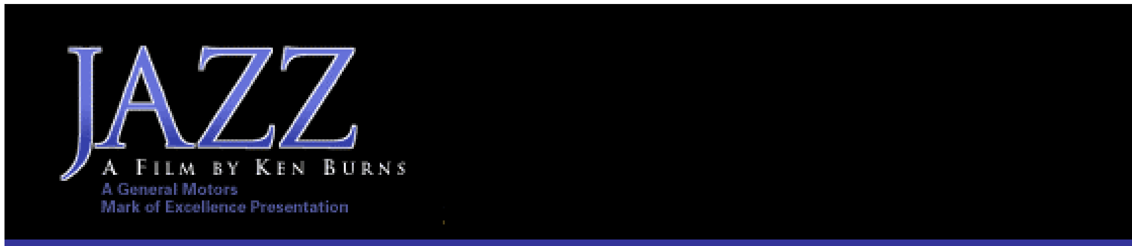

Gary Giddens

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In your book on Charlie Parker, you labeled him as a prophet. Why?

Charlie Parker was like a prophet when he first came on the scene, right at the end of the Second World War. He made his first recording as a leader at the end of 1945 and it came out in 1946. For two years before then there was a recording band, so nobody around the country heard Charlie Parker. It was explosive, out of nowhere. It was, the first thing you have to remember about Parker before you get into the musicological innovations is that it was shocking, the way Louis Armstrong was shocking in the 1920s. I mean, la dee, dee...., you know, where did this come from, this speed, the velocity, the excitement, the exhilaration? Forty years after he made those records I would play them for a class of, you know, undergraduates and they would listen to that and they would respond as though it were burning lava, and they would just, you know, "Keep the hell away from me." They flinch at it and I would say, "Believe it or not, after we're finished discussing this, this record, you're gonna see that what he's playing is nothing but pure melody." And they would scoff. And then we would look at it phrase by phrase and they would see it's melody, but it's played so fast, and with such joy and such exhilaration that it totally revolutionized the music. Even if you didn't know, think you liked it at first, you had to acknowledge that here was something new, and, and want to find out what it was all about.

How did he become able to do that?

I think Parker, much again like Armstrong, was an autodidact and the nature of his genius, if you try to track it, it's very difficult, it doesn't, it doesn't go in any one particular direction, but there's a lot of things that feed into it that have to do with Parker's peculiar education growing up in Kansas City. The things that influenced him, first of all, were the great jazz saxophonists. He memorized their solos, he had all their records, he imitated them, and, in fact, you know, when Parker came on the scene in the, in the late 1940s it

was commonplace, in those days they had 16rpm records, so you could take a 45 or a 33rpm performance by Parker and slow it down to 16, and if you slowed it down to half its velocity, he would sound like Coleman Hawkins or Chu Berry. And these are some of the musicians, Lester Young, Ben Webster, the other great saxophonists that he listened to. But he listened to everything. He listened to Rudi Valle when he was a little kid. He listened to, certainly to Johnny Hodges, he listened to Jimmy Dorsey. He listened to all kinds of bands and band musicians and he soaked up everything. He used to love to go to movie theaters and sit up in the balcony with friends who had such good ears that they could transcribe things that were going on in the score. And they would debate the way things were voiced and orchestrated. So he really understood the way a piece of music was made. And he would take a piece of music like "Cherokee" and play it, that became his signature theme. Hundreds and hundreds of times every night. That was the piece that he had his great breakthrough on all of a sudden. He broke through the basic chord system that was common in jazz, started playing on the upper intervals, and brought a whole new spontaneity and melodic vocabulary to the music.

He is a genius in some way. Is there something unknowable about genius?

I think genius ultimately is unknowable. We're never gonna really understand what makes a Mozart or a Schubert, any more that we're gonna understand where an Armstrong or a Parker come from. Parker's genius when we try to analyze it, when we look at his records, we can see certain things that, that filter through from the tradition of jazz and from other music. So we can see that he really did understand what Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young were playing and he used them. But the final result is just inexplicable and wonderful. It's a magical thing and it's only happened relatively few times in the history of western civilization where a musician comes along and can completely transmute the music. And jazz, certainly Parker and Armstrong, and I think if you tried to fight for a third figure other than Ellington who's more a composer than an improviser, you'd probably get an argument on your hands from somebody. Whereas I don't think there are many people left in the world who'd want to argue about the preeminence of Armstrong and Parker.

