating a year by noting that Davis moved in "soon after" late 1958 but Szwed avoids naming a year altogether. For what it's worth, available evidence suggests that Davis had purchased the home around October 1960 for $75,000 and had moved in by February 1961.
THREE BEAUTIFULLY FINISHED FIRST CLASS
private Dwellings for sale, 306, 310 and 312 West 77th
St., west of West End Av., having a beautiful view over-
looking the Hudson and Riverside Drive; all the modern
improvements; the newest, best and most economical
heating apparatus in the city; guaranteed. Inquire on
the premises or to E. PURCELL; Owner and Builder,
188 West 81st.

Fig. 4.1 The first known ad for Davis’ future home

Fig. 4.2 Davis on his front stoop, ca. 1970

Fig. 4.3 312 W. 77th St., present day

---

205 "Real Estate—New York City," New York Herald, September 18, 1892, 7.
The three and one-half story brownstone at 312 West 77th Street was one of at least nineteen Upper West Side homes designed in the Renaissance Revival style by architect Charles T. Mott and helped symbolize the rapid development of that area during the early 1890s. On September 18, 1892, soon after its construction was completed, owner and builder E. Purcell took out an ad in the *New York Herald* proclaiming that the home was "first class" and featured "a beautiful view overlooking the Hudson and Riverside Drive; all the modern improvements, [and] the newest, best and most economical heating apparatus in the city, guaranteed." In light of Purcell's enticing description, the home would remain on the market for about eight months until sold for $29,000 to real estate speculator and Brooklyn resident Frederick C. Dexter. Dexter, in turn, would hold onto the home for almost two years but, rather than take up residence there, remained in Brooklyn and treated it as an investment. For Dexter, the home at 312 West 77th Street was just one of many properties he bought and sold in the 1890s and the $3,000 he ultimately profited from it represented a fraction of his overall income. But, by the time it was converted into a Russian Orthodox Church almost sixty years later, it had been a home for at least three well-to-do white families or individuals who embodied the exclusiveness and desirability of Manhattan's Upper West Side.

---

208 Landmarks Preservation Commission, *West End-Collegiate Historic District Designation Report*, 1984. Of Mott's nineteen Upper West Side homes (or those that fell into what became known as the West End-Collegiate Historic District), eleven were on 77th Street and construction on all of them was completed between 1891 and 1892. Mott had worked with Purcell in designing all three homes Purcell owned on that block - 308, 310, and 312 - and it is known that 312 and 310 were designed in identical fashion.

209 Accounts in at least three New York newspapers between May 19 and May 20, 1893 state that Dexter bought the home from real estate agents E.A. Dailey and E.J. & S. Grant. However, the May 21, 1893 issue of a fourth New York paper, *The World*, claims that Purcell's wife sold it to a J. Dexter for $29,500. Whether or not Mrs. Purcell worked for the same realty company that reportedly sold the home to Frederick C. Dexter and whether J. Dexter and Frederick C. Dexter are related is unclear.
The home’s first residents were the Dickinson family, who purchased the home from Dexter in February 1895 for $32,000.\textsuperscript{210} Edwin E. Dickinson and his wife Frances lived there with their two sons Wells S. and Edwin B., daughter Delight (who would eventually be married there in 1908), cook, and “German protestant nurse.” Edwin E. had served as the private secretary for vice president William A. Wheeler during the presidency of Rutherford B. Hayes (1877-1881) and, while living at 312, worked as the president and treasurer of the Boynton Furnace Company.\textsuperscript{211} On November 11, 1919, just over two years after his wife had died in the home, Dickinson sold it for $19,000 to a lawyer named Lamar Hardy, then counsel for Armour and Company (a Chicago-based slaughterhouse and meat-packing company) and former Corporation Counsel for the late New York City Mayor John P. Mitchel. Hardy, though, would live in the home only two years before selling it for double what he paid to Dickinson.\textsuperscript{212} The 1921 buyer was a “lawyer and prominent Princeton graduate” named William R. Wilder who had been a fellow classmate of Woodrow Wilson’s at the Ivy League school and was then a senior partner in the Wilder, Ewen, and Patterson law firm. Just three and a half years later,


\textsuperscript{211} General Catalogue of the University of Vermont and State and State Agricultural College, 1791-1900 (Burlington, VT: Free Press Association, 1901), 131; “Miss Dickinson A Bride,” \textit{New York Times}, May 1, 1908, 7; On the cook and “German protestant nurse,” see “Situations Wanted-Females,” \textit{New York Herald}, May 1, 1898, 10 and “Situations Wanted-Females,” \textit{New York Herald}, May 31, 1898, 19; “Edwin E. Dickinson,” \textit{New York Times}, August 7, 1935, 19. When Frances died in 1917, the home was appraised at $30,000. Edwin E. subsequently inherited nearly $200,000 but would sell the home for much less than it was worth which suggests, at the very least, that he didn’t do so out of financial desperation. The fact that Hardy was able to sell the home so soon after he bought it, and for more than its appraised value in 1917, raises a whole host of questions regarding what was (or wasn’t) done to the home in the four years before it was bought by Wilder.

however, Wilder passed away in the home at the age of 66. Unlike Edwin E. Dickinson, Wilder’s widow Mabel remained in the home for many years following her spouse’s death – making money, in part, by renting out their 12-room summer home on the Housatonic River in Stratford, Connecticut – before deciding to sell it in 1952 to the Ruling Archbishop and Diocesan Council of the North American and Canadian Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Greek-Catholic Inc. for $18,325. During its short tenure as a church, it was known as the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. Aside from holding a regular service schedule, the church made the press several times for hosting a high-profile wedding, orthodox Yuletide ritual, and even a 1957 radio broadcast recorded by the head of the church, Metropolitan Anastassy, who “contrasted the teachings of the Gospel with those of communism.”

Between May and October 1960, newspaper reports show that Davis purchased the home, had it renovated, and finally moved in.

The reasons behind Mabel Wilder’s decision to sell the home to the church and why the church stopped using the home in the late 1950s remain unclear. However, what the home’s residential history undoubtedly clarifies is that not only did Davis’ time there

---

213 “Wm. Royal Wilder, Lawyer, Dies At 66,” *New York Times*, April 20, 1925, 17. He had purchased the home from Hardy in late October 1921. Wilder and Wilson were members of Princeton’s class of 1879 – Wilder had been Secretary of the class. On his being a senior partner, see *Landmarks Preservation Commission, West End-Collegiate Historic District Designation Report*, 1984, 137.

214 “Real Estate; Connecticut-New England For Sale or Rent,” *New York Times*, May 10, 1925, 9; “Manhattan Mortgages,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1952, 24. The latter piece details that the stated amount was due to Mrs. Wilder in full, at a five-percent interest rate, by December 21, 1961. Because Davis had moved in before then and Mabel died in 1955, it is unclear whether the church fulfilled its original agreement with another member of Mabel’s family.


216 Les Matthews, “Mr. 1-2-5 Street,” *New York Amsterdam News*, May 28, 1960, 11; Les Matthews, “Mr. 1-2-5 Street,” *New York Amsterdam News*, September 3, 1960, 11; Jesse H. Walker, “Theatricals,” *New York Amsterdam News*, October 8, 1960, 16. Matthews’ September 3, 1960 piece specified that Davis’ home was being redecorated by Ralph Cheeseborough. An article in the same paper on October 8 focused on Cheeseborough as the recent victim of a mugging but also claimed that he was living at 312 W. 77th St. Davis was known to have been on tour at the time of Cheeseborough’s mugging which suggests that Cheeseborough was living there alone while redecorating the home.
represent a break from the home’s association with racial homogeneity, it, as well as the neighborhood’s close association with wealth, signified an appropriate place to live for an important man of means. Prior to moving into the home, Davis had lived in a variety of hotels and apartments in New York City which was a typical residential pattern for both up-and-coming and even some established black jazz musicians. But, as the fastest rising star in jazz (not to mention one of the wealthiest) during the late 1950s and early 1960s, becoming a home owner complemented his rare level of success. Davis biographer Jack Chambers noted that “late in 1958, he was still living in an apartment on Tenth Avenue near 57th Street,” which was in a building that also housed several other notable jazz musicians. The apartment featured elegant décor and a large living room that, despite the sparse furnishings, was nonetheless comfortable. “Comfortable it may have been,” Chambers states, “but it was hardly the place to park a Ferrari.”217 With an expensive sports car and home in a desirable neighborhood, Davis was finally able to surround himself with independence and luxury whether on the road or off.

As noted in Chapter 3, jazz musicians lived much of their lives on the road and Davis expressed a clear desire to maintain a sense of consistency in terms of luxury transportation when not using his Ferrari. According to Chris Murphy, this was true with his accommodations on the road as well. Murphy’s memoirs show that the distance Miles enforced between him and his band while traveling paralleled his choices of accommodation in a variety of forms including staying in a beachside cottage while the band lodged in the hotel building, and having suites in the same hotels in which his band members had regular-sized rooms. The hotels that the band stayed in were usually modern, Murphy notes, but Davis occasionally expressed a desire to stay in a black-

---

217 Chambers, *Milestones*, 298
owned hotel as he did in Cleveland in 1975, highlighting the intersection of his racial
conscious and identity as a consumer.218 All things considered, one can view Davis’
desires for accommodations on the road as similar to how he hoped to live when at home
on West 77th Street. Like much of what Davis did, whether artistically or otherwise, this
was a variation on an experience common to other jazz musicians, as evidenced by Louis
Armstrong’s insistence on taking his records and record player with him wherever he
goes and Duke Ellington’s penchant for luxurious accommodations.219

Davis’ decision to live in the city was, of course, also not uncommon among jazz
musicians. At the time Davis made his 20-block move northward, he bypassed pianist
Thelonious Monk’s small ground-floor apartment on 63rd Street, singer Mary Lou
Williams still lived at her long-time Harlem apartment (63 Hamilton Terrace – where she
lived from 1947 until her death in 1981), Duke Ellington was on the verge of concluding
his stay of more than twenty years at his 4th floor apartment on St. Nicholas (also in
Harlem – he had rented out the entire floor), and Davis’ famed artistic collaborator, Gil
Evans, held court in the Whitby Apartments near Times Square, just to name a few.220

Even for big name jazz musicians who didn’t live in New York City at the time, urban
residences, such as Dave Brubeck’s home in Oakland and John Coltrane’s in
Philadelphia, were common. Living in the city had presented obvious advantages to jazz
musicians for decades, not the least of which was close proximity to night clubs, major
record labels, and fellow artists. Indeed, one can make a strong argument that the
development of jazz music was inherently tied to the northern and urban migration of

218 Chris Murphy, Miles To Go: Remembering Miles Davis (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2002)
219 Max Jones and John Chilton, Louis: The Louis Armstrong Story, 1900-1971 (New York: Da Capo Press,
millions of African Americans during the first half of the twentieth century. However, jazz musicians, like many other Americans, had begun moving to rural or suburban areas in increasing numbers since the end of World War II. The most unique example of this was likely Brubeck’s cross-country move to the hamlet of Wilton, Connecticut in the summer of 1960.\(^\text{221}\) But for many black jazz musicians in New York, the postwar move away from the city involved a much shorter commute.

**Long Island, Queens, and Addisleigh Park**

In 1947, the *Amsterdam News*, New York City’s primary black newspaper, carried an article about pianist and bandleader Count Basie’s move from Harlem into a “seven-room mansion” in the “exclusive” Queens neighborhood of Addisleigh Park. Basie’s wife Catherine, as it turned out, had purchased the home in August 1946 for $50,000 using checks her husband had sent her from the road while on tour with his band and it wasn’t until the following year that Basie actually saw the home for the first time. In light of this fact, the article claimed that Basie had “dreamed of retiring to just such a spot as he now owns after exciting nights in clubs and theaters.”\(^\text{222}\)

Trying as he might have done to escape elements of the club and theater scene by moving to Queens, Basie soon found himself surrounded by some of its biggest stars. Pianist Clarence Williams is often touted as the first black jazz musician to move to the area, having arrived as early as

---


\(^{222}\) “Count Basie Resident In Exclusive Addisleigh Park,” *New York Amsterdam News*, April 19, 1947, 13, 16. To be clear, I don’t doubt that Basie genuinely loved the house but the aforementioned article, as well as Basie’s own memories of getting the house, confirms that he had little to do with picking it out. In his autobiography, *Good Morning Blues*, Basie states that while he vaguely remembers looking at homes in the area with his wife, the first time he learned about their new home was on a telephone call with her while he was on tour: “We had been talking for a while, and then she told me. ‘By the way, I have to give you our new address’” (p. 276).
1923. Twenty years later, however, trumpeter Louis Armstrong bought a home in nearby Corona and, by the end of the 1940s, Basie's Addisleigh Park neighbors included singers Ella Fitzgerald, Lena Horne, trumpeter and composer Mercer Ellington (son of Duke Ellington), trumpeter Cootie Williams, bandleader Illinois Jacquet, bassist Milt Hinton, and saxophonist Earl Bostic. In addition to its becoming a haven for jazz musicians, Addisleigh Park was also home to famous boxer Joe Louis and two of baseball's biggest black stars, Jackie Robinson and Roy Campanella. Fittingly, Campanella biographer Neil Lanctot described the neighborhood "as a sort of Beverly Hills East for black America."223

The influx of such residents to Addisleigh Park, as well as its high number of working class blacks, represents a unique example of postwar suburban space becoming accessible for large numbers of African Americans. It has been often noted that African Americans were largely denied the means and opportunities to move to the suburbs, but urban historian Andrew Weise has noted that the number of black suburbanites, the majority of them being from the middle class, rose significantly between the 1940s and 1950s (from 1.5 to 2.5 million). As a result, he argues, they "asserted their equality and consciously minimized the social distance that whites sought to maintain as a privilege of race."224 The example of Davis' move to the Upper West Side proves this minimizing of social distance took place in the city as well as the suburbs and the fact that Davis experienced at least one noteworthy example of racial discrimination as a result—a worker making a house call once assumed Davis was the home's janitor—highlighted the

consequences of such a move. However, whether in light of or despite the high number of Addisleigh Park's black residents in the 1940s, minimizing social distance between themselves and whites didn't exempt them from discriminatory treatment either. In fact, it can be argued that, compared to urban residents, black suburbanites were more prone to experiencing prejudicial treatment and did so under much worse conditions.

Just two months before the Basies purchased their new home, a Jamaica Supreme Court judge granted a temporary injunction on an Addisleigh Park resident’s attempt to sell her home to Samuel Richardson, a “Manhattan Negro merchant,” thereby upholding the neighborhood’s “restrictive covenant.” Around that same time, several of the area’s approximately 60 African American-owned homes were bombarded “by vandals armed with eggs, fruits and vegetables.” And in late July, five African American families discovered notes on their mailboxes, signed by the “Ku Klux Klan, district of St. Albans,” warning them simply to “beware.” To be sure, the judge’s decision was ultimately overruled (though not until 1948) and it was quickly discovered that the “K.K.K.” notes were a result of youthful hi-jinks. Nevertheless, the overall message was clear: African Americans looking to move to the suburbs in the postwar era were often racial pioneers understood to be invading white space and weren’t guaranteed a welcome reception.

After battling the legality of Addisleigh Park’s “restrictive covenant” for two years, the costs of being a racial pioneer on Richardson had taken their toll. While he wasn’t sure he still wanted to live in the upscale neighborhood, he remained steadfast in

---

225 Paul Maher, Jr. and Michael K. Dorr, ed., Miles on Miles: Interviews and Encounters with Miles Davis (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2009), 158.
his determination to buy the property on the principle that it be available for public
sale.\textsuperscript{227} Un-phased by receiving one of the “K.K.K.” notes, on the other hand, was Dr.
John A. Singleton. Even before it became known that it was a prank hatched by local 13-
year olds, Singleton presciently told a reporter “I’m convinced it’s a hoax....People who
pull gags like this are just stupid cowards. They amuse me.” Singleton, as it turns out, had
seen this kind of stunt before. Having moved to Queens from Omaha, Nebraska 12 years
earlier, where he had been in the state legislature, Singleton recalled an incident whereby
some of his so-called “white friends” burned a cross in his backyard under the auspices of
the Klan “but they did no harm.”\textsuperscript{228} Threats (or, at least, supposed threats) from the same
group that had been responsible for an untold number of black murders and voter
intimidation rituals since the late 1860s – and as of the 1920s could boast membership in
the millions across the United States – were simply not going to scare Singleton into
abandoning his desire to live in an American suburb.

The reactions of Richardson and Singleton shed light on the variety of ways
African Americans made sense of the resistance shown towards their desire to live in the
suburbs. Whether or not Basie’s own feelings about moving into Addisleigh Park had
anything in common with either man is difficult to say; his recollections on the move are
not extensive and do not acknowledge the neighborhood’s recently checkered racial past.
Yet, his decision to continue living there until his death in 1984 suggests that he shared
both men’s determination to defend the basic right of African Americans to choose where
they wanted to live. The restrictive covenants in place at the time Basie and others
moved to Addisleigh Park were a grim reminder of the neighborhood’s previous history –

\textsuperscript{227}“L.I. Housing Ban Outlawed,” \textit{New York Amsterdam News}, July 24, 1948, 1, 22.
not unlike that of Manhattan’s Upper West Side – as an enclave of racial exclusivity. However, their collective decisions to move there signified the neighborhood as one in transition. By 1952, the racial make-up of the neighborhood had changed dramatically, evidenced by a 12-page spread dedicated to it in Our World, a magazine that catered to African Americans.

