



Michael Cuscuna Interview

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What drew you to jazz? Was there a moment... that this was you?

I think what, what drew me to jazz was, when I was very young, I was into rhythm and blues, things like The Drifters, and The Coasters and Jackie Wilson. And when I began playing drums, I started to buy records with drum solos. And little by little, by osmosis, the music around the drum solos started to seep into me. And within a matter of maybe a couple of years, I sort of catapulted myself through the history of jazz, starting with Gene Krupa solos with Benny Goodman, and working my, my way up through Brubeck and then through bebop, and then I think when I discovered John Coltrane, was the time that I knew that jazz really and truly had me.

What is it about jazz that has you?

It's hard to say. Jazz is very unique in the sense that it feeds both the mind and the soul. Classical music, when you listen to Bach keyboard music, you can tell it was written by a musician who played that music. And what distinguishes a great classical pianist is not someone who necessarily plays the notes but someone who makes the music come alive. And in jazz, it's always in the hands of the creator and so it's always very, very much alive.

What do you say to people who say, "This is noise. I can't get it."?

There used to be an old saying that, you know, if you ask 'what is jazz?', you'll never know the answer. I don't really feel that elitist. But I know that one problem with jazz for a lot of people is that it's, it's not oriented toward lyrics, and the other thing that I find very hard for people to absorb initially is that there are so many things going on at once. It's not linear; it's multi-layered and I guess the best thing for people to do is to focus on one part, on one person, and then let it branch out from there. Truly, the greatest jazz is jazz played by ensembles that were born to play together. And there really are ensembles that were born just to meet and play together. And there's recorded evidence of that.

What's your earliest jazz memory?

My earliest jazz memory is going into Birdland; I don't remember the year - it was around 1961, and paying a few dollars to go into what was called the peanut gallery - the non-alcoholic section. And it was a triple bill. It was Betty Carter and her trio, Thelonius Monk and his quartet, and a new edition of Art Blakey and The Jazz Messengers, with Curtis Fuller, Wayne Shorter, and Freddie Hubbard, and Cedar Walton. And, an astonishing array of talent, but something we sort of took for granted when, everyone that was growing up around New York. It was the first time I'd seen Art Blakey live, and I'd never seen jazz quite that skillfully sculpted from a drum set. But Art Blakey created dynamics and a drive and a swing that made jazz absolutely exciting. And they were playing music of the highest level, but it could be appealed to on a very simple visceral level. And it was just extraordinary.

But people say that jazz was just an intellectual pursuit, didn't have an emotional dimension...?

I don't think that that's really true. There was a great deal of criticism when, when bebop came in because it took jazz off the dance floor. Jazz was no longer the popular music, which the swing bands were. Well, that may be true, but what it created was a development in music that was incredibly exciting. It drew from Baroque, it drew from Debussy and it drew from the jazz that had existed up to that point. And it was music of astonishing depth. And yes, jazz then became more of a music for a people who were deeply into it. But it was no less visceral, and it, it was no less exciting than the jazz had preceded it. And, by the time groups like Art Blakey and Horace Silver came up in the 50s, they were very conscious of audiences, and they were drawing blues and gospel influences back into the music, so that people would walk away with memorable tunes. Everything would swing. It would have dynamics. It would be paced, and they had a great deal to do with bringing an audience back to jazz.

Describe a day of the jazz record center, the panel discussions.

The jazz record center was a store that was on, I think 46th Street, between 6th and 7th, and it was one flight up. And it was a place where people gathered. In those days, you could ask to hear any record played and this was a store that had everything. It had European imports at a time when that was rare, and it had out of print records and it had the current records. And invariably, there would always be heated discussions among people and it didn't matter whether you knew anybody or not. It would just get involved in a discussion. I remember once going up there and Archie Shepp had made his first record on a very small label, and I was really curious about everything that was new at that time and I remember asking a guy what Archie Shepp sounded like and he said, "Well, kind of like Ben Webster with a pot of oatmeal in his horn." And, which was an intriguing image. And then

someone else would join in and say, "Oh, well, that music is not going anywhere. This is anti-jazz." And pretty soon, there would be about 5 or 6 people involved in a very heated debate on, on the aesthetics and values of different musicians and things in jazz. And it was a great, it was a great place to throw out your ideas and it was a great place to pick up a lot and to learn a lot.