Talk a little about how quick on the uptake he was at pulling stuff together to put into his music.

Parker loved song lyrics and he knew them by heart. He was like Lester Young in that. And, so he would use them in his improvisation if a woman in a red dress walked in, he would quote "The Lady in Red." He could, he could take these quotations and he could, you know, weave them into his solos at that tremendous velocity without losing a beat, without missing a chord. And these are the kinds of things that musicians would just, you know, roll their eyes and wonder at and a few people who were listening closely in the

audience would, would, would laugh in, in, in mutual amazement. Parker, it was very important for Parker, the whole element of popular song. And this has, this has been a neglected subject. You know his wife, one of the women he lived with for several years, Chan, used to talk about the fact that after they saw "The Great Caruso," he used to walk around the house singing "Be My Love," you know, Mario Lanza. And he, there were a lot of other popular songs, and he genuinely enjoyed these songs. And most of the great figures in jazz have a profound relationship to the popular culture, (like Miles) and one of the things that jazz does is it transmutes the popular culture into something, into art. And Parker was particularly exemplary at that.

Let's talk about this incredibly complicated individual and his intellect and thirst for knowledge.

Yeah, yeah, I have to take a breath for just a second.

Would you like me to move on to something else?

Why don't you do that.

Okay. Let's talk about the impact of "Koko."

"Koko" is one of the most extraordinary recordings in jazz history, there's no question about it. It was the recording that really unleashed Parker on, on the jazz world. It had Dizzy Gillespie playing in the opening arabesques. It was supposed to be Miles Davis, who was at the session, but Miles couldn't play that. So that Dizzy, who was just there and who was sitting in playing piano on a couple of tracks, picked up his trumpet for that one piece. It's based on the chords of "Cherokee." And initially, after the arabesques, which are 8 bars by Parker, which are very fast, very flying, fluent, and then 8 bars by Gillespie, and then into a theme, very short little thematic phrase, and then into the melody by Ray Noble of a popular song, "Cherokee," ba, ba to de ba ba ba boo be bop, somebody said, "No, no, we can't do that, we can't record "Cherokee," because then you'd have to pay mechanical royalties. They didn't want to have to do anything like that. So they took out the melody of "Cherokee" and they went straight from the little, little thematic phrase into Parker's solo, like that (claps). And in fact, you actually hear one of these (claps), because Max Roach does it on the drums as if to say, "Sit back, ladies and gentlemen, wait until you hear this." And then Parker flies into this astounding two chorus solo that has, if, I mean, if you, if you deconstructed it, you'd find, you know a serious percentage of the, of the fragment, of the melodic fragments that compose modern jazz right there in Parker's solo. And it's, it's, it consists of riffs, melodic ideas, it even consists of a quotation of a famous old piccolo abologato from, from New Orleans days, high society, be be ...., which he just throws in, and, when he's finished, Max Roach plays a chorus, just kind of a roll on the snare drum against the, playing against the beat. And then they repeat the 8 bar arabesque. And you're out. And I've never heard anybody who on hearing

that record for the first time wasn't, you know, just left stunned. It is a stunning record. But after listening to it for more than, you know, 30 to 35 years, I find it just as striking and just as amazing everytime I play it. It is a masterpiece. There isn't a note on it that you'd want to change.

So something happened to him (Parker) between 16 and 19.