In the end, Basie’s extended stay in Addisleigh Park was somewhat exceptional. By the early 1960s, several of the famous jazz musician residents had moved away including Cootie Williams (1953), Ella Fitzgerald (1956), and Lena Horne (1962). Taking into consideration the fact that each of them represented an earlier generation of jazz musicians and older styles compared to more modern styles forged during the 1950s and 1960s (several of them by none other than Davis himself), it is tempting to classify the postwar suburbs as a sort of retirement community for jazz’s elder statesmen. This is, of course, not to suggest that those who moved to Addisleigh Park and the surrounding area stopped performing and/or composing once they arrived. In fact, during the early 1960s, Gillespie, Basie, and Armstrong were touring the world on a regular basis. But, it is important to note that, playing and touring aside, the suburban move did seem to signal a drastic change in lifestyle.

Addisleigh Park had first been laid out in the Garden City model that had flourished in both England and the United States around the turn of the century. English-style architecture (mainly Tudor and Colonial), free-standing homes, shady trees, and ample front lawns gave the neighborhood an English countryside feel and its lack of commercial enterprises provided a complete separation of residential, commercial, and
industrial districts. This latter detail, in particular, emphasized by its often touted proximity to the St. Albans Golf Club, helped ensure that the experience of living in Addisleigh Park was defined by the clear distinction made between work and leisure space as opposed to city life where the two were occasionally indistinguishable. Echoing the benefits of this distinction for jazz musicians and their celebrity athlete-neighbors was the aforementioned 1952 article in *Our World* which noted that “after rugged road trips, performances before thousands, they love to return to the privacy of home. There they become just ordinary American citizens with families, hobbies, and problems.”

Count Basie’s “hobbies and problems,” while living in Addisleigh Park, remain a mystery but his desire for privacy is documented. According to the *Amsterdam News*, Basie’s favorite feature of the home was the “Basie Basement” where he “finds his pleasures” while alone. “It has always been his desire to have a quiet hideaway-room like his basement,” the article added. Furthermore, the timing of the Basie family’s move to Queens from Manhattan – just three years after the birth of their daughter Diane – suggests that family concerns played an important role in their decision. Bassist Milt Hinton, on the other hand, addressed this matter more directly. At the time of his move to Addisleigh Park, his wife, Mona, was expecting and, according to Hinton, “we wanted a nice, clean place to raise a child.” He would also later state that the house represented “the first time Mona and I had something that was ours. It was our security and some

---


new roots.”232 Although she would later admit to not having lived in her Addisleigh Park house much, Lena Horne was assisted in her decision to move there by bandleader Cab Calloway so that her children could be enrolled in private school and her husband could look after them.233 Both male and female jazz musicians, as it turns out, shared the prevalent cultural assumption of the suburb as an ideal place to settle down and raise a family, thus supporting Weise’s assertion that African Americans’ “suburban dreams [were] firmly anchored in the postwar mainstream.”234

However true this appears to have been in terms of raising families, black jazz suburbanites had deeper issues with the “postwar mainstream” that buying a suburban home simply couldn’t solve. In the first several years after the war, many of those that had become or would soon become Basie’s neighbors in Addisleigh Park participated in a handful of benefit concerts for a variety of civil rights-related organizations and causes, highlighting the social and political awareness of the group. While many of these concerts featured multiple acts, several of them were headlined by current or soon-to-be Addisleigh Park residents highlighting their popular celebrity status as well. Cootie Williams and his Orchestra, for instance, was to be the featured attraction at the National Urban League’s Annual Beaux Arts Ball in 1945, Ella Fitzgerald organized a series of benefits for lynching victims in 1947, Count Basie headlined a March 1947 rally for the NAACP in Brooklyn, and a few months later “Illinois Jacquet Night” was held at Harlem’s Savoy Ballroom which benefited the same organization.235 Also in March

---

1947, Earl Bostic, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, and Cootie Williams (among others) appeared on a program to benefit the Pittsburgh Courier’s Charity Fund (which included funding for The Committee for Racial Democracy in the Nation’s Capital) at New York’s Carnegie Hall and, the following year, the same venue hosted a benefit for the Booker T. Washington Memorial Fund that featured Fitzgerald and boxer Joe Louis. Many of these same performers had participated in such benefits before and would continue to do so for years to come. In fact, both Jackie Robinson and Count Basie would use their homes to host similar events during the first half of the 1960s as the modern civil rights movement peaked. Thus, we can think of the black celebrity’s suburban home as both a signifier of their entry into the mainstream and space from which they worked to alter it.

As noted earlier, many of Addisleigh Park’s famous musician-residents had moved out by the early 1960s, at about the same time Davis chose to remain in the city. Despite his extensive musical influence within the jazz community and reputation as a trend-setter, Davis’ preference for remaining in Manhattan in the 1950s and 1960s did not stem the tide of black jazzmen and other musicians moving to Queens. The purchase of Cootie Williams’ former home by soul singer James Brown in 1962, for instance,

238 Unfortunately, newspaper reporting did not always follow up on each of these 1940s benefits making it difficult to know whether they were all successful in terms of both profit margins and attendance. Of all the ones listed above, for instance, only “Illinois Jacquet Night,” was known to have been financially successful, having raised over $800 for the NAACP, and approximately 2,000 were known to have attended the Booker T. Washington Memorial Fund concert in 1948. With ticket prices for the latter event listed as between $2.00 and $25.00, however, the profit potential was quite large.
reflected the fact that Addisleigh Park and the surrounding area remained a hotspot for current black musical celebrities. Indeed, a younger generation of black jazzmen representing more modern musical styles than their swing-era predecessors proved just as willing to buy into the dream of living in the suburbs. Preceding Brown by a decade, bebop pioneer Dizzy Gillespie moved into a home adjacent to Louis Armstrong’s Corona residence, bassist Charles Mingus spent a brief two years in St. Albans starting in 1954, while saxophonists Cannonball Adderley and John Coltrane – both one-time Davis sidemen who helped spur the developments of soul jazz and jazz fusion respectively – each moved to Queens in 1955 and 1959. Coltrane would even later move to the rural Dix Hills neighborhood of Long Island in 1964.

Coltrane, in many ways, singlehandedly represented a continuation of the type of black jazz musician that had moved to the suburbs in the immediate postwar period: popular, racially conscious, and family-oriented. By the time he moved to Dix Hills, Coltrane could boast massive stylistic influence within the jazz community and commanded a lucrative contract with Impulse Records, the leading label for black avant-garde musicians. Between 1963 and 1964, he participated in at least 3 civil rights-related benefits and had recorded an original composition entitled “Alabama” which was dedicated to four African American girls who had recently died as a result of a racially-motivated church bombing. Furthermore, the timing of his suburban move coincided

---


240 The three aforementioned civil rights-related benefits Coltrane took part in between 1963 and 1964 are thought to be the only three he ever took part in as a leader of his own group. The first two were benefits for the Congress of Racial Equality which took place in October 1963 and April 1964 while the third was a benefit for Freedomways, a black periodical, in late December 1964. “Alabama” was first recorded in a studio in November 1963 and appeared, somewhat ironically, on the album Coltrane Live At Birdland for Impulse Records (AS-50).
closely with his burgeoning romance with Alice McLeod and the birth of their son John Jr.\textsuperscript{241} However, unlike many of his swing-era predecessors in the suburbs, Coltrane continued to experiment musically after making the move and even used his new home to do so. The results of those particular musical experiments would not only create one of the most influential albums in jazz history but highlight perhaps the most unique role that homes played in the lives of musicians: sites for composition, performance, and/or recording.

\textit{"A Home Supreme": Music and the Home}

The summer of 1964 was a busy time for Coltrane. For several months, he had sustained a busy schedule touring the country in a station wagon with his quartet. With the tour over, however, Coltrane was finally free to spend time with his new family in their new home and take a break from music. But, according to Coltrane scholar Ashley Kahn, his "obsessive nature would not let him rest." For five days in either the summer or early fall of 1964, Coltrane secluded himself in an unoccupied guest room on the second floor of his newly purchased home, intent on composing. His wife (then girlfriend) Alice later recalled that "John would go up there, take little portions of food every now and then, spending his time pondering over the music he heard within himself." In the end, the combination of Coltrane's artistic vision, understanding wife, and access to private space produced a marked effect upon the saxophonist. Alice described his reappearance "like Moses coming down from the mountain" and remembered seeing "that joy, that peace in his face, tranquility." When asked by his wife

about his experience, Coltrane responded: "This is the first time that I have received all of the music for what I want to record, in a suite. This is the first time I have everything, everything ready." In contrast with Basie's supposed dream of using the home as a means of escaping work, Coltrane insisted on escaping within the home to focus on it. The summer tour had likely inspired Coltrane musically but could not compare with the peace and quiet offered at home as a catalyst for composition.

What Coltrane composed during that five day period would be recorded in December 1964 with his quartet as the album *A Love Supreme*. Structured as a four-part suite ("Acknowledgement," "Resolution," "Pursuance," and "Psalm"), *A Love Supreme* balanced composition and improvisation while showcasing the quartet's distinctive individual playing styles but is perhaps best remembered for Jimmy Garrison's "mantra-like bass line" and Coltrane's own repetitive chanting of the album's title (the first time he allowed his voice to be heard on a musical recording). Thematically, the album emphasized peace and spiritual rebirth. In his own authored liner notes (another Coltrane album first), Coltrane both thanked and reached out to a "gracious and merciful" God to whom "all paths lead." Those close to him over the years had known Coltrane as a spiritual man but, according to Kahn, "the album's unblinking message of reawakened spirituality" had a "discomfiting" effect on jazz listeners who had become more accustomed "to the cool, guarded aesthetic of the jazz scene." Nevertheless, it soon

---

243 Coltrane's drummer/percussionist on the album, Elvin Jones, shared a story with Kahn regarding the quartet's summer tour, claiming that Coltrane had asked him if he could play tympani while they were driving and went on to explain "some of the things he wanted to do when we went into the studio again" (Kahn, 121). Coltrane, it seems, had begun envisioning *A Love Supreme* while on the road that summer but was only able to fully bring his ideas together at home once the tour was over.
244 Kahn, *A Love Supreme*, xvi-xvii.
became one of jazz's best-selling albums, noted for its multiple musical (not to mention ethnic and cultural) influences and cross-generational appeal.

In recent years, the story of Coltrane's in-home seclusion has become increasingly well-documented and the album's connection with his Long Island home is at the center of modern efforts to restore it (see Conclusion). However, while *A Love Supreme* is likely the most famous work of jazz known to have been fully composed in a musician's home, it is but one example of how jazz musicians utilized and/or modified their domestic/leisure space to allow for the "labor" of music. In the basement of the very home where he composed *A Love Supreme*, Coltrane and his wife built a recording studio for themselves and his quartet. Miles Davis had a "music room" set up at his Upper West Side home where his bands could rehearse and even used his home's intercom system to listen in on jam sessions that took place there in order to audition potential new members. A 1939 article in the *Amsterdam News* claimed that Duke Ellington's band took over an entire floor in his apartment building on St. Nicholas "where they live the life when the band is in town." For approximately eight years, during the 1950s and 1960s, a who's who listing of modern jazz stars made use of photographer Eugene Smith's five-story apartment in midtown Manhattan for late night jam sessions that were

---

245 Coltrane's life and work are among the most well documented of any jazz musician. Still, it has only been recently confirmed that Coltrane moved to Dix Hills in 1964 and composed *A Love Supreme* there. Prior to Ben Ratliff's 2007 work, *Coltrane: The Story of A Sound*, it was common for Coltrane scholars to claim that Coltrane didn't move there until 1966, after his marriage to Alice had taken place. Despite the work of Ratliff and Fulgoni—who's research has benefitted from interviews with Coltrane family members—the 1966 claim has even been re-asserted as recently as 2010 by author Leonard Brown.

246 Another famous example of a popular jazz composition being fully written in a musician's home is the song "Blue in Green" which was recorded for Miles Davis' album *Kind of Blue* in 1959. Davis' pianist, Bill Evans, remembers composing the song alone while in Davis' Tenth Street apartment right before the recording session, but Davis' recollections of the event have alternated between himself claiming compositional credit and sharing it with Evans. See Ashley Kahn, *Kind of Blue: The Making of the Miles Davis Masterpiece* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000).

247 Davis and Troupe, *Miles*, 263.

also occasionally subjected to amateur recordings. Far more common, however, was the jazz musician who at least made sure to be able to enjoy the experiences of playing and listening to music on their own terms via pianos and personal stereo equipment. Still, the acts of playing and listening at home, whether with a band or alone, remained a common activity for jazz musicians, even if the home wasn’t theirs to begin with.

In 1995 famed singer Singer Shirley Horn attempted to recreate the feel of in-home jam sessions by recording an album at her Washington, D.C. home. "I wanted it to be like the old days," Horn said, "when folks would get off work at two or three, drop by my place, and play till dawn. Good company, good food, good music." As Horn’s memory suggests, jazz musicians performed countless early hour jam sessions at their colleagues’ homes. In his famous essay, “Living With Music,” Ralph Ellison described the frustration he experienced attempting to write “in a tiny ground-floor-rear apartment” while surrounded by an aspiring opera singer, noisy pets, “preaching drunks,” and “a night employed swing enthusiast who took his lullaby music so loud that every morning promptly at nine Basie’s brasses started blasting my typewriter off its stand.” “In those days,” Ellison stated, “it was either live with music or die with the noise.” No doubt he captured the feelings of a good many jazz musicians’ neighbors, including those of Miles Davis who were known to have loudly reprimanded him for holding jam sessions on the front stoop of his home at W. 77th St.

---

However, it should be noted that in-home jam sessions were not always limited to the residences of jazz musicians. During the 1920s, it became common in black neighborhoods in the urban North to have “rent parties” where attendees would pay a small entrance fee to help the host(s) pay the month’s rent. In the decades before suburban neighborhoods like Addisleigh Park became accessible to large numbers of African Americans, the hosting of such parties was a partial antidote to the economic effects of racially segregated housing. Surveying more than two thousand Harlem residents in 1927, for instance, the Urban League found that almost half of them spent twice as much of their income on rent than white New Yorkers and that all of them paid an average of 40 percent more in rent compared to same-size apartments outside of Harlem. To make matters worse, the study also found that the average monthly income for the same black families was $270 less than that of whites who lived elsewhere in the city.²⁵³ Pianist James P. Johnson was known to have performed at Harlem rent parties in the 1920s, but his aforementioned decision to settle in Queens in 1923 may have been guided by the comparatively bleak economic realities of living in Harlem.

To counter such gloom, rent parties were often raucous affairs. Usually held on either Saturday or Thursday nights to accommodate the schedules of black workers, rent parties typically ran well into the morning hours and promised their attendees an array of pleasures including sumptuous food, drug and sexual experimentation, and, of course, entertainment. Some apartments were surely large enough to accommodate an entire band but it was most common for the musical entertainment to come from pianos alone. As a result, a virtual who’s who of the era’s famous black pianists performed at rent

parties including Fats Waller, James P. Johnson, Willie “The Lion” Smith, and Duke Ellington. Ellington was even known to have attended a host of rent parties as a teenager in his native Washington D.C. just to hear the city’s best known pianists and even composed a “shout,” specifically to be played at a rent party.²⁵⁴ According to Mark Anthony Neal, rent parties offered established players like Ellington “access to the emerging styles and tastes within a largely migrant working-class culture” helping to keep their music relevant to a cross section of the black community.²⁵⁵

But, Ellington’s experiences in Washington D.C. also remind us that the parties served as important sites of artistic influence for up-and-coming musicians. The fact that such players were lesser known meant that they were paid a fraction of what bigger names charged but this, in turn, often resulted in greater visibility and a host of opportunities “to take the necessary aesthetic risks to develop their own style in the presence of a demanding and discriminating public.” Because the “public” at rent parties tended to be made up largely of migrants from the south, musicians who played for them “were valued for their ability to confl ate various regional styles, in effect creating a sound that would resonate across the diaspora.” Neal refers to the rent party as a “public and participatory cultural space that encouraged artistic innovation” and cites the development of the urban blues from such parties as an important contribution “to the emergence of the black popular music tradition of the twentieth century.”²⁵⁶ From this

²⁵⁴ Richard O. Boyer, “The Hot Bach” in Mark Tucker, ed. The Duke Ellington Reader (New York: Oxford, 1993), 239. Boyer’s piece was originally published in 1944. According to the same piece, Ellington was asked about a piece he wrote entitled “Saturday Night Function” which he claimed was “from the old rent-party days” but it’s unclear whether this was the same song referenced above. It should also be noted that rent parties were sometimes referred to as “hops” or “shouts.”
²⁵⁶ Ibid.
perspective, rent parties can be understood as cultural and aesthetic training grounds for aspiring black musicians.