Tell me again about the peanut gallery... What kind of excitement...?

Well, the peanut gallery was, was incredible 'cause Birdland was one of those places that musicians really loved to play. And, it was, it was a large room but it had a contained sound. You would just descend down the stairs and all your idols were there and you'd stop at a landing to get abused by PeeWee Marquette and then you would just continue down and wrap around and you had a clear sight to the bandstand. You were all the way at the end, but the sound was great. And the, the great thing was being able to see so many great acts, especially John Coltrane's quartet. I guess my most vivid memories of Birdland are, are seeing Coltrane. In the peanut gallery, the tables were very nicely spaced, and I remember we used to just get up and dance to John Coltrane. I mean, we, it was just heavy metal. It was heavy metal jazz. It was the, probably the most extraordinary experience of my musical life. The energy, the power that came out of that group was just astonishing. It was as close to having a religion as I ever got.

Why did the jazz clubs start closing in the 50s?

The jazz clubs in New York, I can only speak for New York, the jazz clubs in New York didn't start closing until the late 60s. Certain clubs were closing; others were opening. But there was always an incredible amount of first line jazz in New York City. I think what, it's a handy thing for people to say that, "Oh, well, it was The Beatles - The British Invasion." But I think what siphoned off a lot of people was an attraction to a lot of what we call the underground rock scene. Jefferson Airplane, and Country Joe and The Fish, and The Grateful Dead, and people that were trying different things, expanding rock harmonically, and just doing things that were interesting, and with the advent of rock on FM, it developed its own scene. And I think that really began to signal the disintegration of the jazz record business and also of the jazz club circuit.

But gigging was always important before the age of the mega label?

Absolutely. Gigging was the way people made a living. Later on, jazz shifted to what folk, blues, and rock were doing, where the record company would be the father of all things, and you would look to them for subsidies and you would look for most of your income from recording. Whereas in the old days, there was a club circuit, there was a jazz club in every city of a hundred thousand or more. And there was a circuit. And there were booking agents and managers who could keep you on the road 52 weeks a year. Somebody

like Hampton Hawes, for example, who was not the most popular, the most original pianist. But at a time when the Oscar Peterson Trio was real popular in the mid-50s, somebody like Hampton Hawes or Phineas Newborn could come along and fill that circuit. Because there was a circuit blazed by Oscar Peterson. And suddenly, there was a need for acts to be filled in those clubs. And it was a very healthy, active scene throughout urban America.