Well, Parker seems to have had a fairly normal upbringing until he was 16 and he was playing with a band in the Ozarks. And the band, they got into a terrible car accident and Parker's closest friend, according to a lot of people, the one person who really got close to Parker, was killed, and he never really got over that. And in addition, Parker himself was very seriously injured and was on his back at home for several weeks, perhaps months after that, I think it was months. And it was during that time that he started using pain killers. And soon graduated from painkillers to morphine and heroin and became a terrible heroin addict for most of the rest of his life. He seems to have completely changed at that point. He became remote, difficult to communicate with, both with his young wife, with friends, with his mother Addie, and he seemed older. Everybody who knew him in that period and in the years that followed remarks on the fact. And you have to remember now that Charlie Parker, when he died, he was only 34 years old, which is, I think, phenomenal when you consider what a completely adult, virile presence he was in the world of jazz, I mean everybody looked up at him. All of these musicians, some of them who were considerably older, when Charlie Parker put his hand on your shoulder, it was a mark of, some, you know, great arrival. And all of these musicians talked about Parker as being much older, and a lot of them were quite stunned to realize years and years later that he was maybe only three years older, or four or five years older at best, because he was the, he was the God, he was the Messiah of this new music, of this surrealistic musical world that was becoming known as bebop, and everybody looked up to him.

We want to understand the actual human being who created this music. Who was Charlie Parker?

Parker had multiple personalities, not a disorder, but he just had a lot of personalities. And you know the time he was in New York at the peak of his renown, he was leading three lives. It sounds like, you know, the old television show, Kim Philby "I Lived Three Lives." But he did. He had the life of a jazz musician, which would be a full-time job for most people, perfecting your art and performing night after night. He had the, the job, as it were, of a junkie, which is also a full time place which led him, a full time job which led him into, you know, terrible places where the musician might not want to be. Scoring and keeping himself healthy and the right kind of, you know, drug-induced mental state day after day after day. And then he led this middle-class life as, as the, as a father and a husband living in the east Village of Manhattan where he was known by all of his neighbors as, you know, somebody who would always had a smile on his face and was friendly.

A lot of people didn't know who he was or what he did. But he was liked, very well liked. And he managed to play these three different roles simultaneously. He had a thirst for knowledge and he knew so much. I mean people tell stories about him fixing cars and filleting freshly killed rabbits and, you know, you name it, he just, he knew a lot about life and he knew a lot about the way the world worked. And yet, he was shy. He did not get frequently the kinds of jobs that he would have liked because he was too shy to ask for them. And because other people wouldn't, contractors would never ask him, thinking, "Hey, this is Charlie Parker, he wouldn't want to play, you know, accompanying alto on a record by some famous young pop singer. So he was not sufficiently used. His talents were never sufficiently exploited, not completely exploited. And, you know, when he went to Europe, that was probably the one time where audiences and critics and the public really greeted him as heroic figure. In New York and in the United States, it was mostly within the musical community. But he never won any of the big, you know, the trinkets of celebrityhood. He never was on the cover of any major magazine. He never recorded for a major label, not once in his career. He was never invited to, you know, be in films. He, he was a musician's musician.

So 1946 he went to California with Dizzy Gillespie and having an hellacious experience. Tell us the set up.

Well in 1946 Bird and Dizzy went west, took a train to Los Angeles. And they had an engagement set up and they also had a few record dates set up. But they discovered, much to their horror, that California was not yet ready for their music. It was being belittled on radio stations and it was not much performed. And they had a, they had a very difficult time. And then on top of that Parker, there was bad dope going around and Parker got some of it. And he became very, very sick. He had a complete nervous and physical breakdown and had to be hospitalized in Camarillo State Hospital for a year. Gillespie went back to New York alone. What I always find ironic about the California story is that, within months of Parker coming home, California had been completely bebop-ized. Central Avenue was one of the, was probably the second most exciting place to hear the new music in the country after New York. Every young musician who had heard Parker either on live broadcast on the radio or had come down to the clubs, and had heard Dizzy Gillespie as well and was now trying to play that music. And so in a sense they were like colonial masters. They had, had come to this little outpost California and they had changed it around musically. And by the time they came back to New York, New York was much more open to what they were playing. And so he began to record for bigger labels, he began to record for Norgran instead of for, you know, Savoy, and, although he still made some records for Savoy and for Dial. And Parker was always recording for tiny labels. And he actually had enough clout, though, to convince Norman Grantz, his producer at Norgram, to put together a string ensemble for him. And with that he had the closest he would ever have to a hit record with

"Just Friends." It was a record that at least got some radio play and a lot of people knew it and it's still a classic today.