Fifty years later, much of the same could be said for the Loft Jazz scene in New York. By the late 1960s, the popularity of rock and roll had eclipsed that of jazz and many club owners responded by shutting their doors or focusing their attention on booking rock bands. At the same time, jazz was continuing to develop aesthetically into what many have called Free Jazz or the avant-garde, a style characterized for its wide variety of musical influences and lack of adherence to Western notions of musical structure, form, and tonality. The fewer opportunities for lucrative gigs and recording contracts that came as a result forced many black avant-garde musicians, like the Harlemites of the 1920s, to take matters into their own hands in order to survive economically. Cooperative efforts, like the Chicago-based Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, as well as the ownership of small record labels and recording studios became commonplace which reflected an increased push for control over both the business and aesthetic components of their art form. Avant-garde jazz, in a sense, had become increasingly privatized and perhaps nothing exemplified that more poignantly than the new spaces in which avant-garde jazz was frequently performed.

The postwar economic boom of the 1940s and 1950s had given way to deindustrialization by the end of the 1960s. Areas in New York City neighborhoods, such as the Lower East Side and SoHo which had been hubs for large industry and included a high number of working-class black residents, became wastelands with many companies shutting down completely or shifting their business elsewhere in the country. But, while the vacant buildings, with their vast interiors and tall ceilings, represented job
loss and an overall economic downturn, they created important opportunities for young black jazz musicians to keep their art alive and control the means of both its production and reception.

Lofts, or the upper floors of old factory buildings, became popular sites of free jazz performances and recordings. Compared to commercial clubs, lofts offered more spatial, economic, and aesthetic freedom. The larger size of the lofts created more space for stages, chairs for audience members to sit, and sometimes featured rugs for audience members to lounge on during performances. The fact that lofts were often privately owned residences (as opposed to businesses) meant that most did not serve alcohol. As a result, loft jazz concerts, unlike rent parties, became known for their laid back atmospheres and audience behavior. Writing for the *New York Amsterdam News* in 1976 at the height of “loft jazz’s” popularity, Les Matthews described the atmosphere as “where you sit on the floor, sit and smoke and listen to cool jazz.”

An audience member at a loft jazz concert the following year who had just moved to New York from California compared the atmosphere to homes on the West Coast noting “It’s so relaxed. It even has the clean, fresh smell of homes out there.” Saxophonist Abdul Sami went so far as to justify the run-down interior of Ladies Fort (a basement club modeled after the Loft style) by stating “the most important thing here is that the music is happening and everyone is relaxed.”

Sami’s statement, in particular, reflected a continued push from within the black jazz community on what could be called domesticating jazz, getting audiences to relax

---

257 Les Matthews, “Stardust Beat,” *New York Amsterdam News*, July 31, 1976, D7. I have taken Matthews’ use of the word “cool” in this statement to indicate the mood of the performances as opposed to the style of jazz performed.

and focus entirely on the music, thus distancing it — and, by extension, themselves — from stereotype-driven reputations defined by immorality and uncivilized behavior. The aptly-named bandleader Paul Whiteman attempted to “make a lady out of jazz” in the 1930s by blending jazz and classical styles but, since then, black jazz musicians have roundly rejected the notion that “domesticating” jazz need involve a dissolution of its racial elements. The Modern Jazz Quartet since the 1950s has perhaps come closer than any other black band to realizing Whiteman’s aim with their blend of jazz and classical styles, staid performances, and wearing of tuxedoes. Yet, at the same time, as we have seen in a previous chapter, musicians such as Miles Davis argued for greater audience interest in his music alone while also sartorially framing himself as a serious, sophisticated artist via expensive tailored suits. By comparison, the efforts of those involved in the loft jazz scene, who often wore African or African-inspired clothes, represented a more concerted effort to control the spaces in which jazz was heard, the audiences who heard it, and how it was received.

Like rent parties of the 1920s, the locations of jazz lofts, combined with the fact that they did not force attendees to spend large amounts of money on alcohol, allowed African Americans of low socioeconomic status greater access to performances and helped sustain the music’s racialized identity. In addition, being outside the bounds of commercial studios and clubs gave loft performers more freedom to experiment artistically and, again like the rent parties, promote relatively unknown musicians. Saxophonists Archie Shepp, Sam Rivers, and drummer Rashied Ali established three of the best known lofts in New York City between the late 1960s and 1970s — Artists House, Studio RivBea, and Ali’s Alley — which helped spawn a new generation of free jazz.
musicians (trombonist Ray Anderson and saxophonists Henry Threadgill and David Murray among others) who worked to blend the sounds of jazz and rock.\footnote{Todd S. Jenkins, \textit{Free Jazz and Free Improvisation: An Encyclopedia, Volume 2} (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), liv.}

Though the loft jazz scene died off in the 1980s, its legacy has left a defining mark on our understanding of jazz. Many of the same musicians, while taking part in that scene, concurrently found themselves spread across the country in institutions of higher learning and continuing to influence new generations of college students.\footnote{Saxophonists Archie Shepp and Yusef Lateef, for example, taught music at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst while fellow reedman Anthony Braxton took a teaching position at Mills College in the mid-1980s. Others that followed similar paths include trumpeter Bill Dixon who started teaching at Bennington College in the late 1960s and pianist Cecil Taylor who taught at both the University of Wisconsin at Madison and Antioch College during the early 1970s.}

This trend, which James Lincoln Collier has derisively called the “academization of jazz,” continued loft jazz’s emphasis on distancing the music from the marketplace while allowing a variety of jazz styles to be understood in the context of one another, much as classical music had been taught.\footnote{James Lincoln Collier, \textit{Jazz: The American Theme Song} (New York: Oxford, 1993), 150. Collier looked upon jazz’s entry into the academy as a negative change from the way older musicians had learned the music from one another. Learning it from instructors, Collier feared, might provide students with the skills needed to play with good tone and intonation, but, more importantly, “can inhibit the development of an individual sound.”}

But, jazz’s entry into the academy during the 1960s and 1970s reflected a broader national trend of students (an increasing number of whom were African American) demanding courses on black history and culture. Successful protests to create Black Studies programs on campuses, such as San Francisco State College in the late 1960s, convinced many college administrators across the country to forestall similar events by hiring faculty whose positions on Black culture were similar to the newer, more militant generation of college students.\footnote{Iain Anderson, \textit{This Is Our Music: Free Jazz, The Sixties, and American Culture} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 162.}

The emphasis many avant-garde black jazz musicians had put on the music’s racial identity thus put in them in a prime
position to benefit from this and ultimately secure jazz a well-deserved place that it continues to hold in the pantheon of higher education.

The extent to which jazz musicians utilized homes and apartments for composition and performance space is ultimately reflective of what being an artist is all about. Ralph Ellison complained of how much the aforementioned surrounding noise contributed to his writer's block but came to sympathize with the singers' artistic obsession, having been exposed to similar approaches by jazz musicians as a boy in Oklahoma City. "These jazzmen...lived for and with music intensely," Ellison stated. "Their driving motivation was neither money nor fame, but the will to achieve the most eloquent expression of idea-emotions through the technical mastery of their instruments."^263 As with all creative artists, jazz musicians make a living honing their technical skills while consistently responding emotionally to the world around them. In addition to the fact that their instruments are often easily transportable and capable of being played on their own, jazz musicians do not tend to hold regular working hours. Professional musicians, who tour, perform, and record regularly most often perform in scheduled places at scheduled times but continue to seek out other opportunities to play in different spaces and with different musicians in order to maintain their creativity and remain in touch with their emotions. Ultimately, this has left behind a diverse and spread-out structural history of jazz, one that transcends the world of clubs and recording studios and includes the more private spaces of jazz musicians' lives.

Conclusion: Homes, Museums, and the Future of Jazz

Enterprising tourists of jazz will likely be disappointed at the relative dearth of existing clubs and other kinds of spaces in which their favorite performer(s) played during much of the twentieth century. Among them, the Apollo Theater and Village Vanguard in New York are exceptional as still-thriving, uninterrupted hubs of black culture and jazz performance. Others, such as the Morton Theater in Athens, Georgia and even the Jewell Building (formerly the Dreamland Ballroom) in Omaha, Nebraska, suffered structural damage and/or periods of neglect since hosting jazz’s biggest stars between the 1920s and 1950s but have since reopened to the public. Those hoping to hear a jazz performance at New York’s famed Birdland will be delighted to know it still exists but will have to settle for the fact that it’s in its third location, the original (at Broadway and 52nd) having closed in 1965. The building that housed the famed Manhattan night spot, Minton’s Playhouse, where bebop is often thought to have been “invented,” still stands and was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1985. Like the Morton Theater and Jewell Building, it suffered an extensive period of neglect after it closed its doors in 1974 and eventually reopened to the public but, as of 2010, had closed for a second time. Compared to these examples, however, countless others have succumbed to demolition leaving empty space or newer buildings on the ground where they once stood.

Still, for those hoping to visit structures of importance to jazz history, one would have a great deal more luck tracking down clubs and theaters than the actual homes of jazz musicians. One exception is, predictably, in Queens where the Flushing Town Hall

conducts “Queens Jazz Trail” walking tours that showcase over two dozen former and current musicians’ homes. Outside of Queens, the list of existing homes once lived in by jazz greats is shorter and more spread out but, like their Long Island counterparts, often privately owned. As a result, the homes have not been renovated to the period in which the particular musician(s) lived and the interiors are inaccessible to the public. Examples include Miles Davis’ home on Seventy-seventh Street as well as a host of buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places: Coltrane’s Philadelphia home (from 1952 to 1958 – added in 1999); Duke Ellington’s long-time Harlem apartment on St. Nicholas (added in 1976); saxophonist Charlie Parker’s Manhattan apartment (added in 1994); bandleader Fletcher Henderson’s Georgia home (added in 1982); and trumpeter “Bix” Beiderbecke’s boyhood home in Davenport, Iowa (added in 1977).²⁶⁵ It is quite fitting, then, that the home of the one jazz musician most often credited with turning jazz into an art form and influencing everything that came after him is the one exception compared to all of those listed above.

The Louis Armstrong House Museum (itself a stop along the “Queens Jazz Trail”) was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1977, became a City of New York Landmark in 1983, and first opened its doors to the public in 2003.²⁶⁶ Located in the working-class neighborhood of Corona, it was purchased by Armstrong’s wife Lucille in 1943. Louis Armstrong lived there with her until his death in 1971 (in the home’s master bedroom) after which she continued to use it as her primary residence until she

²⁶⁵ “National Register of Historic Places – Performing Arts,” accessed June 22, 2012, http://nrhp.focus.nps.gov/natreghome.do?searchtype=natreghome. This is the homepage for the National Register of Historic Places (NHRP), run by the National Park Service. It contains a searchable database for all sites that have been added.
died 12 years later. In accordance with her will, the city of New York then took
ownership of the home and promised to transform it into "a living memorial to her
husband." Since then, while the city retained ownership of the property, management
of the home was placed in the hands of nearby Queens College (which also houses
Armstrong's archives). Visitors can now take tours of the partially renovated home,
conduct research with the museum's collections, purchase souvenirs in the museum's gift
shop, and attend numerous public events, such as concerts and lectures, held on site.
Keeping up with the times, the Louis Armstrong House Museum has both an interactive
website (www.louisarmstronghouse.org) and a Facebook page
(www.facebook.com/louisarmstronghousemuseum). Its regular Facebook posts consist
of information on the famed trumpeter, video links to his performances, as well as photos
and film clips from inside the home and recently sponsored events providing a form of
virtual access to the museum from around the world.

While the efforts to commemorate Armstrong through the use of his home as a
museum remain exceptional, recent efforts have been mounted to draw attention to the
homes of John Coltrane and Miles Davis. In 2004, Coltrane fan Steve Fulgoni saved the
saxophonist's Long Island home from demolition and successfully convinced the town of
Huntington to place a historical marker in front of it in order to increase public
awareness. Since then, the home has been acquired by the town and designated a local
historic landmark. More recently, however, it has been listed on both the National
Register of Historic Places and as one of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's 11
Most Endangered Historic Places on account of the massive funding needed to pay for
the home's restoration and interpretation. Fulgoni currently sits on the board of an

267 Carter-Kennedy, The Lucille Armstrong Story, 38.
organization called the Friends of the Coltrane Home that includes members of Coltrane’s family and manages the fund raising efforts. Since its inception, the group has garnered the support of some of jazz’s living legends, attracted the attention of the global media, and keeps fans up to date with its efforts through a website (www.thecoltranehome.org) through which sympathetic fans can donate money. The organization can already boast tens of thousands of dollars in donations between the State of New York and the National Trust for Historic Preservation but will need even more to realize its goal of utilizing the home as a museum, archives and learning center that “celebrates the Coltranes’ music and influences” and outreach center for students and adults alike.268

While Fulgoni’s efforts technically remain in limbo, more recent news and success has resulted from the efforts of longtime Davis neighbor Shirley Zafirau to memorialize the building and block. After Davis moved away from 312 W. 77th St. in 1985, the home was remodeled and has since been used as an apartment building. In May 2013, the Transportation Committee of a municipal services organization called Community Board 7 approved the idea of having a historical medallion installed on the home, commemorating Davis’ life and times while a resident there. This move prompted a ceremony on the home’s front stoop complete with appearances and speeches from Davis family members as well as a jam session with some of jazz’s biggest names. In December 2013, capping off a five-year push for Zafirau, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg signed a bill officially renaming West 77th Street, between Riverside Drive and West End Avenue as “Miles Davis Way” which allowed Davis to join the ranks of

other famous jazz musicians, such as Duke Ellington and Chico O’Farrill, who have had streets named after them in New York.\textsuperscript{269} Furthermore, it was done in the face of skepticism - the same group that would vote on Zafirau’s plan, for instance, had already ruled against an effort to rename West 72\textsuperscript{nd} Street and Central Park West after John Lennon in response to neighbors’ fears that it would turn the area into “a tourist circus.”\textsuperscript{270}

The full effects of the Davis and Coltrane projects have yet to be seen but the potential benefits of their success remain high. A BBC reporter carrying the story of Fulgoni’s efforts in January 2012 concluded that because jazz is no longer the soundtrack of New York City and is “struggling to find new audiences,” the idea of using a musician’s nearby home as a cultural center to promote jazz could go a long way towards keeping the art form alive. Similar efforts, such as Baltimore’s Eubie Blake Jazz Institute and Cultural Center, while not utilizing a musicians’ actual home, have demonstrated long-term success, thus creating a potential model for Fulgoni and the Friends of the Coltrane Home and supporting the BBC reporter’s claim. In any case, considering the dearth of information on jazz musicians’ homes in the collective narrative of jazz history, it seems ironic that the very thing often ignored by jazz scholars at the expense of the

\textsuperscript{270} Leslie Albrecht, “Miles Davis Could Get Upper West Side Street Corner Named For Him,” October 13, 2010, accessed April 5, 2012, www.DNAinfo.com. In this article, Albrecht claims that one of the reasons commemorating Davis’ time at 312 W. 77\textsuperscript{th} St. is so important is because of the music that was composed and/or played there. According to Albrecht, Davis moved into the home in 1958 and worked out ideas with pianist Bill Evans that were included in the 1959 album, Kind of Blue, as well as conceiving of the 1969 album Bitches Brew “in the brownstone’s basement.” Based on the best available evidence, Davis couldn’t have worked on Kind of Blue at the home because the album came out before he moved in, but the connection with Bitches Brew remains plausible. In the end, the questionability of Albrecht’s claims about the year Davis moved in and the home’s connection with Kind of Blue reflects what’s at stake for historians in terms of connecting residential space to the lives of jazz musicians.
music could end up at the center of ideas on how to revive it – for the time being, perhaps a "tourist circus" is precisely what jazz needs.
CHAPTER FIVE

Miles and Martin: Jazz, Instrument Ads, and Identity

Introduction

Miles Davis' "career" as an endorser of trumpet manufacturers began, not with Martin, but with a Boston-based company called Vega in 1949; in print, at least, it was extremely short-lived. Between October and December of that year, Davis "appeared" in only two ads for the manufacturer in the pages of Down Beat, once in person and the other in text. The former ad featured a photograph taken in January 1949 while Davis was appearing with Oscar Pettiford's all-star bebop combo at the Clique Club in New York City. In the photo, Davis is sitting in between black trumpeter Fats Navarro and white trombonist Kai Winding, both fellow Pettiford all-stars and Vega endorsers. Davis looks admiringly at his trumpet as Navarro and Winding look on, all three of them smiling. Navarro, holding his trumpet between his knees, supports Davis' with his left hand near the tuning slide while his right, with open palm and outstretched fingers, is placed several inches directly in front of the bell. One might surmise that the photograph has captured Navarro explaining the explosive power of Davis' Power Model Vega trumpet. In the latter ad, which featured a photograph of white trumpeter Don Fagerquist, of Artie Shaw's band, Davis is only mentioned in the caption which noted that both trumpeters used the Vega Power Model "exclusively" and that Davis was Fagerquist's "favorite star." The company, which had been advertising its brass instrument line in Down Beat since the mid-1930s (soon after the magazine began), would only advertise it once more before disappearing from the magazine's pages altogether. Its last brass ad, in the January

27, 1950 issue, featured black trombonist and bebopper J.J. Johnson endorsing the Vega Power Model trombone.\footnote{Down Beat, December 16, 1949, 16; Down Beat, January 27, 1950, 11. Soon after Johnson’s ad, Vega would abandon production of its brass horns in an attempt to concentrate on its more popular line of stringed instruments. For more on Vega’s company history, see Ken Achard, History and Development of the American Guitar (UK: Musical New Services, Ltd., 1979; The Bold Strummer Ltd., 1990). Vega’s line of brass instruments appears to have begun in the early 1900s after the company purchased the Standard Band Instrument Company.}

Some instrument ads go so far as to note which albums or singles feature the sounds of their endorser’s horns, but Davis’ two ads for Vega did not. However, evidence suggests that he – as well as Winding and Johnson – might have played with one on the now-famous album, Birth of the Cool, by the Miles Davis Nonet.\footnote{Vail, Miles’ Diary, 24-32. The album’s first recording session, which included Winding, took place on January 21, 1949, three days before the Pettiford band completed a nearly three-week stint at the Clique Club. The second recording session, which featured Johnson as Winding’s replacement, took place just two months later. Furthermore, despite its use of a dated photograph, the timing of Davis’ first ad for Vega coincided with the release of the upcoming album’s two singles, “Boplicity” and “Israel,” which were recorded during the aforementioned second session. The third and final recording session, which also featured Johnson as the group’s sole trombonist, took place on March 9, 1950, almost two months after Vega’s final brass instrument ad appeared in Down Beat. It is unclear whether or not Davis and Johnson were continuing their “exclusive” use of Vega instruments at that time, but neither would appear in ads for other instrument manufacturers for many months.} If proven, it would mean that at the tail end of Vega’s foray into brass instrument manufacturing (Vega was more well-known as a maker of stringed instruments) the company’s products helped shape the sound of modern jazz for years to come. In any case, Davis’ ads for Vega appeared just a few years into his professional career, while he was leading a double-life as sideman and bandleader, and marked him as an up-and-coming talent. In addition, as the aforementioned Vega ads suggest, endorsements with instrument manufacturers were a way for young musicians to gain celebrity status without necessarily having to do the work of leading a band. An endorsement deal with Vega, it seemed, simultaneously provided Davis with the trumpet(s) he used to record a landmark
album and offered him an important early opportunity to become like the company's namesake: a star.