We were talking before about the, the rock radio thing. What happened to jazz as a reaction to the FM underground rock scene was that a lot of the musicians who were the leading hard bop players of the day began to explore fusion in the true sense of the word. Fusion with rock, fusion with R&B, and during the 70s, fusion reigned. And what happened was that there was really no idol for people that wanted to pursue acoustic jazz, to look up to. And there was a terrific drought of young players in the 70s. That was of great concern to the future of jazz. I remember Art Blakey asking me to come down to Mikell's one night, when he was having open auditions. And those were always fun; you get to hear a lot of young people. They're always fun nights. And, on this night, this young kid sat in on trumpet, and he was astonishing. His, his technique rivaled Booker Little's and his, his ideas were fresh and different, and very concise and clear. Very clear thinker. And at the end of the set, I asked Art, I said, "Who the hell is that?" And he said, "That's Ellis Marsalis's kid." And Ellis Marsalis is a wonderful New Orleans pianist who was little known outside New Orleans, but a favorite musician of a lot of us. And he introduced me to him and later on he said, "He's in his first year at Juilliard and, of course, you know, I couldn't do that to Ellis. I just couldn't pull him out of school and offer him a job, you know, so I can't give him the gig." About 2 sets later, about 4 in the morning, we were all hanging out at the club, and I said, "So, Art did you decide on any new members?" He said, "Um, just one. Wynton Marsalis." And Wynton was the, the first new acoustic jazz player with something to say. And fortunately thereafter, with his brother Branford, and a lot of people that Wynton knew, the flood gates opened and suddenly in the 80s there were a lot of new players that pumped new blood into, into jazz. Which was, which was very much of a saving grace. In the 70s, the problem with, with fusion and there was a lot of brilliant, brilliant music that was happening in fusion, although purists hated it, but a lot of it were, was, was dead-end streets and Art Blakey used to like to tell the story about Donald Bird coming up to him at backstage at some concert and saying, "Man, the pressure of coming up with another record that's going to sell as much as my last one and I'm not sure what direction to go in." And Art was always a firm believer in sticking to the aesthetics that you always loved and developing from there. And he said, "I looked at Donald and he had a lot of money, but he had this big pot belly and he looked stressed and he didn't look healthy and I said, 'Donald, I never saw an armored car following a hearse.' " And I think that that really told the situation where the, big business had come into jazz. And, and fusion had become a part of pop music. And with it a lot of pressures, and a lot of demands that really shouldn't have been applied to the art.

So Wynton brought it back?

Yeah. Wynton's mere existence set off a lot of events that really brought jazz back. When Wynton signed with Columbia and although he was recording with Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter, Tony Williams, he was young player. And it gave a lot of encouragement for a lot of young people to pursue jazz more deeply and to put all their energies into it as a creative and professional life.

And Wynton has insisted that jazz have a history that fusion never suggested that it have?

People talk about the fact that so much of the jazz recordings that are coming out now are re-issues. But in fact, jazz re-issues are very important because there are 15, 20, 25, 30-year old players who've not been exposed to this music. And making great jazz available is one of my passions, but also, I think it's important because it's making it available to young voices that will, at some point, make a difference in the jazz scene. And so, I think the history is very important. I think the danger of being too involved in history is that you begin to re-create music instead of create music. So, it can be a trap. But I think it's essential and I think recordings are the main vehicle today. You cannot see John Coltrane and McCoy Tyner and Elvin Jones and Jimmy Garrison live. You cannot hear the, the Ellington saxophone section of the 50s and 60s any more. They don't exist. They're, they're not here to hear, except in recordings.

What happened to bop in the 50s? Why was hard bop necessary?

Yeah, I can give you one of the theories and then it'll get 9 of them and you can juxtapose them and make a fool of me.

[Laughter.]

Charlie Parker and Bud Powell and Dizzy Gillespie had such a devastating effect on jazz musicians in the good sense of the word, that jazz was never the same. And everybody in New York that owned an alto sax that had the chops, could fall under the spell of Charlie Parker. And was trying to emulate him. And what happened with that was that there were a lot of gigs around New York at clubs where guys would just pick up a rhythm section. People did not have their own bands. There was so much talent and, and so little career direction that there was just a lot pick-up gigs going on. And this was something that Horace Silver and Art Blakey in particular felt strongly against. They thought that this was really hurting jazz. In the cool school, people like Jerry Mulligan and Chet Baker and, and Dave Brubeck were developing ensembles, keeping them on the road, developing a following, developing a career. But in jazz, so much was going on, and none of it was really focused. Guys were just interested in imitating Charlie Parker and getting on to the next gig, that it started to lose its way. That it started to lose its way and so, Art Blakey and Horace Silver formed a group called The