Why was it important for him to play with strings?

Yeah, the Bird and strings bothers a lot of people, I'm not sure why. I, I, well I think one, one reason is that the arrangements on most of the records is terrible. Norman Grantz hired two, you know, hack arrangers from the 1930s. One did some good work for Buddy Berrigan but they, they weren't great writers and they should have hired very gifted modern arrangers of Parker's generation. They should have hired Gil Evans and George Russell and Gerry Mulligan and, you know, people who could really write. And in fact Parker made that argument and went to them himself and commissioned arrangements from them, most of which were never recorded, although there are broadcasts of a few of the things that Gerry Mulligan and George Russell wrote. So most of what we know of Bird and strings is a string ensemble playing very conventional versions of pop tunes salvaged by Parker's solos. So it seems like there's a fight going on between the, you know, the good Parker and the evil, commercial strings. But in fact the strings inspired him the way the Guy Lombardo style reed section inspired Louis Armstrong. He liked playing against it and he made some beautiful solos in that environment. Had he lived, had he been able to commission arrangements by better orchestrators he would have produced some brilliant music in that arena.

So when Parker died, some musicians were shocked into quitting. Can you talk about that a little bit?

While Charlie Parker was, was at his peak, and this was a great source of disgust to him, and deeply personal, deeply problematic, a lot of musicians began taking drugs because they thought it would help them to play like Charlie Parker. And Parker used to say, "Do as I say, not as I do," which doesn't always work on young, impressionable kids who are trying to play the music and, as a lot of musicians have said to me from that period, "You know, we didn't really know about heroin, we didn't know the way everybody knows today what it does to you. It was just, you know, if the government said it was illegal, how bad could it be." But when Parker died, a lot of musicians stopped taking drugs. And in fact, it has often been suggested that the, the end of heroin, heroin sway over jazz occurred in the middle 1950s for two reasons: one, because of Charlie Parker's death, which was quite shocking, he was 34, and two, because of the arrival of Clifford Brown, who was only in his early and middle twenties, he died at the age of 25. And Clifford Brown didn't take any drugs and he didn't smoke and he didn't curse and he was just, he was a, you know, a pure bred young man. But he played with more brilliance than anyone had come along since Parker, and in a sense, he proved that it wasn't about drugs.

Okay, let's move on. Coleman Hawkins' "Body and Soul." Why was that so important in the way he played the choruses and what he's doing with the song.

Coleman Hawkins was the virtual inventor of the tenor saxophone in jazz. He was one of, to this day, one of the four or five greatest tenor saxophonists the music has ever produced. But he came along at a time when the tenor saxophone was a vaudeville clown's instrument, and no one had ever made serious music on it. Ravel and a few other composers had attempted to write passages for the saxophone. But, but Hawkins took the tenor saxophone and he made art on it.

Coleman had a mystique about him.

Yeah, I think one of the reasons that Coleman Hawkins had the particular impact that he did, beyond the fact that he was an extraordinary saxophone player, was a personal charisma, a certain virile magnetism he had, almost by the 1940s, a kind of like Bogart, you know, quality. I mean you can imagine Coleman Hawkins sitting at the bar in Casablanca. Everything about him, the way he held himself, the way he held his cigarette, the way he held his saxophone, but most of all, the quality of his sound. He had the most virile sound I've ever heard on a tenor saxophone. It was big and full without being blustery, without a lot of wind or extra vibrato. And he just played with such authority, I mean every eight bars in a solo would just seem to, you know, unfurl like a perfect ribbon. It, it was never any hesitation or any question, any unnecessary repetition. Extraordinary eloquence. And he kept it right up to the end. I used to seem him in his last years when he had been drinking, he was not in good health, his suits were still very expensive, silk mohairs. But they were hanging a little bit, you know, loosely on his shoulders, but he still had that quality and he had that gruff voice, that wonderful voice that Hawkins had, and you just felt that there was, you know, here was a man who was really comfortable in his own skin and comfortable in the world. I'm not saying that it was necessarily true, I'm saying that's the, the, the image that Coleman Hawkins produced.