Yet, for those who appear in advertisements, any stardom they experience as a result comes with strings attached. In exchange for increased exposure (and often financial compensation), individuals allow companies to capitalize on their image and/or popularity by featuring them in their advertisements. In some cases, companies capitalized on celebrities' endorsements by subsuming their identities into that of the company. Such was the case for individual males whose endorsement of the Martin Band Instrument Company earned them the moniker "a Martin man." As far as all musicians are concerned, the very nature of print advertisements also decouples them and their music from the contexts of live performances with particular groups. As a result, such ads become cultural texts infused with new layers of meaning on both the personal and musical levels. In addition to these meanings being inherently influenced by the contexts in which the ads are placed (primarily the other ads, text, and/or pictures that surround them), they include the suggested meanings of the ad from the company's point-of-view and the actual meanings constructed by members of the ad's collective audience.

While this is true with all kinds of advertisements for any product that feature musicians' endorsements (or any kind of music for that matter), I'm particularly interested in the dynamics of this process as it relates specifically to printed ads for instrument manufacturers. Like all companies, instrument manufacturers are interested in maximizing their profits. Many have attempted to do so over the years by appealing to a broad customer base, often through endorsements from a diverse group of players who represent different races, genders, ethnicities, primary instruments, and musical styles.
Because musicians are the companies’ primary market and instruments are a musicians’ chief expressive tool, audiences of their ads are encouraged to “hear” the sounds of each musician in the context of their fellow endorsers. We might say, in other words, that, through a diverse set of endorsers, instrument makers create their own, otherwise unlikely, “bands” that perform a cacophonous mixture of sounds and identities for the company’s benefit. Most readers and musicians might have interpreted such ads as having enhanced their sense of the instruments’ possibilities, and thus appeal. But, because instrument makers such as Martin tended to design ads which included photographs of multiple endorsers in a non-hierarchical fashion (except when it came to promoting its endorsers’ standings in popularity polls), it stands to reason that other musicians might have interpreted these ads as a threat to their individual artistic integrity by forging associations between them and dissimilar styles and practitioners, let alone musicians assumed to be of an inferior skill level. If it weren’t for their mutual association with Vega, one has to wonder how else they could have read about Don Fagerquist and Miles Davis in the same advertisement.

In this chapter, I intend to unpack this complex process as it relates to Miles Davis and his long-time trumpet supplier, the Martin Band Instrument Company. Doing so not only allows me an opportunity to explore the broader topics of instrument manufacturers and their relationships with jazz musicians – the latter being an oft-ignored subject in the field of music (not to mention jazz) history – but more specifically to investigate how the discourses of jazz and race intersect with ads and help frame their multiple layers of meaning. Understanding what was at stake for Davis during his tenure with Martin,
however, first requires placing his endorsements in the contexts of how race and jazz had been advertised before his association with Martin began.

_Race Record Ads and Image Manipulation_

In his 2003 book, *Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology, and African American Culture between the World Wars*, Joel Dinerstein looked at how big band swing and the elaborate dances that often accompanied it by African Americans represented a unique form of cultural adaptation amidst anxiety about human participation in an increasingly mechanized world. As he notes, the developments took place during a time when most understood African American expressive culture as primitivistic and not worthy of deeper contemplation. A more widespread understanding of jazz, in particular, as a serious art form was yet to come but Dinerstein identifies endorsement ads by black jazz musicians for instrument makers from the time period as exceptional forerunners to that train of thought. Providing images from such ads that appeared in the jazz magazine *Metronome* between 1936 and 1940, Dinerstein claims that they represent “some of the first dignified images of African Americans ever presented in the national media: jazz musicians dressed in suits and featured as artists, media stars, and representative Americans.”274

Prior to the mid-1930s, the primitivistic framework indeed helped define representations of African American music and musicians in the national media. Ads for “race records” – recordings targeted specifically to black consumers – by companies like Okeh and Paramount began appearing in the nation’s largest black newspapers in the

---

early 1920s to promote the latest recordings by black blues, gospel, and jazz artists. The idea of promoting black artists at the time was new and "race records" represented segregation in the recording industry. The appearance of these ads helped turn working musicians into major stars and testified to the growth of the black consumer market, itself a product of recent mass migration northward. At the same time, however, the recording industry was dominated by whites whose limited knowledge of blacks was often limited to a host of antiquated stereotypes. Furthermore, most record companies weren't eager to upset white customers, especially in the South, and used racist and minstrel imagery in some of their ads in order to stroke whites' sense of racial superiority. "Black artists had made it onto records," author Karl Miller has recently noted, "but they were still playing minstrel buffoons."275

As Miller and others have demonstrated, however, not all "race record" ads contained racist imagery and many went so far as to make direct appeals to black consumers. Paramount, for instance, ran an ad in 1925 celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of Emancipation and some ads for Okeh and Ajax Records in the mid-to-late 1920s utilized African American slang. Black Swan (1921-1924), started by Harry H. Pace, was "the first major black-owned record company"276 and described itself and its lineup in some ads as "The Only Negro Records Made by the Only Negro Company Using Exclusively Negro Voices." In addition, while a handful of Black Swan ads featured photographs of their artists - including female blues singers Ethel Waters, Etta Mooney, and Fae Barnes - the heavy majority only featured the company's logo, a

275 Karl Hagstrom Miller, Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 207. Miller was also careful to note that some black consumers were offended by such ads.
floating black swan, craning its neck towards the water. Many companies also used humor in their ads to sell records by featuring cartoon illustrations that reflected ridiculously literal depictions of song titles and, as Mark K. Dolan has argued, a handful of ads’ illustrations innocently appealed to recent migrants’ nostalgia and shared memory of the South.

Nevertheless, the impulse to connect jazz with primitivism and the South was strong. Numerous references to jazz as “jungle music” in the mainstream media and the existence of popular performance venues such as The Plantation Café (Chicago, 1924-1927) and Cotton Club (New York City, 1923-1940) are evidence that this impulse transcended the record industry. At the same time, images of fictitious African Americans characters such as Aunt Jemima and the Gold Dust Twins (both of whom had “real-life” counterparts that would appear in person to promote products) had long-since graced the shelves of America’s stores “endorsing” a variety of goods from food items to cleaning products. Such image manipulation was designed to lend a sense of authenticity to each product by privileging African Americans’ former roles as slaves by turning them into commodities and tethering their identities to the labor and service sectors. As fellow members of the culture industries, via entertainment, it is no wonder that African American musicians (not to mention their music) often received similar treatment.

---

277 See ads for Black Swan in *Chicago Defender*, 1921-1924
279 Newspapers such as the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Washington Post* published a number of pieces on the jungle-jazz connection between the 1910s and 1920s routinely attacking both the sound of the music itself and the dances it inspired. One short piece in the *Washington Post* in 1923 put it succinctly: “music that has charms to sooth a savage breast has spells to wake the savage step.” The same piece went on to refer to jazz as “jungle jangle.”
Trumpeter Louis Armstrong emerged during this same period as one of jazz’s biggest black stars. But, while jazz historians tend to agree that he made his most influential and groundbreaking recordings during the 1920s, Armstrong scholar Brian Harker reminds us that such recognition took many years to arrive. Instead of being identified as a genius of sorts at the time, Harker suggests, 1920s listeners heard Armstrong in the context of popular novelty entertainment wherein “the outlandishly new was expected as a starting point for success.” Likewise, ads for Armstrong’s recordings on the Okeh label between 1926 and 1930 appear par for the course representing a microcosm of the industry’s complicated approach to racial matters. For the first two years of that period, readers were just as likely to come across an ad that framed Armstrong visually as a serious artist as they were to see minstrel-like imagery accompany a description of the songs. However, during the last three years, cartoon images of dancing and strutting minstrels (some of whom were depicted with elated, scantily-clad white women) became more prevalent. While none of the aforementioned ads depicted Armstrong himself as a minstrel, Okeh came extremely close in 1930 with a pair of ads that superimposed a photograph of Armstrong’s head on cartoon bodies, including a tuxedo-jacketed and checkerboard-pants wearing man carrying a woman (“Song of the Islands”) and a polka-dotted bandana and furry-chaps wearing cowboy shooting a gun in the air (“I’m A Ding Dong Daddy”).

281 Brian Harker, *Louis Armstrong’s Hot Five and Hot Seven Recordings* (New York: Oxford, 2011), 6-7. 282 For perfect examples of this, see ads for “Wild Man Blues” and “Gully Low Blues” that appeared in successive weeks of the *Chicago Defender* in 1927. Both ads were the same size and featured a single image accompanied by text. But, while the “Wild Man Blues” ad (July 16) showcased a cartoon image of a minstrelized dancing African tribesman, “Gully Low Blues” (July 23) featured a photograph of a tuxedoed Armstrong holding a trumpet against his thigh and smiling at the camera, his head offset in the foreground by a large black star. 283 [“Song of the Islands” – Advertisement], *Chicago Defender*, March 29, 1930, 4; [“I’m A Ding Dong Daddy” – Advertisement], *Chicago Defender*, October 4, 1930, 2.
By the early 1930s, Armstrong’s fame as a recording artist had spilled over into
the visual fields of cartoons and films, both of which had recently integrated motion
pictures with sound. However, the advent of such technology not only failed to
destabilize the time-honored practice of associating jazz with black primitivism, it
appears to have provided new opportunities to bring Armstrong’s Okeh ads to life. In an
eerie continuation of the disembodied head motif, Armstrong was featured in a 1932
Betty Boop cartoon entitled “I’ll Be Glad When You’re Dead You Rascal You.” Though
the episode starts out with actual footage of Armstrong’s nicely-suited orchestra
performing “High Society,” an image of his floating head appears later as an African
cannibal chasing Boop’s partners Bimbo and Koko while singing the cartoon’s theme
song. Later that year, in another eerily similar instance of depicting Armstrong in odd
clothing, he appeared in the short film A Rhapsody in Black and Blue performing “I’ll Be
Glad When You’re Dead You Rascal You” and “Shine” as the leopard-skin bedecked
“King of Jazzmania.”

Despite these portrayals, Armstrong biographer Gary Giddins has argued that the
trumpeter’s complete ownership of his role in Rhapsody signified “unequivocal self-
confidence bordering on macho arrogance” and thus transcendence of the industry’s
“racist trappings.” Film scholar Donald Bogle indirectly agreed, noting that while racially
degrading film roles like Armstrong’s were sadly common during the 1930s, the era
nonetheless marked a “Golden Age” for black actors on account of the “joie de vivre”
with which most of them approached their roles.284 Such arguments work to retroactively
grant agency to black artists and may have captured the reactions of many an Armstrong

284 Scott Allen Nollen, Louis Armstrong: The Life, Music, and Screen Career (Jefferson, NC: McFarland,
2004), 41.
fan at the time. Either way, they wrest total control over the images' meaning from the hands of the media and serve as important reminders that the visual realm is inherently subjected to varied forms of interpretation. Armstrong’s record ads and roles on film helped catapult him into the national spotlight but they ultimately came at a cost. Whatever black musicians and fans thought of Armstrong’s ads and film appearances at the time, they likely realized at least one thing: achieving widespread fame involved surrendering partial control of your artistic and racial identities to the media. Respectable, non-racialized roles were indeed few and far between for black musicians during Armstrong’s heyday but, as Dinerstein noted above, the tides began to shift by the mid-1930s as swing became America’s popular music.

**Big Band Era as “Golden Age” of Musician Endorsements**

The one-two punch of radio and the Great Depression nearly drove the entire record industry into bankruptcy in the early 1930s, limiting the few opportunities black artists had for visual exposure in the media. However, the immense popularity of big band swing between the mid-1930s and 1940s not only helped to revive the record industry but ultimately created a heightened public profile for its players. Buoyed by the emergence of nationally circulating jazz-themed periodicals such as *Down Beat* and *Metronome*, a long list of companies that serviced (or sought to service) the multiple needs of big bands and instrumentalists had outlets through which they advertised their goods to a growing audience of fans, aspiring musicians, and professional players. Like “race record” ads before them, endorsement ads for such goods became an avenue

---

285 *Down Beat* began publication in 1934 while *Metronome*, which had begun publication in 1885, began focusing on jazz in the early 1930s.
of fame for swing era musicians but, unlike them, they included a variety of products as well as a diverse line-up of endorsers: black and white, male and female, sideman and bandleader. If the 1930s was a "Golden Age" for black artists on account of how they approached their film roles, it could also be seen as a "Golden Age" for jazz musicians, black and white, on account of the sheer number of endorsement ads in which they appeared. These ads featured a wide range of products that included music stands, suits, mutes, mouthpieces, reeds, cases, method books, amplifiers, and even tour buses, but the majority of them were for instruments.

Prior to the swing era, instrument manufacturers advertised their products in a variety of ways. Publications such as Boy's Life, Popular Science, and the Music Supervisors Journal (later Music Educators Journal) featured print advertisements and salesmen were even known, on occasion, to go door-to-door and hold local demonstrations of their products. In each format, testimonials from current players played an important role in selling instruments and nothing epitomized that approach better than trade journals published by the manufacturers themselves. The Martin Band Instrument Company, which was founded in 1905, was a late comer to this trend, having published its first journal, The Martin Bandwagon, in 1940 (Conn and Buescher, for instance, had begun publication of their journals many decades earlier). But, like its many predecessors, The Martin Bandwagon's pages were saturated with endorsements of Martin instruments from both professional and amateur players. In its very first issue, a short article on the role of endorsements in instrument ads stated that all musicians are different and therefore base their decisions on which instrument to buy on a variety of factors. "The reputation of the manufacturer, methods of construction, lasting quality,
playing ease, tone, economical service and many other factors,” said the article, “should be equally if not more important to the discriminating artist than the mere idea that ‘Joe Doakes plays one and so should I.’” Nevertheless, the same piece acknowledged the importance of having “Big Names” in advertising, claiming that those who endorse Martins “have a wide influence on the purchase of instruments.”

By 1940, the kinds of “Big Name” musicians endorsing instrument manufacturers had changed quite a bit. Not only had black musicians begun appearing in such ads, but the idea of including jazz musicians was fairly new. Between the latter half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, players and conductors in military and town bands as well as orchestras were most often featured in instrument makers’ ads. But, as school bands became more common, instrument manufacturers began to shift their focus. One of the most successful American instrument companies, Conn, went so far as to sponsor the first National Band Competition in 1923 to take advantage of this trend. A consistent winner of the competition in subsequent years, the Joliet Township High School Band (Joliet, Illinois), was featured in ads for Conn and other instrument makers as a result and in ways that helped set the stage for how big bands would be featured in similar ads during the swing era.