Jazz Messengers. With a fixed personnel, which at the time was Doug Watkins and Kenny Durham and Hank Mobley. And they started fixed arrangements and they brought in gospel influences, blues influences, things that people could relate to who were not deeply into modern jazz. And they began to develop the sound and it caught on very quickly. And it caught on at a time when a lot of other factors were coming into play. The LP was going from the 10 inch LP to the 12 inch LP. That sounds like a technical point, but it's not. What happened was that suddenly, record companies had to create a whole new library of music, a whole new catalog of music. So there was an incredible flurry of recording going on. And fortunately, at the same time, there was a lot of migration of incredible talent, from Detroit, from Philadelphia, from Chicago. An influx of players and a talent pool that I don't think we'll ever see the likes of again. It was an astonishing amount of talent and everybody was playing somewhere every night, and as a result of the Jazz Messengers, other groups developed out of that. And hard bop, which I don't think had been named by then, a lot of people called it the blue note sound at the time, a lot of people called it funk jazz before there was a funk jazz, really became the new mainstream. And helped attract a lot of people and keep a lot of audience that was wandering elsewhere.

What was the message of Blakey's group?

Music for the people. The message of the group was we swing, we're earthy, we play the blues. You can walk away humming it, but we're not going to cheat on the quality of the music or the creativity. And they found a way to do everything.

And this was something new, beyond Bird?

This was something that included achievements of Charlie Parker, but also brought in a lot of more root-based influences that made it attractive to people. Where people didn't feel left out.

Like what are those influences?

Essentially, the blues, gospel harmonies, very bluesy melodies. Shuffle beats, things that people could get in the groove of. They didn't have to know what Hank Mobley was playing, they didn't have to understand the chord changes or what he was doing. They could just get with the program.

I want to talk about Art Blakey and his contribution.

Yeah. Art Blakey was important in a lot of ways to jazz. Not, not only in setting up The Jazz Messengers, but also developing a litany of modern jazz that became very important. Art Blakey was a drummer. Never wrote a song, never wrote music, and yet, the way he sculpted from the drums was so identifiable that we refer to, to tunes as Art Blakey tunes.

OK. Talk to me about it...

OK. I want to start with your, your other issue first. Probably the best example of fusing gospel and jazz and, and blues in the modern idiom was "Moanin'." It was a Bobby Timmons tune. He had just joined The Messengers, and Benny Golson was in the group at the time; he was musical director. And he started working this out at a rehearsal and it was just something he, some licks, some gospel licks that he knew. And Art and Benny became intrigued and, and Timmons finished it and developed it into a tune, which is now a modern jazz standard. But it is very much in the tradition of gospel Amen!. I mean the whole, the whole cadence and the whole melody is, is an Amen melody. And it became one of the biggest records for Art Blakey. And much to Art's credit, he never tried to continue imitating it, giving endless watered down versions with every album. He moved on. But it was always a part of his library and it was probably internationally one of the, one of the most memorable and biggest hits in jazz. And it, it also gives rise to the fact that Art inspired a body of very important compositions from composers like, in recent history, Bobby Watson, and, and Wynton Marsalis, back to Wayne Shorter and Freddie Hubbard and Lee Morgan and Bobby Timmons and Hank Mobley and Benny Golson. And much of it was the way he sculpted music from the drums. He never wrote a tune in his life, yet we always talk about Art Blakey tunes. The, because there're tunes that his playing influenced the composers to write for the band that they were playing in and one thing his tunes always had was intelligence, harmonic sophistication, and also a dynamic they built. They were sectional and they built. So that you always had guideposts, even, even a novice listener could feel the structure of the tune under the solos. Even if they didn't think that they could, it was just there. And it was a grounding, I think, for people.

And he's also bringing people along.