Let's talk about "Body and Soul."

"Body and Soul" is one of the supreme masterpieces among jazz records. It's a phenomenal recording. A lot of people for years said that Coleman Hawkins made a lot of records just as good and why did this one become a hit. It's not true. Listen to all of his records. He made many great records. I think it's very important to talk about the fact that Hawkins had so much charisma in his solos. Now just to give one example, in 1926 he made a record with Fletcher Henderson called "Stampede." This is a very primitive record in 1926. And it's a very primitive saxophone style that Hawkins is playing. But saxophonists all over the United States started imitating him, including Buddy Tate, who later became a star with the Count Basie Orchestra. Now Buddy Tate was hanging out with Lester Young and Ben Webster, you know,

these other two geniuses of that era. But here they were in person, and he was listening to a tinny little old 78 of "Stampede" and he was trying to imitate Coleman Hawkins. Well, Coleman Hawkins went to Europe in 1935, he stayed for four years, almost four or five years. And he was only heard here on records. And then he comes back, goes to the studio, and the first recording session he puts together "Body and Soul." And what is "Body and Soul?" It's a ballad written in the middle 1920s by John Green, was made famous by mostly torch singers as well as Louis Armstrong who made a wonderful recording of it. And there were a few recordings done in Europe in the middle 1930s. D'Jango Rheinhardt and some other people made recordings of it. Hawkins comes along with a recording that consists of two choruses in which he never, except for the first two measures, plays any of the melody. This was a marvelous thing. A confusing thing to a lot of people. I mean, he starts off ba da boo de boo be bop, and then he goes off into his own melodic variation and he sustains and continues that variation for two full courses, playing one brilliant melodic idea after another until the end of the record. And the first, you know, no matter how many times you listen to it, but I think of the first time especially, when it's over, you just kind of shake your heads and it's another example of pure magic.

Lester Young. Perhaps you can give us a sense of his music and how he didn't want to play like Coleman Hawkins.

Lester Young was a complete individualist in every degree. I mean, the way he talked, he invented words, he would say, if he didn't want you around he would say something like, "I'm feeling a draft." He used to say, "Bells," when he liked something. He looked different. He wore a pork-pie hat. He had a crazy little snaggle-toothed smile and he had bright red hair that went straight back, and a funny way of walking. And everything about Lester Young, soft-spoken. But most individualistic of all, of course, was his way of playing. And no body wanted to hear it when he first came on the scene outside of the group of musicians who surrounded him in Kansas City. And the great example of this is that Fletcher Henderson was smart enough to recognize, as he had ten years earlier when he was in New Orleans and he heard Louis Armstrong and he hired him, tried to get him to come to New York, Armstrong wouldn't do it. This time he saw Lester Young and he, and he succeeded in convincing Lester Young to leave Kansas City for New York. But when he got there, he was replacing Coleman Hawkins who had just gone to Europe. All the musicians in the band were bugged, you know, they were giving him a hard time. "You don't play the right way, man. You're just, Coleman Hawkins, that's the way you play." So Mrs. Henderson had the temerity and the moxie to ask Lester Young to come over to the brownstone where the Henderson's lived and she brought him into the basement and put on a record player of Coleman Hawkins records and forced him to sit there, telling him that this was the way he should play. Well, he didn't last very long and Henderson called him aside and said, you know, "Lester, I like the way you play, and I think you're gonna be bigger than any of these people but I don't think it's fair to you or to the other guys in the band and I'm

gonna have to send you home." And he did. But of course a year later, he came back to New York as a member of Count Basie's Orchestra and the tenor saxophone was never the same again.

I think to the general audience, Sidney Bechet is the lesser known of the jazz titans. Help us understand who he was.