Both high school and swing era big bands were large ensembles which featured a diverse instrumentation (brass, woodwind, percussion – many big bands also featured stringed instruments such as guitars and basses). In ads for instrument makers that

---

featured both kinds of groups, it was not uncommon for either the entire band or sections within it to be pictured. Specialization within the instrument manufacturing industry resulted in companies that tended to produce either brass and/or woodwinds while others each made stringed instruments and drum/percussion equipment somewhat exclusively. As a result, well-known bands (of both types) and/or their individual sections occasionally appeared in ads for more than one instrument maker and within short periods of time. In the September 1934 issue of the Music Educators Journal, for instance, the entire Joliet band is featured in an ad for Conn while, on a separate page, its drum line appeared in an ad for Ludwig drums.\footnote{288} Eight years later, in the pages of Down Beat, Jimmy Dorsey’s big band could similarly boast endorsements with two different instrument makers (Conn for his brass section and WFL for his drummer) while his saxophone section was featured in an ad for Rico Reeds.\footnote{289} Such ads, particularly those for sections, thrust sidemen into the national spotlight and doubtless increased their public profile. However, the “group shot” format often used in ads for both kinds of groups, combined with the fact that each one was typically pictured in matching uniforms, underscored the very nature of that profile by promoting a sense of collective celebrity over an individual one. To the extent that sidemen become celebrities through these ads, their status was defined by their membership in the group and not as the group’s leader.

Of course, this is not to say that there was no such thing as individual celebrity when it came to both kinds of groups. High school band directors and big band leaders

\footnote{288} The Conn ad was featured on the journal’s back cover while the Ludwig ad appeared on page 51. Both ads celebrated the fact that the Joliet band had just won the National Band Competition for the sixth time. By the end of the decade, their domination banned them from the competition all together.\footnote{289} The ads for each company featuring Dorsey’s sections and drummer appear at various times and among many others in Down Beat throughout 1942.
symbolized the groups' success and were commonly depicted in ads as influential, authoritative figures. In the aforementioned Conn ad featuring the Joliet band, the photograph of the entire band (which is so large that faces are rendered unrecognizable) is offset by a close-up of its director, A.R. McAlister. The ad also includes a quote from McAlister attributing "most" of the band's success to its "switch from other makers to Conns." Utilizing a similar approach, a Conn ad for the Jimmie Lunceford band in 1937 (the first instance of an entirely black jazz band endorsing a major instrument maker in the pages of Down Beat), promoted the group's upcoming European tour while an image of Lunceford looms over a much smaller image of the band.  

A handful of ads for several drum makers in the early 1940s continued to depict this power dynamic by depicting bandleader and drummer, with the leader actually standing over the seated drummer. One such ad for Ludwig, showcasing drummer Dez Thompson with her female bandleader Ada Leonard, reflect the fact that this form of depiction was utilized for all kinds of big bands. Endorsement ads for Shastock and Ray Robinson mutes by the brass sections of Tommy Dorsey and Glenn Miller's bands, as well as those by the Bob Crosby Orchestra for Selmer Porta-Desks (music stands), visually employ a famous-by-association dynamic as well, suggesting that doing so had become a proven formula of sorts for both instrument and band accessory makers alike. Ads for such companies had helped thrust big band sidemen into the national spotlight but made sure that any stardom they experienced was tempered by their association with a more famous bandleader.

291 Down Beat, February 1937, 15; Down Beat, December 1, 1939, 13; Down Beat, February 1939, 6.
America's entry into World War II marked a change in the types of ads for instrument makers. Companies, such as Conn and Martin, were pressed into military service and forced to use their special equipment to make materials of war as opposed to new instruments. Throughout the war, ads for instrument makers showcased the praise they received from the military for the quality of their products and/or endorsements from musician-soldiers who played the company's instruments; no endorsements from non-military musicians were featured. As such, each company took part in the culture of sacrifice that greatly defined life on the home front in America and aligned its goals with that of the nation. A 1944 ad for the Martin Company, for instance, featured a response from its employees to a letter of praise from the U.S. Undersecretary of War and having been awarded the Army-Navy Production Award “for high achievement in the production of materials of war.” In it, the employees expressed their gratitude “for the opportunity of using our facilities and our skills on an important assignment in the production of war material outside the field of music” and pledged to continue their efforts as such “to the cause of quick and complete Victory.” Later that year, with an end to the war in sight, Martin began to shift its focus to getting civilian customers excited about “post-war Martins.” “We haven’t any Martins since 1942,” an ad in the *Music Educators Journal* stated, “[but] the instruments we’ll have ready, when war restrictions are lifted, assure you an entirely new experience...in scale...in tone... [ellipses in original] in all-around ‘playability’ that will make Martin ownership a greater joy than ever!”

292 *Down Beat*, September 1, 1944, 5.
293 *Music Educators Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (November-December 1944): 29. The same ad noted, at the bottom, that any member of the armed services who played a Martin was eligible for a “$25 After-the-War Purchase Bond” for free that was to be “Acceptable as cash on any post-war Martin.”
The latter half of the 1940s witnessed the end of the war, and just as veteran soldiers strove for a "return to normalcy," so too did instrument makers. With their manufacturing plants and workers allowed to re-focus their efforts on making instruments, companies like Martin began running endorsement ads with non-military musicians again but had to contend with changes that had been taking place in jazz since the decade began. Miles Davis arrived in New York in 1946, a year after the end of the war, to play with saxophonist Charlie Parker and trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, stars at the forefront of a new style called bebop. With its emphasis on fast tempos and virtuosic solos, bebop was not amenable to dancing and was typically performed by small groups, which marked a drastic shift from the more dance-friendly days of the big band era. The small size of most bebop groups - 4-6 players - was similar to that of jazz bands from the 1910s and 1920s and, like the race record ads from that period, helped re-focus attention primarily on band leaders/individual musicians (as opposed to entire sections, bands, or sidemen).

Endorsement ads for instrument makers began to reflect this trend while still attempting to treat existing big bands much as they had before the war. Davis’ aforementioned ads for Vega are good examples, as they frame Davis, Navarro, and Winding as individual musicians (as opposed to members of Pettiford’s group) while the title of the second ad - “Artie plus Fagerquist plus Vega...POWER!!” - squarely framed Fagerquist’s identity as a sideman with Artie Shaw’s big band. In the coming years, as the small group format remained central to the aesthetic development of jazz, bandleaders would increasingly be featured in endorsement ads at the expense of their sidemen. But, in their attempts to maintain a broad customer base, instrument makers continued to
create ads that mediated jazz musicians’ identities in unique ways. As an African American jazz trumpeter who first became famous in the late 1940s and went on to appear in a variety of ads, Davis was positioned in such a way as to signify on the history of Armstrong’s race record ads by benefiting from both the swing era shift away from primitive representation and the post-swing era’s emphasis on individual musicians in instrument advertisements. By the time Davis rose to fame, the world of ads that he became a part of was better suited to visually represent black jazz musicians as serious, respectable artists. But, as Davis’ tenure with Martin attests, ads for instrument makers in the post-bop era reflect the variety of ways in which racial and musical identities became intimately intertwined amidst a context of social, musical, and institutional change.

*Miles and Martin*

Miles Davis’ first known ad for Martin appeared in the February 1951 issue of *Metronome* and pictured him alongside fellow trumpeters Dizzy Gillespie and Howard McGhee. As evidenced by Vega’s use of a nine-month old photograph in its first Miles Davis ad, the timing of the February 1951 ad for Martin tells us little in terms of when Davis actually signed with them; the exact moment he made the switch from Vega to Martin may be forever unknown. But even though he would prove to be one of the longest-running Martin artists in company history (if not the longest), Davis’ switching of trumpet makers in the 1950s would not be his last. After having exclusively appeared in Martin ads between February 1951 and February 1955, Davis appeared in his first ad for

---

294 To the extent that an advertisement’s text is reliable, it would seem this took place sometime in 1950. The same Vega ad that featured Fagerquist and noted that he and Davis played with Vegas “exclusively” also appeared in the January 1950 issue of *Metronome* (p. 28).
Besson in December of 1955. But, starting in March of 1957 and ending in December 1958, Davis would appear in ads for both companies. January 1959 would thus mark the beginning of Davis’ long-term exclusive relationship with Martin. Until his death in 1991, Davis would personally appear in a number of ads for a variety of products/services (AR 3a home speaker systems, TDK, Honda, BMI, Van liquor) but they would not include a different instrument manufacturer.

For what it’s worth, Davis’ numerous switching of companies during the 1950s, and occasional doubling-up, seemed par for the course for him, particularly with respect to record labels. Davis had begun the decade continuing a recording contract he had had with Capitol Records since January 1949. In January 1951, with his Capitol contract fulfilled (and supposedly around the same time he first signed with Martin), Davis was recruited to join Prestige Records. However, between 1952 and 1955, Davis would lead recording sessions with bands for the Prestige, Blue Note, Debut (owned by Davis’ friend and bassist Charles Mingus), and lastly Columbia labels before settling exclusively with the latter company until a late-career switch to Warner Brothers in 1985. While his relationship between Capitol and Vega, as well as the timing of his contracts with Prestige and Martin seemed to have lined up fairly neatly, his first recording session with

---


Columbia in October 1955 occurred just before Davis' back-and-forth between Besson and Martin got underway. Davis, it seemed, had settled down with a record label several years before doing the same with instrument makers but, by the beginning of 1959, Davis' "sampler tour" of record labels and trumpet makers was over. Columbia and Martin had won the allegiance of jazz's biggest star.

In addition to the companies with whom he was affiliated, the 1950s were very much a decade of change for Davis' music. The two famous albums, whose recording sessions bookended that period, *Birth of the Cool* and *Kind of Blue*, were not only harbingers of new and very different jazz styles (cool and modal) but were separated by recordings that helped epitomize the sound of hard bop as well. Davis' being on the forefront of every major style of jazz during the 1950s helped distinguish him from the two most famous black jazz trumpeters who came before him, Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie, both of whom continued to regularly perform earlier styles with which they had become associated. Despite these distinctions, the mostly white readership of *Down Beat* and teams of international jazz critics consistently gave all three men (and, oftentimes, their bands as well) high popularity rankings on a biannual basis throughout most the decade.\(^{299}\) Ranking highly in the same polls were several prominent white trumpeters, notably Maynard Ferguson and Chet Baker, suggesting that there were solid fan bases for a wide variety of jazz styles as well as black and white players in the

\(^{299}\) See results of both *Down Beat*'s Reader's Poll (taken from its readership – started in 1936) and its International Jazz Critics Poll (taken from critics in both the U.S. and Europe – started in 1953). The Reader's Poll usually appeared in the magazine's last December issue while the International Jazz Critics' Poll appeared in an August issue. Armstrong, Gillespie, and Davis, and oftentimes their bands, consistently rank highly in both polls especially during the first half of the decade. Results from both polls during the latter half (and well into the 1960s) are more clearly marked by Davis' ascendance into major stardom and Gillespie's persistent popularity, the two often beating each other out for first place.
1950s. Such results ultimately obscured the presence of racialized tension within the jazz community but were wholeheartedly embraced by instrument manufacturers eager to promote their products’ wide appeal.

Throughout the 1950s, instrument makers routinely took out ads that celebrated their endorsers’ poll rankings and no other company than Martin scored as high when it came to trumpet players. One such ad from 1959, entitled “Poll Winners Play Martin,” celebrated the fact that Martin artists took four of the top five spots in recent polls and had this to say about its success: “Check the Poll Winners right down the line... check the trumpet they play. Far and away you’ll find Martin the overwhelming leader. Year after year, too.” A similar ad from 1956 (with the same title but different design) also made note of the fact that three of its players were ranked in the top four spots in the Down Beat and Metronome polls, marking “the 11th straight year” that “a Martin man” has been in the top five for both polls. With such ads, it was clear that Martin had endorsements from the decade’s most popular jazz trumpeters. As such, the company framed itself as the premier trumpet maker for established jazz artists. But, it also repeatedly harnessed the endorsement’s long-acknowledged power to appeal to consumers’ desires for emulation by framing their trumpets as talismans of sorts, capable of providing prospective trumpeters with the same tone quality, range, ease of play, and, by extension, success enjoyed by their famous endorsers. Having noted its endorsers’ good standing

---

300 Polls similar to those taken in Down Beat were taken in another jazz magazine, Metronome. As jazz scholar Ingrid Monson has recently shown, the high rankings of black vs. white players in both magazines throughout the 1950s were sometimes inconsistent depending on the instrument played. As far as trumpeters went, Gillespie and Davis dominated Metronome polls throughout the decade while Down Beat readers shifted their preferences from white trumpeters to black ones as the decade went on. See Monson, Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
in the polls, the aforementioned 1959 ad, for instance, stated that “Simply, Martin measures up! It’s the extra-range trumpet. Shouldn’t YOU enjoy these benefits too?”

Martin’s framing of its trumpets and star-studded line-up of endorsers allowed the company to make a powerful pitch to consumers, appealing to those whose decision to buy a Martin trumpet could have relied on any number of distinctive factors (race of the endorser, style of music they represented, popularity of the endorser, quality of the equipment, etc.). Exactly how it was received is hard to tell but if the consistency of the “big names” endorsing Martin had as wide an influence on consumers as the company suggested in 1940, one would have to conclude that sales remained high throughout the 1950s.

In any case, the extent to which the company relied on magazine polls to tout their brand was likely met with mixed feelings among black jazz musicians. Davis, for one, was known to have displayed plaques he had received from *Down Beat* polls in his apartment during the 1950s and, because of high standings in recent *Metronome* polls, was a four-time member of the Metronome All-Star band; good poll standings had their benefits. On the other hand, Davis was known to speak out against the critical jazz establishment (an all-white group) which he and others generally viewed as a symbol of racial asymmetry within the jazz world. The jazz musician-critics summit he hosted at the quote ad man, Stanley Resor’s 1929 speech to agency executives on the powers of testimonial advertising. Curiosity, emulation, and a search for authority, Resor concluded were the main reasons testimonials were a successful form of advertising. They work, he claimed, simply because “people like to read about other people.” The authors also acknowledge that, while there is a difference between endorsements and testimonials, it is minimal. “Endorsements,” they state, are “the close cousin of testimonials” via their absence of “explanatory text or narrative” but nonetheless constitute testimonials by implication.

303 On the plaques, see Jack Chambers, *Milestones: The Music and Times of Miles Davis* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 298. Davis was a member of the Metronome All-Star band between 1949 and 1952. Incidentally, the photo of Davis used in many Martin ads throughout the 1950s and into the early 1960s was from when he was a member of the 1949 band. Ironically, this was likely a time when Davis was playing with Vega trumpets instead of Martins.
his Upper West Side home in 1961 is the most tangible example of how he felt on this matter but certainly not the earliest. When the handsome white jazz trumpeter, and fellow Martin artist, Chet Baker rose to fame as an icon of cool jazz in the early 1950s, winning Best Trumpet honors in the 1953 *Down Beat* Reader’s Poll, Davis, who had placed 6th in the same poll, was notably disappointed. Davis met Baker for the first time later that year at a gig in Los Angeles and claimed that Baker “seemed embarrassed” at winning the award, especially over Dizzy Gillespie. “I didn’t hold it against him personally,” Davis said, “although I was mad at the people who picked him….both him and me knew that he had copied a lot of shit from me.”

Davis biographer John Szwed doesn’t attempt to claim who copied what from whom but does acknowledge that the two trumpeters had a number of “striking similarities.” Among them were physical characteristics (both being “slim and handsome”), sex appeal, a love for fast cars and dogs, a doting fan base, and an obsession with music that included a particular interest in popular songs. The public was likely keen on these similarities as well and eager to see how their music compared, evidenced by the scheduling of Baker’s New York debut, in the spring of 1954, at Birdland where his group played opposite the Miles Davis quintet. *Down Beat* columnist Nat Hentoff reviewed the concert and framed it as a contest of sorts in which Davis’ group came out on top. Despite the two leaders’ numerous similarities, Hentoff noted that Davis’ group constituted a “strikingly contrasting presence” compared to “the Bakermen” who sounded “rather frail…and a bit dull.” Davis had his flaws – the occasional fluffed notes and a weakened embouchure that came as a result of inconsistent playing – but, according to

---

Hentoff, they paled in comparison to Baker’s “erratic” tone, “spotty” execution, and lack of energy. Both trumpeters had developed a reputation for skillfully performing ballads by then but Davis’ rendition of *It Never Entered My Mind* reportedly “cut Chet at his own specialty.” Applauding Davis’ bravery for trying out new ideas in solos and his band’s overall coherence, Hentoff concluded that “where Miles and his band plunged in and swam, Chet and his men mostly went wading.” For Davis, who respected Hentoff and had recently been teased by many about the possibility that Baker’s fame would overshadow his own, the review must have come across as vindication, proof that the two men operated on starkly different artistic levels.