Oh, well, yeah. He also was a very important in the maturing process of musicians. When, the first night that Woody Shaw joined Art Blakey in the late 60s, Woody told me that, that the first set he really wanted to prove his metal and he came out of the box with this, with this great solo, and at the end of the set, Art Blakey said, "Where the hell are you going to go from there? You gotta build. You've got to build the way music should build. And you have to use dynamics and you have to use your head." And, he said, "Don't open up until you hear my press roll." And Woody said that it, it was a lesson that really taught him a lot about how to build improvisation and how to shape music. Art also was, we used to call him the, the greatest jazz university around. More than anyone else, he stayed at it from 1954 until his death. About 45 years of leading groups and always believing that he should feed back musicians into the jazz scene. He used to ask players that another leader might find valuable, indispensable and want to hold onto, he used to tell musicians, "Well, you're ready now. You've got the tunes, you've got the experience. It's time for you to lead a band, get 5 young cats and feed the

tributary of jazz that way.” And that’s what Art lived by all his life and he was an important source of talent. And an important university for talent to get the mature experience that they needed. Indispensable.

Mingus.

OH!!! (Laughs) What do you want me to say about Mingus?

Organic, you said.

Yeah. Well, I think the most exciting thing about Charles Mingus was a technique that he had of not showing music to musicians. When he had music, he would sing parts to the musicians and he and Danny Richmond, his drummer, would set up a, a kind of propulsive rhythm, a momentum, an urgency. Sort of like you were going down a hill, and you’re not sure if the brakes are going to hold, kind of feeling. And he would just propel the music and the guys would, would, would play it with their own interpretation. They would never have the music as a guide. And as a result, often ensembles would be, would be ragged. Guys would have different approaches to a tune, but it would have a cumulative sound that was extraordinary, that was really exciting. And in a way, I guess, you could say that Mingus was keeping alive some of the traditions of, of original New Orleans jazz. Because there would be a lot of inadvertent counterpoint. Because guys were interpreting tunes in their own ways. And there would be a freshness to it that was just extraordinary.

Charles Mingus’s music was organic in the way he let it happen. He gave the musicians enough freedom that the composition he wrote on paper was one thing. But it came alive. And came alive in different ways, depending on who was playing it. And he allowed enough freedom and he created enough propulsion with the style of bass that he played and with Danny Richmond’s drums that the music just carried itself and each time it was different. The tune was recognizable but it was always different each time and it was exciting and creative all the time. There was not a dull Charles Mingus performance.

Could you tell me about the John Coltrane Quartet?

Well, the John Coltrane Quartet is one of those phenomenons that makes you start to wonder about predestination and a lot of other factors that are mysteries of human life. John Coltrane went through many phases of playing. Each one very unique and each one his own. When he left Miles Davis to start his own group, he went through a lot of rhythm sections in a short period of time, trying to find the right combination. And, one by one, McCoy Tyner, Jimmie Garrison and Elvin Jones became available and joined his group. And in every case these were musicians that had their own style of playing, all 4 of them. When they came together, it’s as if they were enablers in the healthy sense of the word. They enabled each other to blossom. So,

individually, they inspired and allowed creative room for each other to blossom individually and then, add upon that the, the collective force. The sound that the 4 of them created was something that was absolutely unheard of in jazz and was bigger than the sum of the parts, as great as those parts were. And the John Coltrane Quartet was an incredibly exciting group. He was experimenting with, with extended modality, he was experimenting with, with free form, with not playing on changes, and still playing on changes on other pieces. But he never lost the jazz audience. In fact, in the 60s he had a large white audience, he had a large black audience and while everybody in *Downbeat* and everywhere else was nit-picking about avant garde, traditional, and what was worthwhile, what wasn't, and Coltrane is jazz, Coltrane is anti-jazz. In the meantime, people were flocking to see him. He was an incredibly successful musician with ensemble that was playing avant garde music. And it was, it was probably some of the most exciting music ever created. Forget about the level. I mean, the creative level that they were functioning on. And, but the energy and the power and Elvin Jones way of creating poly-rhythms, but never losing the beat. And McCoy Tyner's kind of modal montuna, which was a really driving force. And it was an astonishing event every time, every time you experienced it.