Yeah, it's ironic that Sidney Bechet is not as well remembered today as he once was, although he is in Europe. Just a few years ago, I remember you could still find juke boxes in restaurants all over Paris that had Sidney Bechet records. Because he lived so much of his later years in Europe, he became a real heroic figure over there. But the thing that you have to remember about Sidney Bechet is that until 1925 there was really only one musician in the whole world who could keep company with Louis Armstrong and not embarrass himself. And that was Sidney Bechet. And there were records that Armstrong and Bechet made together, where Bechet actually bests Armstrong. There aren't many, there just a couple, but they do exist where Bechet plays with such brilliance, both in his sound on the soprano saxophone and his maturity of his concept and the complete absence of frills and any kind of sentimentality and the way he swings and his understanding of the blues. He was a very profound musician. But Sidney Bechet's New Orleans grounded music stayed fairly much the same over the next few years, so that he became associated with, you know, traditionalist jazz, New Orleans rounded jazz. And as a result, when the music began moving into bebop and cool and even into swing before bebop, he became stereotyped as a musician with a limited ability and it wasn't really fair. In the 1950s when he was in Europe, he made a record with the great modern pianist Marcel Solal, and they're superb together. So Sidney Bechet was a man of depth and he really showed that also when he, after his death when his posthumous autobiography <u>Treat It Gentle</u> came out, which it just, many people still consider the most poetic of all jazz autobiographies.

Bix Beiderbecke — is he only important because he is white?

Wait a second, this is just too absurd. Look, Bix Beiderbecke, there's a certain amount of truth to the fact that because he was white, the nature of his genius had a certain meaning, a certain profundity it would have had, it would not have had if he wasn't white, and that is this. There were a lot of young white musicians around the country who were trying to play jazz. Some of them were very talented musicians, some of them were not, as usual, but most of them, certainly all the good ones, knew that the really great figures in the music were black, and they were trying to play like them. They heard Louis Armstrong, they heard Ethel Waters sing, or Bessie Smith, they heard Coleman Hawkins. They said, "Wow, these guys are doing something with these instruments, I want to play that music. I want to devote my life to that kind of music." Bix Beiderbecke was the first of the white musicians who had unmistakable genius. And so his, his, his importance to a lot of the young white musicians was, "Look, he proves it, he

proves that we can play this music. It's possible for a white musician to make a real, original contribution to jazz. Because, because Beiderbecke didn't sound like anybody else. And incidentally, one of Beiderbecke's foremost admirers was Louis Armstrong, who was quoted in various places talking about how important Beiderbecke was as a musician. What was so great about him? First of all, he had a completely original approach in terms of his tone. There were some other musicians who were playing with little vibrato, less vibrato than Armstrong, but nobody had a sound quite like Beiderbecke's. He, he liked to use modern harmonies. He, he was a student of Debussey and Ravel, in his composition, in his playing. He was a great fan of whole tone scales, which he uses in his improvisations quite, quite often. He had a beautiful, fluid, lyrical sense, great melodic sense. And he knew how to spin a melody over 8 bars or 16 bars in a way that influenced, I think, a lot of musicians, including some important black musicians in the next decade.

He became the sort of image of the jazz musician.

Now of course, Beiderbecke, for good or evil, also established the prototype of the jazz legend. He was the first major musician who died very young. He was an alcoholic. He was a loner, he was a difficult man and he was a tragic figure. And so, a lot of that legendary stuff has sentimentalized Beiderbecke's value and that's another reason, I suppose, why a number of musicians, a number of people look at Beiderbecke and think that he's somehow overrated. But that's not our responsibility, the sentimentalization of Beiderbecke. What's there for us to enjoy and to admire are the recordings, and those recordings stand up.

So in the late 40s some musicians got together and made the recording "Israel."

By 1949 it was clear that bebop had become, it was in something of a rut in that a lot of the recordings and a lot of the music that was being played was all based on the same 12 bar blues, 32 bar songs, it was all played with the same velocity, and it was a, there'd be a head, then there'd be solos, then there'd be a head. And a bunch of musicians came together and they used to congregate at, at, at the ground level, the street level apartment that Gil Evans owned in back of a laundry in, I think it was the east 50s. And among them were Miles Davis, Gerry Mulligan, Lee Konitz, John Lewis. Some of the most gifted of the young musicians of that generation. And they wanted to do something different. They wanted to put together an ensemble that went beyond the conventional quintet. They wanted to use polyphony, they wanted to use instruments that were ignored in jazz, like French horn and tuba. And they put together, Miles really did it, he organized a nine-piece ensemble. And he had Gil Evans and John Lewis. Gerry Mulligan wrote most of the music. I think he wrote half the arrangements. And then John Treasey wrote one called "Israel," which I think is a particularly masterful performance and piece of writing. And they went into the studio and they