Fig. 5.1 Baker and Davis appear together in an ad for Martin, June 1954

---

307 On Davis being teased about Baker, see Szwed, p. 106. Szwed notes that “It was easy to tease Miles about him, and everyone from Miles’ tailor to Bird [saxophonist Charlie Parker] had his turn (‘Hey Miles, there’s a little white cat on the coast who’s gonna eat you up!’).”
Baker fans were surely disappointed to read about his comparatively poor showing in New York but not enough to keep him from winning top honors in that year’s *Down Beat* Reader’s Poll (the results of which were revealed in December), beating out Davis by eight spots. To the extent that Baker fans relished his besting of Davis, however, they weren’t able to do so for long. Davis tied Gillespie for the top spot in 1955’s International Jazz Critics Poll and eked out a first place finish over Baker in that year’s Reader’s Poll, marking the last time the two men’s poll results were close. For the remainder of the decade, Davis often topped trumpet polls in both *Down Beat* and *Metronome* while the best Baker could do was settle for third or fourth place. In relatively short time, Davis managed to eliminate any threat Baker posed to his star power, clearly distinguishing himself as the more popular and artistically significant trumpeter. In the process, Davis made sure that the idea of comparing the two men, especially on a musical basis, became less and less meaningful as the decade wore on. Yet, because both men were Martin artists, remained popular, and because the company strove to appeal to a variety of consumers, Davis and Baker maintained a close association in ads for Martin where their distinctive qualities (i.e. Davis’ supposed superiority) were largely diminished.

When it came to designing their ads, Martin was careful to avoid depicting its endorsers in such a way as to make value judgments on their musical significance. Indeed, not doing so would have risked implying that one musician’s endorsement was more important than another, an idea that ran counter to any company’s mission that involved appealing to a broad customer base. Ads touting a Martin artist’s poll results
were the exception whereby whoever polled highest was singled out in some form or fashion. For Baker in 1953 and 1954, this meant that his head shot was larger than his fellow Martin trumpeters and at the top of a large star.\textsuperscript{309} As for Davis – who won top honors in both magazines’ polls in 1957 and 1959 – the fact that his photos were the same size as the others featured was offset by their placement at either the extreme left or top of the ad where readers were most likely to see it first.\textsuperscript{310} Regardless of who won the poll and when, the size of their photo in the ad, and that photo’s placement, accompanying text in the ad explained each individual’s poll results as an added measure of clarification.

However, a large number of Martin ads in any given year did not reference poll results at all and instead opted for a less hierarchical approach to representation whereby numerous artists were featured in similar-looking photos of the same size arranged in seemingly no particular order around the ad’s text and illustrations. In ads of this type, artists of differing races, musical styles, and levels of popularity were equalized. Despite Davis’ success at distinguishing himself from other jazz trumpeters (and Baker in particular), his numerous appearances in such Martin ads during the 1950s – not to mention the fact that Martin often used an outdated photograph of Davis from the late 1940s in their ads – ensured that those same distinctions were often dissolved in the name of mass appeal. Such were the stakes when one’s representation was subjected to the profit motive of corporations.

\textsuperscript{309} Down Beat, March 24, 1954, 8; Down Beat, April 30, 1955, 4. It should be noted that, in between polls, instrument makers ran ads based on the most recent results. Therefore, both ads cited here are for poll results from the previous year and were printed before the next round of polling results were publicized.

\textsuperscript{310} Down Beat, January 9, 1958, 41; Down Beat, January 8, 1959, 3. In the 1958 ad cited, the photo of each trumpeter featured had the number of how they ranked over top of it. For Davis, this meant not only having a photo at the top of the ad, but with a “1” placed over his body.
As noted in a previous chapter, Davis began playing with custom-made colored Martin trumpets as early as 1960, a change that happened to coincide with those in the company's ad designs and a corporate restructuring. Ads featuring Martin artists, including Davis, began to abandon the practice of featuring numerous images of musicians and instead focusing in on individuals, each getting their own ad space. Furthermore, the newer ads featured updated photographs, including one of Davis that appears to have been taken during a 1959 recording session for *Kind of Blue.* While Baker disappears from the Martin line-up (not to mention the U.S. as of the fall of 1959), the company retained endorsements from a handful of established Martin trumpeters including Dizzy Gillespie and Art Farmer. In addition, the company did not abandon the idea of appealing to a variety of consumers, as evidenced by the continued presence of two older trumpeters – Al Hirt and Roy Eldridge – one white and the other black, both associated with earlier styles. Just as Martin ads were becoming more individualistic in nature, the company cemented plans to join forces with other instrument makers. In January 1961, Martin merged with two other prominent instrument makers – the E.K. Blessing Band Instrument Company and the F.A. Reynolds Company – to form the Richards Music Corporation (RMC). The merger, which was described as "one of the largest mergers in the history of musical instrument manufacturers," greatly expanded the number and kinds of instruments traditionally produced by a single company while, at the same time, it allowed each individual company to retain their brand names and operate under the same management. The company's new head, Paul E. Richards, announced soon thereafter that the expanded inventory would allow RMC to better compete with

---

311 For an example of this ad, see *Metronome,* September 1959, 10.
European manufacturers in hopes of “reversing a trend in imported musical instruments.” 312

Despite the sound of such promise, the period between the 1960s and early 1970s proved an unstable one for Martin. In January 1963, just two years after the big merger, Martin ads disappeared from the pages of Down Beat, not to reappear for the remainder of the decade. 313 The following year, former Martin artists Roy Eldridge and Al Hirt began appearing in ads for a different instrument maker (Leblanc) and, in 1965, the entire company was sold to the piano-organ-jukebox-accordion-maker Wurlitzer. With the sale to Wurlitzer, Martin shifted its headquarters from its long-time location in Elkhart, Indiana to that of its new parent company in DeKalb, Illinois. Sadly, while the loss of ad space, endorsement defections, and buy-out beg many questions regarding what was going on within the company, Martin’s business records from pre-1965 are thought to have been destroyed while the company was in the process of transplanting its headquarters. 314 Finally, in 1971, Martin would be sold yet again, this time to the French company Leblanc. As had become customary in such mergers, Martin’s headquarters was relocated and absorbed into that of Leblanc USA – which handled the distribution of Leblanc instruments in the U.S. – in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

313 The last two Martin ads (Al Hirt and Art Farmer) in Down Beat in 1963 appeared in the January 31 issue – Davis’ had been in the previous issue (January 17). Martin would not run another ad in Down Beat until the May 27, 1971 issue where it took out an entire page to feature Davis.
314 E-mail sent from Micky Rasmussen, of the National Music Museum, to the author, “Re: Miles Davis and Dizzy Research,” sent on May 19, 2012. In the e-mail, Rasmussen cited a letter he had found, dated August 19, 1968, written by Martin’s Vice President of Marketing, Walter R. Benson. The company had recently moved from its original location in Elkhart, Indiana to DeKalb, Illinois, and Benson was responding to a request of someone interested in learning about Martin’s “records and distribution” in Elkhart. Said Benson, rather bluntly, “The older company records have been discarded.”
By 1971, Leblanc had a time-honored reputation as a high-quality clarinet maker. But its acquisition of Martin was the second time in seven years that the company had bought out a well-known brass maker (it had purchased Holton, which made both brass and woodwind instruments, in 1964), which allowed it to expand, a la RMC, into other markets. Two years before buying Martin, an ad for Leblanc in Down Beat shed light on what the company hoped to achieve by expanding. Featuring images of nine endorsers – two trumpeters, three clarinetists, and four saxophonists – the ad focused on the diversity present: “This year, Leblanc’s ‘universe’ of stars is the greatest ever. Their music is the greatest, also, and it’s varied: Dixie, Classical, Avant-Garde, Jazz, Big Band. Virtually every style and form of sound emanating from today’s music scene.” The ad said nothing about racial diversity, but it was implied; two of the nine pictured were African Americans (Johnny Hodges and Cecil Payne, both jazz saxophonists).

Leblanc’s decision to expand could well have been guided by the simple desire to widen their customer base but their timing suggests other related concerns. By the 1960s, the clarinet had long since fallen out of favor as a popular jazz instrument. Its use, which was heaviest during the Dixieland and swing eras, between the 1920s and 1940s, had marked it not only as an antiquated instrument but also a mostly white one. Aside from New Orleans-native Sidney Bechet in the 1920s, almost every prominent jazz clarinetist had been white including Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Woody Herman, Pete Fountain, and Buddy DeFranco. Furthermore, the post-World War II Dixieland revival was dominated by white players which helped cement the musically outdated and racialized identity of the instrument. Set against the backdrops of the civil rights movement, Davis’ continued musical experimentations which increasingly sought black audiences, and his

---

uniquely colored trumpets, the clarinet could be thought to represent the very antithesis of modern black musical sensibilities.

Leblanc's acquisition of Holton, it seemed, had allowed the company to frame itself as more musically and racially modern. Considering Martin's largely black, popular, and modern line-up of trumpeters in the early 1960s, particularly Davis and Gillespie, it's likely that Leblanc hoped to continue that process with its acquisition of Martin; even though Leblanc already had a trumpet line (courtesy of Holton and referred to in ads as Leblanc-Holton), it allowed Martin a greater sense of autonomy by continuing to make instruments solely under its own name. However, the very year Leblanc purchased the well-known trumpet manufacturer, Gillespie began appearing in ads for a different instrument maker (King), and while Davis remained faithful to Martin, the mere handful of ads he appeared in for them during the last 20 years of his life (only three in *Down Beat* between 1971 and 1985, for instance) made little to no mention of the company's actual owner.\(^{316}\) Those few Martin ads, unlike many of the ones he was featured in during the 1950s, only featured Davis and were careful to use current images, at least one of which was known to have been picked by Davis himself.\(^{317}\) Furthermore, none of them utilized a standard design that had been applied to other endorsers; Davis' Martin ads from 1971 and beyond were modern, unique, and all about him. Regardless

\(^{316}\) Davis only appeared in two ads for Martin in 1971 issues of *Down Beat* (May 27, p. 2; August 19, p. 12). In them, no mention of Leblanc occurs, only that Martin's headquarters was in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Davis' next ad for Martin in *Down Beat* didn't appear until 1983 and while it, again, didn't use the Leblanc name, it featured the company's logo. To date, I haven't been able to find any others that he did between then and his death in 1991.

\(^{317}\) LeBlanc Memorandum to Leon and Dick H. from Vito Pascucci, dated January 5, 1984. The letter is part of the archives of the National Music Museum in South Dakota and notes that Davis had recently sent them a photograph of himself that was to be used in advertising. The advertisement in question ran in *Down Beat* in 1983 congratulating Davis on his recent Grammy but featured an illustration of the photo as opposed to the photo itself. The aforementioned Leblanc memorandum discussed a letter the company had received from Davis' lawyer who claimed Davis had, in fact, not approved that image for such use.
of whose input decided the parameters of the Leblanc-Martin relationship, Davis’ image
remained insulated from dissimilar musicians and free of any association with outdated­
ness Leblanc may have retained. Davis’ first ad for Martin since Leblanc’s buy-out
referred to his music as “legendary,” but it could be argued that, even as early as 1971,
the company thought the same of the trumpeter himself and worked to treat him as such.

Fig. 5.2 A full-page Martin ad dedicated to Davis in 1974\textsuperscript{318}

\textsuperscript{318} Down Beat, September 12, 1974, 5.
Conclusion: Miles and Martin, Beyond the Ads

Particularly in terms of timing, students of Davis’ career might recognize the irony of the fact that soon after Davis appears to have achieved autonomy in his instrument ads, his popularity (which instrument makers paid close attention to) began to decline. Leblanc’s buy-out of Martin took place just one year after Davis released the album Bitches Brew, which sold handsomely (400,000 album sales in the first year alone) and is considered by many to be the quintessential example of jazz-rock fusion.\(^{319}\)

However, Davis’ continued explorations in that realm during the first half of the 1970s and his embracing of pop songs during the 1980s had the cumulative effect of dividing his fan base; where some appreciated Davis’ creativity and reaching out to new audiences others saw crass commercialism and preferred his earlier output. At the very least, the early 1970s marked the beginning of an extended period of inconsistency for Davis in polls, something he had not experienced in roughly twenty years, and the results of which suggested the existence of a public struggling to come to terms with an ever-evolving icon.\(^{320}\)

In parallel with those struggles was a turn towards neoclassicism that defined the major trend in jazz during the final decade of Davis’ life. When Davis flew to Los

---


\(^{320}\) Readers of *Down Beat* consistently ranked Davis in the top two spots as a trumpeter between 1970 and 1976 while polls taken of jazz critics during the same period vary between first and fifth places and even included one year (1973) in which Davis didn’t even place. Interestingly, when it came to assessing his band during the same period, the results were almost the opposite. Readers had his band in first place in 1971 (a rank they had sustained since 1966), third in 1972, and between sixth and twelfth during the period of 1973-1976. Critics, meanwhile, never ranked his band below fourth place with the exceptions of 1973 and 1976 when he wasn’t ranked at all. As for the remainder of his career, readers and critics alike responded well to his band, almost always ranking them in one of the top three spots between 1983 and 1991. His results as a trumpeter were similar but overall less impressive than his band. Critics ranked him between third and sixth between 1982 and 1991 while readers ranked him between second and fifth place during the same period.
Angeles in 1983, and had his broken down Ferrari towed to the L’Ermitage in Beverly Hills, he was there to accept a Grammy for the 1982 album *We Want Miles*. It was to be one of four Grammy awards he’d win before the decade was over, awards which collectively symbolized a high level of critical acceptance of his (and others’) genre-bending new music. But, they took place amidst a public with a growing taste for “classic jazz” from the 1950s and 60s. Indeed, the presence of these two trends could be said to have constituted a period of “bi-modernism” in jazz. Appealing to the neoclassicists was a young black trumpeter (and New Orleans native), Wynton Marsalis, who would become a rival of sorts for Davis. In polls, at least, Marsalis showed alarming consistency – not unlike Davis from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s – winning first place (according to Readers) in the “trumpet” category every year between 1982 and 1991. For every one of these years but 1990, when he came in third, Davis remained close behind in second place. In 1985, Davis presented Marsalis with an autographed piece of his artwork at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Fest.\(^{321}\) For the cameras, at least, all appeared civil between Davis and the young prodigy. However, the following year at the Vancouver Jazz Festival, when Marsalis made an unannounced trip to the stage to play with Davis’ band, he was coldly rebuked by the veteran.\(^ {322}\) Davis was not accustomed to being challenged by other musicians, least of all younger ones, while he was performing on stage; he preferred to handle their relationship as much on his own terms as possible.

\(^{321}\) *Down Beat*, August 1985, 11. The presentation was captured on camera. *Down Beat* printed the photo and entitled it “Trumpet Summit.”

\(^{322}\) George Cole, *The Last Miles: The Music of Miles Davis, 1980-1991* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 199. As Cole notes, Davis stopped the band as soon as he noticed Marsalis on stage with him and threatened to “sack” any member of the band who played with him. Cole goes on to quote Davis on Marsalis’ better showing in the polls: “All these white people are praising Wynton for his classical playing and that’s all right. But then they turn around and rank him over me and Dizzy in jazz, and he knows he can’t hold a candle to all the shit we have done and are going to do in the future.”
Much the same could be said for his relationship with Martin/Leblanc during the same period. Despite lower popularity than in previous decades, Davis had attained the status of a “legend” and thus had power to dictate various aspects of his relationship with the instrument maker. Currently archived at the National Music Museum in Vermillion, South Dakota, is a multitude of letters between Davis (via his lawyer or agent) and Leblanc as well as numerous interoffice memos regarding Davis as a client. The records, which are heaviest from the 1980s, only date back to late 1970 and, sadly, say little about Davis as the subject of ads. However, they provide a rare behind-the-scenes glimpse into the nature of the relationship between Davis and his instrument maker. Endorsement ads were, of course, the most public manifestation of their relationship but, as the correspondence attests, decisions regarding the timing and design of the ads existed alongside a variety of concerns from both parties, many of which revolved around Davis as a high maintenance client. On any given day, Leblanc employees could find themselves on the other end of a telephone call with the trumpeter (or his attorneys) who could be at once disarmingly polite, irate, and demanding. At the same time, the variety of Davis’ requests and concerns as well as the company’s attempts to appease and maintain him as a client shed light on how both of them attempted to make the most of their professional affiliation.

Larry Ramirez, brass instrument inventor and horn tester for Holton (another subsidiary of Leblanc), became one of the company’s primary contacts with Davis throughout the 1980s. In a 1981 report to his boss, Vito Pascucci, Ramirez described the “fruitful” exchange between himself and Davis when he delivered a new black horn to him after a concert in Denver, Colorado. The exchange – which had involved
comfortable conversation about music over drinks in Davis’ hotel room and the trumpeter’s testing of the new horn against Ramirez’s chest – altered his assumptions about the controversial trumpeter’s reputation, leading him to state, “I had always heard that Miles was indifferent, rude, arrogant, the Prince of Darkness, etc., however, he was very charming to me.”

But, after years of miscommunication, legal threats, and strange requests (and in the midst of legal threats from Davis’ attorneys regarding Leblanc’s supposed request to Yamaha that they stop supplying Davis’ band with keyboards and percussion equipment) that involved Davis and a handful of Leblanc’s work force, a memo to Vito Pascucci from his son, and fellow Leblanc employee, Leon in 1988 likely reflected the sentiment of his co-workers: “Larry should do all dealings with Miles.”