Pick a tune from that period. I want to continue with John Coltrane, what he meant to that age.

What John Coltrane meant at the time, for me and for a lot of young guys that were playing music at the same age I was it was just this astonishing blossoming. We had no idea what this group was up to, we really couldn't understand what they were doing, but it just, it grabbed us in a way that, in, in a way that was emotional, intellectual. It was just an extraordinary experience. It was very much like what Benny Golson told me John Coltrane went through when he first saw Charlie Parker in, at a concert at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia, and Benny and, and John Coltrane were, were high school friends and they went to this concert, and Charlie Parker was astonishing and, Benny said "We both walked home in silence and we didn't call each other for about 2 weeks, and we used to talk to each other every day. And, and finally John called me up 2 weeks later and said, 'Man, what do you think?' " And they were both grappling with this amazing new thing that they had heard. And that's very much the way John Coltrane, I think, struck us. "Impressions" probably was, was his anthem, although "My Favorite Things" was probably the most popular thing. The amazing thing is you can hear a lot of recorded versions of "Impressions" or "My Favorite Things" and each one is so completely different and so completely astonishing that, it's just a testament to how incredibly creative they were. And anyone that thinks that it's easy to go on stage every night, 300 days a year, and create something new, will never get what it, the toll that it takes to be a jazz musician because it's incredibly draining to start from ground zero every day, and truly create something that's as close as you can humanly get to a masterpiece by midnight.

What's the art of jazz?

I think the art of jazz is instantaneous composing. That's the goal. It's swing, it's emotion, it's visceral in that sense. But it is also starting with a clean slate. Yeah, well, a set of chord changes and a melody to work off of. But to create something from scratch every night and make it memorable, and make it from the heart as well as from the mind. And that's not an easy thing to do.

My own jazz epiphany came from watching a singer; it didn't really matter who it was... a negotiation between the art and that their being...

Very much. I think that's very much the case. I think it takes a lot out of someone to go up every night and create from scratch and to really create something that's absolutely memorable, and meaningful and mature. And that's what makes a jazz musician great. And there aren't that many of them that can do that night after night, and reach a level that's, that's supreme creativity.

It seems utterly American, an art form that's not written down...?

Yeah. With jazz, so much of it is, is of the moment and I, I think that's why recordings are, are so important in jazz. And it's of the moment and it's of human beings. There will never ever be a Duke Ellington Orchestra that sounds like the one that Duke Ellington led. There will never be a Duke Ellington Orchestra that has a sax section sound like the one that really existed when Harry Carney and Johnny Hodges sat on either end of it. It can be approximated; it can never ever be reproduced.

You just said "vulnerable." What do you mean...?

Well, in the creative process of starting from scratch every night and drawing from your heart and from your intellect and making your fingers work your instrument, you have to really lay your soul out to bare. You have to be very vulnerable. It's almost like standing naked on a stage. And that's why, out of Lester Young's pain comes so much beauty. And I think that's why in the 50s and , and 60s there was a lot of alcohol, there was a lot of heroin and cocaine, just sort of to dull the pain. Because every night you'd have to lay your soul bare and put every molecule of your body into creating something.

And unlike other art forms, you're not hiding behind your performance...?

Yeah, unlike other art forms, you don't have private time to tinker with your creation. You're out there. You are in front of people and you are creating of the moment. And there's no net; there is no safety valve at all. You are out there for all to see, to fail or to succeed. Or to just get by.

What killed Bird?

Appetite. First of all, let me just say I didn't know Charlie Parker and I, unfortunately, didn't get to see him live. From what I understand, Charlie Parker had a voracious appetite, and I mean that in an all-encompassing way. Whether it was food or drugs or music, he was an insatiable person. And some people are shooting comets and we just have to appreciate their pain and be lucky that we were on this earth at the right time to really appreciate them. When you think about John Coltrane, he recorded from 1955 til his death in 1967. The body of work and the amount of changes, the amount of artistic success in those 12 years is astonishing. When you think that a young musician like Wynton Marsalis has been recording professionally for 18 years already - it's already 50 percent more than the time that John Coltrane had. And yet, the body of work that these extraordinary people created and the amount of changes and developments in their music was, was just astonishing.