recorded these 12 pieces. And when they were reissued on LP they became known as "Birth of the Cool." "Israel" is a very good example of what was so novel about these recordings. It's a blues, it's 12 bar blues, but the chords are so sophisticated that it doesn't sound like the usual blues, it doesn't rise and fall the way you expect, you know, the tonic sub-dominant tonic chord progression to fall. And it used counterpoints in an interesting way and it had a tambor in the ensemble that was very cool and understated and very modern. And the records didn't make that big of a, you know, explosion at the time that they came out. But when they were released as "The Birth of the Cool," re-released as "Birth of the Cool," people began to see that there was something new going on here and the cool jazz movement was really born with those recordings.

What was Gil Evans' particular genius?

Gil Evans is another one of these unique figures in jazz who is almost completely self-taught. He came from Canada, he was working for, I think it was Skinny Ennis' Orchestra on the Bob Hope radio show, writing orchestrations. And Claude Thornhill, the bandleader, was a guest on Hope's show and he was listening to the music. And he said, "Who wrote that stuff?" And he was introduced to Gil Evans and he convinced Evans to leave the Bob Hope show and come to New York with him to write for his orchestra. He had a completely home-grown style. Big, cloud-like harmonies where all the instruments would come together in these huge chords that just seemed to float in the air. And he would write very, very long melodic lines. I remember listening to some of Gil's records with Thornhill with, with Gerry Mulligan. And Gerry played in Thornhill's band and he knew Gil's writing extremely well and he started laughing at how long the phrases are because none of the musicians in the band could hold their breath long enough to play them, so they had to have, they had to kind of be signed on and off each phrase so that there would be a seamlessness in the line. He was so much an individual that he didn't get nearly the amount of work he should have gotten as an orchestrator. But Miles loved his work. Most musicians did. And when Miles really became important and was signing with Columbia Records in 1956, one of the first things he did was to sign up Gil Evans to write an album that became known as "Miles Ahead." And this was the first of the three major works they did together. And they are among the most exquisitely beautiful and satisfyingly realized LPs of that whole era.

What was it about what Miles and Gil could do that made the synergy so perfect?

The synergy between Evans and Miles Davis was ideal. Why? Because Evans was basically a very lyrical kind of writer and Miles was the most lyrical of improvisors. Miles also spent a lot of time focusing on his timbre. The sound his trumpet produced. Gil once told me that the sounds that Miles made in those years were extremely difficult for him. They were painful physically, and emotionally. I mean, in a way he was a kind of, you know, Marlon

Brando of the trumpet. He was really changing the sound of the instrument. And Gil was able to find, you know, rich, original orchestrations that just seemed to wrap themselves around Miles. I mean, so one of the things they did on, on "Sketches of Spain" basically, you know, Gil would just create a chord and then he would throw, you know, a couple of minutes of open space for Miles to fill it in. And, and the chord would anticipate what Miles would play, and then the following chord would, would pick up on what Miles had played. So they really, they really thought together as one. Gil used to tell me that in the later years, shortly before their death, their deaths, they used to talk late at night about doing Tosca, they wanted to do Tosca together. And they would sing phrases from the opera to each other. Unfortunately that never happened, but those few, that handful of collaborations they did, to this day there's nothing else in jazz or in American music that sounds, really sounds like them. And it's very important to note, I think, that those records went way beyond the jazz audience. Those are the kinds of records, especially "Sketches of Spain" and "Porgy and Bess" that I remember a lot of women would have in record collections that were otherwise rock and roll and a couple of classical, and there would be one jazz record and it would be that. Because it was so sophisticated and worldly and it would set a mood and it was sexy and erotic and, you know, if you wanted to impress somebody on the first date, that was always the record that would go on the turntable. So those records did very, very well. And for all their popularity, they still maintained their integrity as great art.