Instrument repairs and replacements for both Davis and his band mates (regardless of whether they endorsed Leblanc/Martin) were common requests on Davis’ behalf, and his attorney once tried to pressure the company into giving Davis more money on account of Davis’ long-term popularity, loyalty to Martin, and recent interest shown by Yamaha in becoming Davis’ primary horn supplier. Meanwhile, Leblanc/Martin continually kept an eye on virtually every aspect of Davis’ life. Interoffice memos concerning Davis’ latest television appearances, health issues, awards, live performance schedules, and albums reveal the company’s concerns over when best to run ads or simply reach out to Davis themselves. But when it was widely assumed that the company was dealing with a legendary musician, its concerns with public image and

---

323 LeBlanc Memorandum – to Vito from Larry Ramirez; Subject: MEETING WITH MILES DAVIS, DENVER, COLORADO, September 10, 1981.
324 The actual date of the memo is unknown but, as it is typed at the bottom of another memo from May 16, 1988, I assume it was either typed up on that same day or soon thereafter.
maintaining their client's loyalty went beyond the realm of instrument making, repairing, and advertisements.

In a 1988 inter-office memo to Pascucci, Ramirez describes evidence of Davis' failing health and attempts to convince his boss – who had recently demanded a moratorium on Leblanc employees’ taking of Davis’ calls on account of the trumpeter’s supposed rudeness over the Yamaha debacle – that Davis was genuinely sorry for reacting the way he did and that he was worth keeping as a client. Doing the latter, Ramirez argued, would allow the company to avoid making a big mistake and thus solidify its historical significance:

I am...quite aware that his horn will more than likely be put in the Symthsonian Museum as they did with Dizzy Gillespies’ and how we let him slip away to the King Co. So his horn with the tilted bell is in the Museum rather than the Martin which he used since the 1940’s until a few years ago. That horn which will go down in history should have been ours rather than some 'Johnny come lately. Miles has played Martin all of his music life. History should show that Martin, which is part of you, should be there too.\(^\text{325}\)

To date, none of Davis’ horns are in the Smithsonian but, if they were, Ramirez would be happy to know that they would be Martins. The Yamaha debacle had driven both parties to the brink but stopped short of contract dissolution; Davis would continue to be a Martin artist for the remaining three years of his life. As Ramirez’s memo shows,

\(^{325}\) Inter-office memo from Larry Ramirez to Vito Pascucci, dated November 29, 1988. Gillespie’s aforementioned King trumpet had been made in the 1970s, soon after he had switched from Martin, and acquired by the Smithsonian in 1985.
instrument makers' concerns about reminding the public that high-profile clients used their equipment occasionally transcended the world of advertising altogether. It was a rare concern, to be sure, but one that nevertheless reiterates the variety of ways in which the politics of visual representation was important to both parties.

In the end, endorsement ads remained the most important and common public manifestation of a relationship between a musician and their instrument maker. As such, they represented important opportunities for upcoming musicians to increase their public profile, for established ones to maintain them, and helped sway an untold number of consumers to purchase specific brands. At the same time, as I have hoped to show, they represented significant arenas of conflict between the company and musician wherein issues of racial and musical identity as well as corporate legacy were at stake and power was prone to shift. Because of both utter silence from Davis scholarship and an incomplete archive on the company's behalf, we may never gain a full understanding of the role Martin played in his entire career. But, given Davis' prolonged interest in controlling his public image and commitment to Martin trumpets, it's particularly worth it to investigate how that company, whose instruments helped shape the sound of jazz, also used its power to do the same. It is my ultimate hope that future scholars not only work to complete this story as it relates to Davis but do so for other jazz musicians as well.
CONCLUSION

Seeing (for) Miles

*Miles’ Visual Legacy*

One night in the early 1950s, a young illustrator and fashion designer named Joe Eula sat at a stool in The Royal Roost, watching as people descended a staircase to enter the noted New York jazz club. The Miles Davis Nonet had appeared there for the first time a few years earlier, performing songs that would eventually help comprise one of the trumpeter’s most famous recordings, *Birth of the Cool*. As such, the Royal Roost has become known as an important place in the history of Davis’ long and influential music career. But, on that night in the early 1950s, it would also become an important place with regards to Davis’ long and influential visual legacy.

Eula remembered the Royal Roost as “a real hellhole” but one that was nonetheless frequented by a who’s who of jazz giants that included John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Billy Eckstine, Sarah Vaughan, and Dizzy Gillespie. “One night,” Eula said, “down comes this glorious-looking black cat, and a wonderful-looking woman with him. Miles could make everybody go silent.” Despite their differences – Eula was outgoing while Davis tended to be an introvert – both men were small in stature which facilitated their bond. “I could see myself in him,” Eula said. “We became fast friends immediately.”326 By the end of the decade, their friendship had become professional. Eula, along with his tailor Joe Emsley, had designed several suits for Davis to wear onstage and, in 1960, Davis approached Eula about illustrating the cover of his latest album, *Sketches of Spain*. Eula agreed and set to work, listening to the album for

inspiration as per Davis’ request. The result was a silhouetted profile of Davis, standing while playing the trumpet, opposite a charging bull and set against the striking backdrop of red and yellow, the colors of the Spanish flag. Over the next four years, that same silhouette would be used on at least one concert poster (Carnegie Hall, May 19, 1961) and four of Davis’ album covers. The silhouette of Davis, naturally, featured the trumpeter wearing one of the form-fitting suits Eula designed for him.

In creating this image of Davis, Eula provided him with something that few other jazz musicians had (or have had since): a logo. Like many logos created for businesses, Eula’s silhouette of Davis has since functioned as both a recognizable symbol and catalyst for consumption. To be sure, it had a relatively short shelf life during Davis’ career, but it has since been revived and can be seen gracing the covers of dozens of live recordings issued as CDs, and a diverse array of consumer goods including drinking glasses, key chains, and clothing. Sony Music Entertainment, which maintains “the official Miles Davis website” – www.milesdavis.com – advertises the aforementioned goods and even uses the silhouette as its “favicon” (icon that appears on the far left of the address bar) and tab icon (icon that appears on the tab). College professor and Davis enthusiast, Peter Losin, uses a modified version of the Eula silhouette in the same way on

---

327 Ibid.
328 The image appeared on both the concert poster and album cover for Davis’ Carnegie Hall performance on May 19, 1961 (designed by Eula), the cover of his 1961 album Someday My Prince Will Come, 1963 album Seven Steps to Heaven, 1964 album Quiet Nights, and the cover of a recording of an interview with Davis conducted on August 4, 1969 and released in Japan. All of the aforementioned albums were released by Columbia with the exception of the 1969 interview recording which was released by CBS/Sony. The back cover of a CD released in 2010 by Domino Records – Miles Davis Quintet, Complete Live at the Blue Coronet, a recording of the band at the Blue Coronet Club in Brooklyn, NY between June 21 and June 29, 1969 – features the image of what may be a concert poster from the year of the performance that includes a slightly altered version of the Eula sketch.
329 The heavy majority of those CDs were released in either the 1990s or 2000s in Japan as part of a series called the Mega Disc Legendary Collection. There were at least 46 such CDs released, two from recordings made in 1959 and the rest between 1963 and 1975. For more information on each of these albums, see www.plosin.com/milesAhead.
his personal website – www.plosin.com – which contains transcriptions of liner notes from Davis albums, a catalog of Davis’ album covers (for both domestic and foreign releases), discography, bibliography, and more. Losin’s decision to use such an image testifies to its mass appeal – used as both “official” representations of Davis and by individual celebrants of his career – but his decision to use a modified version is also a testament to the original image’s lasting influence – just different enough to avoid possible legal repercussions but similar enough to be recognized and thus retain an aura of authenticity.330

Of course, part of the reason this image has become recognizable and perceived as authentic has to do with Davis himself. According to marketing professors Pamela W. Henderson and Joseph A. Cote, a logo that induces a sense of subjective familiarity (which they define as “the perception or feeling of familiarity, whether or not it is based on previous exposure”) is highly recognizable, and effectively “create[s] more consensually held meanings.”331 The Davis-as-silhouette logo contains a great deal of subjective familiarity because it was based on a real-life image that was replicated on numerous occasions (at least in terms of the pose) by Davis himself. In other words, Eula drew Davis as he had seen him but also in such a way that was, or at least became, familiar to countless others. On the other hand, contemporary silhouette artist Kara Walker has noted the genre’s history as one that has been laden with stereotypes in so far as it has attempted to reduce its subjects to an “essence.” Her work signifies on that

330 In an e-mail entitled “Miles Davis silhouette” and dated March 14, 2013, Mr. Plosin explained that his choice to not replicate the Eula silhouette was based on “fear of incurring the legal wrath of the Miles Davis estate.” The image he uses was not made by him but simply copied from a bootleg recording of the Miles Davis Quintet performing in St. Louis that was released in 1997 by Soulard Records. It also appears on the back of a live album, recorded at the Monterey Jazz Festival in 1963, and released by the Core record label as a CD (year unknown) – Core Collections CC 004
legacy by exploiting the dual nature of the genre, approaching each piece not as
containing a set of predetermined truths about people but simply a “blank space that you
project your desires into. It can be positive or negative.”332 Davis’ numerous real-life
public replications of the pose he struck in the Eula sketch imbued the silhouette with
familiarity but, as Walker might argue, its “consensually held meanings” would be
difficult to determine. In any case, as both marketing professionals and artists would
agree, the Eula profile silhouette successfully utilized a combination of prominent
features – namely the pose and trumpet – to create an image recognizable to the public.

Eula’s silhouette captured Davis in what is commonly referred to as his “s-pose,”
formed by an arched back and a protruding mid-section that shifts the majority of the
body’s weight to the legs. While it is unknown exactly when Davis began to utilize this
posture while playing the trumpet, it was one he continued to use for many years, at least
into the 1970s. Davis’ penchant for boxing (which, for him, included both watching live
matches and physically training as a boxer) convinced him that a great deal of power and
strength could be drawn from the legs whether in the act of punching or blowing a
trumpet. In the same year that Davis would tell an interviewer from Down Beat that
“boxing is like music,”333 he would record a tribute album to a famous black boxer
named Jack Johnson. The image chosen for the cover of that album was a profile
photograph of Davis taken by David Gahr in 1970 showing Davis wearing modern
clothes with eyes tightly shut, playing the trumpet, and knees bent in an updated form of
the “s-pose.” That same photograph, like the Eula illustration, has since been adapted

332 Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw, Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker (Durham, NC: Duke
University Press, 2004), 23.
333 Gerald Early, “Miles Davis in the Ring: The Boxer as Black Male Hero,” in Miles Davis: The Complete
Illustrated History (Minneapolis, MN: Voyageur Press, 2012), 188.
into another silhouette which ultimately graced at least one of Davis’ concert posters (March 3, 1974 at Carnegie Hall, no less) and even showed up on the cover of a British record label’s 2011 re-issue of *Sketches of Spain*.\(^{334}\) In another curious similarity with the Eula sketch, the Gahr-based silhouette of Davis has also recently appeared on a variety of consumer goods – many of which are also advertised on the Sony site – including a set of expensive “in-ear headphones” made by Monster Cable which were designed to look like a “kind of blue” trumpet with blue wires (though it may only be a matter of coincidence, purchasers of these headphones are to receive, as a free bonus gift, “a Monster re-mastered Sketches of Spain CD”).\(^{335}\) If Davis’ “s-pose” posture was indeed inspired by boxing, it seems appropriate that the two silhouettes appear to be in a duel, of sorts, over which one best represents him.

It is difficult to determine which one of the two silhouettes is thought to be a “better” representation of Davis, but recent developments suggest the Gahr-based silhouette has indirectly won the latest round. On June 12, 2012, U.S. Forever postage stamps, each featuring Miles Davis and French singer Edith Piaf, were unveiled in New York City and Paris; Los Angeles hosted an unveiling just for Davis’ stamp on June 27 as well. Both stamps feature black-and-white photographs of the two artists – Gahr’s 1970 photograph of Davis and an undated photograph of Piaf made by Studio Harcourt Paris. The stamps, which were the product of a rare collaboration between the U.S. Postal

\(^{334}\) Rollins et al., *Miles Davis: The Complete Illustrated History*, 172. On the album re-issue, information and an image of the cover were retrieved March 12, 2013 from [www.soundstagedirect.com](http://www.soundstagedirect.com), an “online independent record store.” To be sure, the silhouette that appeared on the 1974 concert poster was not an exact replica of the 1970 photograph. While Davis’ stance appears to be the same on both, the concert poster features an image of Davis in a different set of clothes (more suit-like than a sleeveless shirt and bell-bottoms).

\(^{335}\) Information and images retrieved March 14, 2013 from [http://electronics.monsterproducts.com](http://electronics.monsterproducts.com). The Davis-themed headphones range in price from $199.95 to $349.95. Nothing on the website indicates that the color blue was chosen because Davis had a blue trumpet or was also believed to be blowing one in the Gahr photograph.
Service and France’s La Poste, were created to honor artists who were popular in both countries. “Miles was adopted by French people as a part of their story,” claimed writer Vincent Bessieres, “because of the stamp he put on their culture.”\(^\text{336}\) While it may only be a coincidence that Bessieres’ choice of words was published a few months after Davis’ actual stamp was unveiled, it’s safe to say that France had placed its own stamp on Davis much earlier. In his famed 1989 autobiography, Davis noted how much he loved Paris and “being treated like a human being” while there.\(^\text{337}\) He had performed in France numerous times since his first trip abroad in 1949 and was even awarded a Medal of Honor by the French Legion just months before his death, the same award with which he and his black trumpet were ultimately buried. In such a context, it’s easy to understand the recent claim made by Davis’ son Erin that, to the famed trumpeter, “France was a second home.”\(^\text{338}\) If nothing else, the stamp’s connection with France exists as a reminder of how Davis, just as he had done with his Italian cars and suits, utilized European space and goods to transcend prevailing notions of race and music that surrounded him in America. It is fitting, therefore, that the stamp finally allows him to be in both places at once.

\(^{337}\) Miles Davis and Quincy Troupe, *Miles: The Autobiography*, 126.
\(^{338}\) Jacqueline Trescott, “Miles Davis postal stamp brings some ‘cool’ to your mail; Edith Piaf also to be honored,” *Washington Post*, May 24, 2012, accessed March 5, 2013, [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).
The stamp is the latest example of how Davis’ visual legacy has continued to thrive long after his death. Yet, unlike many other aspects of Davis’ visual legacy, there was much about Davis’ stamp that was not entirely unique to the world of jazz. As early as 1958, a stamp featuring an image of pianist Thelonious Monk graced the cover of his album, *The Unique Thelonious Monk*. The record label subsequently distributed sheets of the faux stamps as a promotional gimmick but many who got them used them anyway forcing the U.S. Postal Service to issue a restraining order against the label.\textsuperscript{340} By the time Davis’ official stamp was unveiled 54 years later, more than 20 individual jazz musicians had been featured on U.S. Postal Service stamps and at least two stamps had been designed to celebrate the music itself. There were to be 30 million Davis stamps printed by the U.S. Postal Service in 2012 but that number represented a fifth of the

\textsuperscript{339} Photo accompanying a brief article, “Miles Davis Stamp Release Appreciation,” authored by the Jazz Foundation of America. Accessed online, http://www.jazzfoundation.org/jfa/images/MILES-DAVIS-STAMP.jpg

stamps the USPS planned to print for Louis Armstrong in 1995.\textsuperscript{341} Furthermore, Davis was hardly the first American jazz musician to appear on a stamp outside of the United States. Between 1972 and 1984, for instance, the African country of Gabon had issued stamps featuring Louis Armstrong, Sidney Bechet, Erroll Garner, Lionel Hampton, and Charlie Parker; Armstrong, alone, has been featured on stamps from at least ten different countries.\textsuperscript{342}

However, Davis’ stamp does retain some unique characteristics which suggest that the imagery he collaborated in constructing around himself continues “spinning the discourses” from beyond the grave. Most of the U.S. Postal Service stamps that featured individual jazz musicians and preceded Davis’, were part of a series of stamps, which meant that they were released on the same day as others in the same series, and that they didn’t have unveiling ceremonies, let alone ceremonies in three major world cities over a two-week period.\textsuperscript{343} Whereas every one of the jazz musician stamps that preceded his were classified as first-class with fixed values, Davis was the first of the grouping to be featured on a Forever stamp which has a value commensurate with the going rate of first-class mail. Forever stamps didn’t go into usage until 2007, long after the aforementioned


\textsuperscript{343} The bulk of these stamps were part of a “Legends of American Music: Jazz Musicians” series that was released to the public on September 16, 1995. Included in that mass-release were stamps for Coltrane, Armstrong, Eubie Blake, Erroll Garner, Coleman Hawkins, James P. Johnson, Charles Mingus, Thelonious Monk, Jelly Roll Morton, and Charlie Parker. To be sure, there were unveiling ceremonies for some of the other individual musicians who appeared on USPS stamps. A ceremony celebrating the unveiling of the Ella Fitzgerald stamp in 2007, for instance, was held at Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York while a similar ceremony was held for Armstrong in New Orleans approximately two weeks before his aforementioned stamp was released nationwide.
jazz stamps were released, and they have since replaced all first-class stamps.\textsuperscript{344} But, while Davis’ stamp can technically be categorized alongside the others as a first-class stamp, its relative value will help ensure that it will be more widely circulated over a longer period of time and never becomes a mere collector’s item. In addition, as it circulates, it won’t just feature Davis’ name and image. It, along with the Piaf stamp, became the first issued by the USPS to feature a QR code on the back of each stamp which users can scan to be redirected to a website and listen to their music.\textsuperscript{345} Also, while the U.S. Postal Service has made a point of featuring a variety of African Americans on stamps for many years, there has recently been a dearth of those that featured jazz musicians; Davis’ was the first in approximately 16 years. Whether or not his stamp, like much of his music, will help start a trend in that regard has yet to be seen. But, what can be assured is that the Davis stamp is destined to criss-cross the globe for many years to come, bringing his name, music, and image to the doorsteps of millions of people.