Miles Davis Quintet, early 60s, you said... for appeal to the gut and the mind...?

Um-hum.

So, talk about the appeal.

Yeah. After the, after the John Coltrane Quartet, the next thing that truly shook the jazz world was the Miles Davis Quintet that had Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter, Tony Williams, and at first, George Coleman, and then later, when it really found its own identity, Wayne Shorter. And what that group did was really take the music in yet another direction. Herbie Hancock was a young classically trained pianist who had a great ear for funk, a brilliant knack for jazz and a good classical background. He was so facile, harmonically, that he could go anywhere. Tony Williams, when he joined the band, he was a kid; he was 17 years old. And what was astonishing was just getting over the shock of Elvin Jones playing drums in a way that no one else had ever thought of, here comes a 17 year old kid from Boston who played drums in a completely different way that no one had ever thought of. And what Ron Carter and Tony Williams and Herbie Hancock did was they created an elasticity. They could stretch sections, they could stretch or contract the tempo. They were completely elastic and there was an empathy among those 5 people where they could think as one. They could absolutely trust each other, and they could go anywhere, and they would know that everybody else would be with them. So they, they were never inhibited by structure, they were never inhibited by predictability, they were never inhibited by musical signposts. They were free to go anywhere they wanted to and they knew everyone else would follow. That's a luxury that few of us ever experience, in marriage or in music or in, in any kind of art form or any kind of team work. It was, it was astonishing. And the best part of it was that

when you went to see that group, you knew that you were hearing something that was immediate. They were creating of the moment and they were taking it places that they had never been. And that's very exciting to have artists let you share in the creative process. And that's what that band did.

And you said it appealed to the gut and to the mind...?

It, well, the music of the Miles Davis Quartet certainly appealed to the mind, because it was astonishing what they were doing with musical form. They were all virtuosos. And it also really appealed to the gut.

Musically, intellectually, the music was coming from a very high plane. It was something that was really appealing to the, to the mind. But the feeling that the band had, the force, the drive of Tony Williams' sense of swing, which was different than anybody else's, and the way he and Ron Carter interacted and the underlying funk that the 3 of them could create in the most abstract piece of music, always appealed to the body. It was always, always very, very visceral. And it was a group that really had it all - the really showed the spectrum of jazz and appealed to every part of you.

Can we talk about the avant garde musicians in the 70s?

Well, yes, I, I think a lot of it was important. The avant garde really came about in the late 50s. Generally, sociologically, you could say it was a reaction to Art Balkey and Horace Silver doing too many blues, too many funky numbers. I'm not sure what caused it. But the fact was that the pillars of the avant garde, Cecil Taylor and Ornette Coleman and John Coltrane and, and there were others, each had their own different directions. And they had their own vocabulary, constructed from their own educations and backgrounds. And their own way of expressing themselves. And Ornette Coleman was very funky and very organic. He also could, could be very abstract. But he was a, a Texas soulful, bluesy player. What they did was shake up jazz. They gave musicians some new directions; they gave musicians some freedom. So they opened up the jazz vocabulary in that way. They also scared the hell out of a lot of people. When the avant garde made its first splash, suddenly Stan Getz was exploring Brazilian music. Other musicians were moving in other directions. What it did was shake things up and, and shake the dust off of a lot of artists. I think it was healthy. I think much of it is valid. It was probably a very important component of the late 60s, as the jazz scene was, was dying economically. Black nationalism was growing out of civil rights, Malcolm X was assassinated, and there was a lot of anger among black intellectuals that expressed itself in, in the avant garde jazz of the time. A lot of the developments came out of the John Coltrane-Elvin Jones fiery intense approach, and took different directions. Some of it was a dead end street; some of it was very important and and influenced what has come since.