\textit{Wallace Roney: Miles’ Visual Legacy Lives On}

Miles Davis took the stage for the eighth and final time at the Montreux Jazz Festival on July 8, 1991; he would pass away less than three months later. The concert was to be unlike any other in his late career, consisting of performances from earlier collaborations with arranger Gil Evans (including selections from \textit{Sketches of Spain}) and backed by a big band under the direction of Quincy Jones, who Davis had never worked with before. Davis had been absent for much of the rehearsal time leading up to the

\textsuperscript{344} United States Postal Service, “Forever Stamp Fact Sheet,” accessed March 24, 2013, \url{http://about.usps.com}.

festival and was known to have been in bad health. As a precautionary measure, a young trumpeter named Wallace Roney was chosen to be Davis' back-up. Davis and Roney had first met in 1983 when Roney was performing in a Davis tribute concert at Radio City Music Hall and, from that point on, the young trumpeter "was taken under his idol's wing."\(^{346}\) When Davis later discovered that Roney had borrowed a horn to play the Radio City Music Hall concert, he invited him to his Upper West Side home and gave him a Martin Committee trumpet; it was a meeting that Roney would later describe as "the beginning of a great chapter in my life."\(^{347}\) Eight years later at Montreux, Davis added to that chapter by bestowing one of his red trumpets on Roney.\(^{348}\)

Davis' generous gifts to Roney symbolized the unique nature of their relationship, as Roney can boast having been Davis' only student. But, by giving Roney some of his trumpets, particularly colored ones, Davis also ensured that another part of his visual legacy would continue after his death. To date, Roney still owns the red horn Davis gave him at Montreux and at least two other colored horns that previously belonged to Davis, including an aqua blue one and a black and copper one (used during the recording of *Bitches Brew*). Instead of allowing them to gather dust and remain out of sight, Roney has continued to play with them and has even lent them to museums for display, taking an active role in perpetuating a connection between Davis and colored trumpets in public memory.\(^{349}\) While forging such a connection, Roney has also used colored trumpets of


\(^{348}\) Ouellette, "Dark Prince"

\(^{349}\) E-mail from Wallace Roney to the author on January 29, 2010 – Subject: Re: Results from WallaceRoney.com. The e-mail didn't specify who had sent it and referred to Roney as "Mr. Roney"
his own as a means of reinforcing his link to Davis. Album covers such as 1989’s *The Standard Bearer*, 1993’s *Munchin’* and *Crunchin’*, and 1999’s *No Job Too Big or Small* feature images of Roney conspicuously holding or playing a darkly colored horn with his name engraved along the side of the bell and flower etchings just as they often appeared on Davis’ horns. Furthermore, Roney has long been an endorser of Martin trumpets – the cover of *Munchin’* shows the Martin logo on the bell of his horn – and preferred the Committee model, which he recently (and serendipitously) described as “the Ferrari of the trumpet world.”

![Wallace Roney Album Cover](http://www.allmusic.com/album/munchin-mw000174903)

---

350 These aren’t the only album covers on which Roney appears with colored horns. The front and back covers of 2000’s *No Room for Argument*, for instance, show Roney holding a red and a blue horn. 1997’s *Village* shows him playing with a dark blue trumpet on the front cover and 2004’s *Prototype* features an image of him with a dark blue trumpet as well.

351 E-mail from Wallace Roney to the author on January 29, 2010 – Subject: Re: Results from WallaceRoney.com.

Throughout much of Roney’s career, critics have compared him to Davis with good reason. In addition to the visual holdover of the colored and etched Martin Committees, Roney has actively celebrated Davis’ music via live performances and recordings, captured much of Davis’ dark sound and heavily chromatic approach to improvisation, and, like his idol, consistently approached jazz as a vital, ever-changing art form. Elements of each man’s recording careers also bear a great deal of resemblance. Before landing a contract in 1994 with the well-known label Warner Brothers (Davis’ last label), Roney spent several years with a smaller label (Muse Records) just as Davis had done by transitioning to Columbia from Prestige. Roney’s Munchin’ and Crunchin’, his last two albums with Muse before making the switch, were recorded within two months of one another, a history that recalled Davis’ hastily recorded albums Cookin’, Relaxin’, Workin’, and Steamin’, which fulfilled his contract with Prestige and allowed him to record exclusively for Columbia. Many of Davis’ former sidemen – including Tony Williams, Mulgrew Miller, Ron Carter, Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, and Adam Holzman – have also recorded with Roney, further deepening the two men’s musical connection. It’s the result of mere coincidence, of course, but despite the fact that Davis was 24 years older than Roney, the two men also came within one day of sharing a birthday (Davis’ on May 26 and Roney’s on May 25). For Davis, who was known to have superstitions and ascribed some truth to numerology, this latter fact might well have drawn him to Roney and served as a sort of metaphysical or cosmic justification for their close relationship.353

353 On Davis’ superstitions, see Szwed, So What, 221. Szwed claims that Davis’ Upper West Side home featured rooms with rounded walls because “Miles detested corners and believed that ‘haunts’ could hide in
In any case, the close associations with Davis helped set Roney apart from a sea of talented young trumpet players who, like him, helped usher in the neoclassical "jazz renaissance" of the 1980s. At the same time, however, many critics have lambasted Roney for copying Davis too closely and, as a result, he has struggled to achieve critical acceptance on his own terms. As late as 2000, established jazz writer Stanley Crouch felt it necessary to help Roney in this regard. Crouch's article, "Don't Ask the Critics. Ask Wallace Roney's Peers," consisted largely of established jazz musicians defending the trumpeter by emphasizing his multiple influences (including Coltrane, Herbie Hancock, Ornette Coleman, and Lee Morgan), formidable talent, and noting aspects of his playing that, while they mimic Davis', reflect Roney's unique ability to do so. Despite Crouch's efforts to widen (or at least modify) the distance between Roney and Davis in the minds of critics, the close comparisons have continued, much to Roney's chagrin. In a 2004 article in JazzTimes, Roney was asked about his connection with Davis and responded with "a forceful disclaimer": "You have to note that you asked me. I love talking about Miles – he's my idol, I'm not ashamed of it. But y'all act like that's all I have to say. You don't mention that you ask me about him and I respond." Journalist Peter McElhinney, who interviewed Roney in anticipation of a 2011 performance, acknowledged that while Roney had "come a long way" from the days in which he was

---


355 Adler, "Wallace Roney"
considered a mere Davis clone, the same assertion, two decades after Davis’ death, was “as much invitation as insult.”

On their own, Roney’s struggles for individual acceptance can be understood as a testament to both the ideological gaps that have long existed between the critical establishment and jazz musicians (something Davis hoped to lessen at his home in 1961) as well as the trajectory of jazz history that has lately favored neoclassicism at the expense of more experimental players; on the latter point, one only has to compare the careers of Roney to that of the wildly successful fellow trumpeter and poster child for neoclassical jazz, Wynton Marsalis, as supporting evidence. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, Roney’s struggles exist as an equally powerful testament to the influence of visual and material culture on an artist’s identity.

The subjects of each of the chapters in this dissertation represent material trappings of stardom that, at the same time, helped Davis to frame his identity as a modern, influential, and wealthy African American man. However, the notable differences between Davis’ choices as a consumer and those of other African Americans – both in his time and before – effectively set him apart from them and reinforced the public’s understanding of him as a creative genius, someone who was as interested in constantly updating his music as he was his image (and, to an extent, that of African Americans in general). In this regard, we can begin to think about Davis’ visual legacy as a reminder of just how intertwined those two facets can be. Read across the history of Roney’s career, it stands to reason that both his musical and material tributes to Davis have contributed to his struggle for critical acceptance as an individual artist. Despite

having developed much of his jazz education in the classroom – a hallmark of many jazz musicians who have come of age since the 1970s – Roney nonetheless embraced the idea of learning through apprenticeship. “You have to understand the legacy by hanging with the masters,” Roney said in 2011, “See how they walk, talk, hold their horn.”357 While such an approach has been embraced by both Davis and Roney, the two men appear to have learned different lessons from it. Given Davis’ history of “spinning the discourses” with respect to jazz, race and visual/material culture, it would seem that the most appropriate way to pay tribute to him would be to continue the process using Davis’ choices as a guidepost. For Roney, in particular, this could begin the moment he decides to put down his colored and etched Martin Committee trumpet.

A “Resistant Reading” of Miles

Miles Davis’ silhouettes and stamp, along with the example of Wallace Roney attest to a varied iconography of Davis that continues to thrive in the present day. Taken together, they have helped establish a visual legacy for Davis that connects the world of commodities with jazz and includes both actual and suggested representations of the famed trumpeter. Like the advertisements discussed in Chapter 5, each of these examples represent Davis as the object of consumption that trade on the power of the testimonial – despite the absence of Davis’ physical presence, the idea of Davis is used in each case to convey notions of coolness, quality, and /or authenticity. Together, they can be thought of as constituting a spectrum of Davis’ visual legacy – with the silhouettes / logos representing Davis’ iconic presence via illustration drawn from life, the stamp as Davis’ “actual” presence via photography, and Roney as Davis’ presence (re)embodied – that is

357 Ibid.
presented in a wide variety of contexts and thus provides modern-day consumers innumerable ways to make sense of it. Given the pervasiveness of these images, this process is likely to continue for a long time. But how can the context of the present day help us make sense of the subjects of this dissertation’s chapters? In my final section, I provide a suggestion by applying the ideas from a recent debate over the role of images, music, and commodification.

In his 2001 article, "Looking At Records," Philip Auslander uses musical recordings to challenge French Situationist theorist Guy Debord’s idea that “commodity capitalism works by substituting images for reality.” According to Debord, this process involves the creation of spectacles which distract consumers by presenting the social world as a series of images as opposed to the reality in which the consumer lives. Ultimately, Debord asserts that this substitution facilitates a sense of alienation among consumers by encouraging them to identify with images of reality at the expense of their individual needs and desires. Auslander, a la O’Meally (see Introduction), concedes that images associated with music, particularly in the form of album covers and CD booklets, are capable of providing pleasurable experiences for consumers and can help fuel their anticipation of hearing the music. However, he argues that Debord’s position (as well as that of other Situationists) is inherently limited due to its inability to account for “the specific implications of…visibility in a cultural subsector (music) whose primary sensory modality is the aural.” Auslander notes that while it is possible to imagine how, in the Debord-ian sense, the ear can substitute for the eye when it comes to creating an alienated experience for the listener, Situationist theory, in his view, fails to account for how looking at records can still constitute “a perverse act.” By looking at an object whose
primary function is to provide music, Auslander argues, one consumes a commodity “in a way that goes against the grain” by defying the notion that objects are to be consumed only in certain ways. Auslander uses, as his primary example, the visible grooves on a record which, on one hand, spectacularize time by reducing it to a set of images but, on the other, fail to accurately represent a consistent definition of a record or song’s actual length. In Auslander’s view, because the very thing that has been commodified – time – can concurrently be interpreted as an abstract concept, the grooves of a record thus offer consumers “opportunities for resistant readings of the spectacle.”358

At the time of Auslander’s article, the world of musical commodities that he referenced was growing smaller due to the increasing presence of downloadable music from the internet. This trend, Auslander argues, was having the effect of unmooring music from physical support and establishing what he called a hypercommodification of music in which music was becoming increasingly removed from the realm of the spectacular object. Auslander claimed this presented a challenge to Debord’s theory that “commodification was an ocular phenomenon,”359 but his claim failed to grasp the extent to which live performances and technological devices – such as computers, televisions, and, more recently, smartphones, tablets, iPods, and other portable mp3 players – have maintained a close relationship between the acts of listening to music and viewing images. Pyrotechnics, laser shows, music videos, a multitude of graphic visualizations for computer programs (such as Windows Media Player) that accompany the playing of sound files, and applications that provide images of album covers while listening to

359 Ibid.
songs, all attest to our culture’s continued emphasis on the synaesthetic capabilities of music. Recent reports that record sales have hit all-time lows at the expense of online streaming support Auslander’s claim that consumption of music is becoming less associated with the physical supports of records, CDs, album covers, and accompanying notes or booklets. But despite the changing format of musical commodities, the actions of musicians, recording companies, television channels, and the broader technological sector are evidence that Auslander severely underestimated the long-standing cultural desire to combine music with visual spectacle, a desire that has not shown any signs of decreasing. As such, the relationship of technology and musical objects will likely continue to fuel ideological debates, such as that between Auslander and Debord, for many years to come.

However, just as Auslander used music and musical objects as examples of the limitations of Situationist theory, I have used musicians, chiefly Miles Davis, and objects associated with them to support a similar argument. The identity of a musician is obviously more highly dimensional and complex than a material object such as a record or compact disc whose primary function is to play music. However, the ability of consumers to view those same objects in a counterhegemonic way can be applied to musicians as well, or people who are primarily understood as players of music. Davis’ long-term practice of conspicuous consumption helped generate a sense among his audiences that he was materialistic. Viewed through the lens of Situationist theory, Davis’ consumer choices functioned as spectacles that supported commodity capitalism via images that reflected the ability of consumption to fulfill individual desires. While I

---

do not entirely take issue with the idea that Davis was materialistic, the fact that each of the objects analyzed throughout this dissertation were intimately connected with his music provided an opportunity to understand them as having performed a more complex set of functions for both Davis and, by extension, other jazz musicians.

The analytical framework of race deepened that understanding by situating Davis’ consumer choices against the backdrop of a long history involving African Americans’ use of material objects to signify on their social meaning. That same framework continues to have meaning as politicians work to roll back legislative gains of the civil rights movement in the guise of a post-racial society, and some of the same discriminatory treatment Davis experienced as an African American not only persists but, in some cases, threatens African American lives (e.g. Trayvon Martin). In the contexts of a culture that values the synaesthesia of visual and aural, continues to engage in racial profiling, and attributes jazz as a largely African American art form worthy of critical praise, it is important to think about how figures like Miles Davis functioned as both a product and proponent of each. Davis, as a wealthy jazz superstar, recognized that the way people saw him would not only influence their perceptions of him, but of African Americans and jazz in general. His example continues to remind us of how visual, musical, and racial discourses can coincide, overlap, and ultimately reinforce one another in the process of constructing identity.

Davis’ trumpets, suits, cars, home, and ads, for me, functioned like the grooves on a record for Auslander by facilitating “resistant readings” of spectacles heretofore understood as representative of a mostly one-dimensional social reality (i.e. materialism and self-indulgence). “Seeing (for) Miles,” therefore has attempted to highlight the
multitude of viewpoints that are possible for audiences and musicians alike to take in order to better understand the dynamic, multi-dimensional relationship between the visual, racial, and the musical. It hopes to have shown how looking at a musician can constitute "a perverse" and also critically productive act.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


H.E.P. “Notes Between the Notes.” Down Beat, September 15, 1942.

H.E.P. “Notes Between the Notes.” Down Beat, October 15, 1942.


Stoll, Sarah. “Leblanc fondly recalls the charms as well as the talents of Miles Davis.” The Leblanc Bell (Winter 1992).


General Catlogue of the University of Vermont and State and State Agricultural College, 1791-1900. Burlington, VT: Free Press Association, 1901

Articles without authors [in chronological order]

“Real Estate—New York City.” New York Herald, September 18, 1892.


“Situations Wanted-Females.” New York Herald, May 1, 1898.


“Lamar Hardy Named Corporation Counsel.” The Sun, September 25, 1915.


“Gale and Glaser Plan Merger and Ballroom String.” Billboard, June 20, 1942.


“ODT Springs Five Busses for Negro Orks Touring South.” The Billboard, August 29, 1942.


“Preston Jackson Recalls First Gig – And Satchmo’s Box Coat and Tan Shoes.” Down Beat, November 1, 1942.

“ODT Extends Bus Permit to Irving Miller’s Crew.” Baltimore Afro-American, March 27, 1943.


“Tisket, Tasket Basket As Aid.” The Chicago Defender, September 14, 1946.


“Miles Davis To Dress Up For New Bill.” Chicago Defender, October 24, 1959.


VITA

Ben Anderson was born in Monmouth, Illinois in 1979. He graduated from Hermitage High School in Richmond, Virginia in 1997. As an undergraduate, he attended Virginia Commonwealth University where he received a B.A. in Music with a minor in American Studies in 2001. He entered the American Studies Program at the College of William and Mary as a master’s candidate in 2003 and defended his thesis in 2005. He returned to the American Studies Program at William and Mary in 2007 as a Ph.D. candidate, passed his qualifying exams in 2009, and defended his dissertation in 2014. He currently resides in Richmond with his wife, Ashlyn Howell Anderson, and works for the National Park Service between gigs with local jazz bands.