What's the appeal of the avant garde saxophone music?

The saxophone, I think the, the attraction of the saxophone, which became the principle instrument of jazz, I guess it started to move in in the late 30s, is that it is like the cello, very close to the range of the, of the male voice. And it is an incredibly expressive instrument. With the avant garde, and this isn't true of everybody in the avant garde, but with the avant garde, a lot of the cries of frustration and anguish that were being felt in, in the social and political upheaval of the late 60s were, were very easily and graphically expressed through the saxophone. And John Coltrane had made the tenor saxophone the voice of the avant garde, and I think that's why so many of the major practitioners were saxophonists. And yet, each one had their own identity and their own differences in the way they approached music.

What's race got to do with jazz?

Well, I guess race has a great deal to do with jazz. Jazz would not exist if it were not for a very unfortunate atrocity and that was the, the movement of black people to this country against their will. Jazz is clearly an outgrowth of an African and American experience and that is the, the southern slaves carrying vestiges of African music and also developing a form of blues that probably didn't exist in Africa. And European classical music, which was what white people brought to this country, and it was the wedding of both of those that made jazz possible, in a very simplified form. It was a unique American art form, but it was a unique black American art form. Which is not to say that there are not a lot of great white musicians playing it. And I think that has always been a bone of contention, is that a lot of white people get very offended by... "Well, what do you mean it's black American music?!? I mean, look at yah-da-yah-da. Look at yah da-yah-da." But the fact is that it comes, it comes out of the black experience and it comes out of the melding of black and European histories.

Want to just say that last thing again...?

Oh, OK. But the fact is that it is a unique art form that comes out of the black and Europeans histories, and it was developed essentially by black people and it is a black American art form that someone from the Ukraine can play. If they're good enough.

We often say where was jazz born? And we usually answer, New Orleans, but why was jazz born?

I don't know why jazz was born, but I'm very grateful for it. There's a lot of theories behind it. The fact that blacks had access to instruments, and used to gather in Congo Square in the late, in the late 19th century. And out of that gave rise, there were drum and fife corps in Mississippi that shoot back directly to, to African styles of music, and most of them using a pentatonic scale.

But I wanted to know why you were grateful for jazz...?

Jazz reached me in a way that nothing prior to that had. It was before puberty. And, it was something that just appealed to every part of my being, and something that became all-important to me. And it also gave me a purpose in life. At first, trying to play it, but when I knew that that was a fruitless exercise, I got very much involved in radio and writing and recording. And with jazz, I have a purpose in life. And it's a most joyful and exciting one.

What's the future of jazz? Is it dead?

Well, no. I don't think making a film about jazz is a signal that it's something that's frozen in time. I think it's just the diary that takes us up to the present. And I hope that's what this is about. The, the future of jazz remains very unknown. Will it exist? It will always exist. What form it will take - you'll have to ask the next great voices in jazz. Right now, what I'm very happy about is that there are a great deal of programs that, that address the history of jazz, that young musicians are learning the, the background out of which the music came, that there's more important music available than ever before. And I think we're set up for a very healthy future in jazz.

Was fusion a dead end?

Fusion was very much a dead end and that doesn't denigrate the music at all, because some of the musicians that got into fusion, especially the Tony Williams Lifetime with Larry Young and John McLaughlin, were astonishing. I mean, the music they made was at a brilliant level and it was wonderful. But what happened was that it created a drought for young musicians to come up in pure jazz and by grafting different musical elements together, I think a lot of these great groups hit creative dead ends. All the great groups of that time, Weather Report, Chick Corea's bands, Herbie Hancock's bands, Tony Williams' band - they, they all hit dead ends in that incandescent period of their greatest creativity. And then looked to other forms.

The End