Let's talk about Miles. Say in the late 50s, his distinct mood and sound on the trumpet.

Miles initially appeared to be a somewhat troubled young man when he came on the scene. He was 19 years old when he first was working with Charlie Parker, and he had the job that every trumpet player would have killed for, which was to play in Parker's band. And he, he was different and most of the serious people, the musicians recognize right away that he had a wonderful lyricism that was quite unusual and he didn't sound like anybody else. But he had to invent a style because he couldn't, he didn't have the virtuosity of Dizzy Gillespie. He didn't have the virtuosity of Fats Navarro or Kenny Dorham. So he started to create a style that was based more on timbre and melody. Play very few notes, but make them the right notes. Create a sense of mood. And he had some bad personal years when he was also involved in drugs and then he got over that. And then he really, when he really re-emerged in '54, '55, '56, there was an almost Keatsian quality about him, even though he was, he was in his late 20s and almost as old as, you know, Keats was when he died or older. He was the young romantic, he was a true romantic. He played ballads the way nobody else could play them. They weren't sentimentalized. They were beautiful and they were deep and they didn't require a lot of hand-wringing. And they were different from anybody else, what anybody else had played. I mean, I suppose you could talk about Chet Baker, but Chet Baker always struck me as a more fragile kind of musician in a way. And Miles' timbre, his control of his sound became a

constant in his music. So even though he kept changing his style, from making, you know, hot blues records like "Walking," to making the collaborations with Gil Evans to the modal records like "Kind of Blue," and "Milestones," to the very fast, you know, exciting records of the middle 1960s where he took standards from the 40s and 50s and played them in such a way that they, you know, you almost couldn't tell what the original structure was. But no matter what he played, and even when he went farther than that and started playing fusion music, the sound of Miles was always there. Nobody else could quite imitate it, and it held him in good stead, no matter what the company, no matter what the setting was. You might not like the setting, but when Miles picked up his trumpet, you understood, you recognized the truth of what he was playing.

I read somewhere that in the 50s you were existentialist, read Camus and watched French films and listened to Miles Davis. He became a cultural icon.

I'll leave that to somebody else.

Music of MJQ.

The MJQ. Fine, sure.

It sounds like background music.

The Modern Jazz Quartet is the ensemble that seemed to bring the classical influence, the European finery into jazz in a way that no other band quite did. And this turns a lot of people off. They can't get past that finery to hear what's being played, which I think is unfortunate, because among other things it's one of the great blues bands of all time. Milt Jackson, Milt Jackson is one of the great blues improvisers and the Modern Jazz Quartet has been a perfect setting for him. But instead of just hearing Milt play five courses of the blues, you frequently hear it with John Lewis playing a contra puntal accompaniment on piano. And you have orchestrated rhythm figures by, on the drums and the base. And there's a beginning and a middle and an end. The pieces are all very tightly constructed. John Lewis himself is one of the great blues players, but he's, but he's a musician, he uses very few notes. In a sense the Modern Jazz Quartet is yet another one of those ensembles that springs from the Miles Davis "Birth of the Cool." John Lewis was the pianist on those records and one of the orchestrators. And all those ideas of counterpoint and polyphony are very much a part of what the Modern Jazz Quartet does. But it is a chamber group, in a sense even more than say the Benny Goodman trio was a chamber group and that everything is conceived, everything, much of it is written. The improvisations oral and folded in written conceptions.

Most of us think of blues singers as Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith and that's all.

People always forget about Ethel Waters, I don't know why. Ethel Waters is one of the most phenomenal performers, I think, in American popular music. And she's a very important figure in jazz. She was contemporaneous with Bessie Smith. She actually preceded Bessie Smith for a few years. She was a fine blues singer, but her specialty were double entendre lyrics, and some of those records are scorching today. But she, the thing about Ethel Waters that I think is remarkable is that she, she made this transition from vaudeville, where she was billed as "Sweet Mamma Stringbean" because she was so thin into the blues world, into the jazz world. Vaudeville, movies, stage, movies, and she was a top star in every area. I mean at one point she was one of the highest paid women in the United States. And as she became more and more popular, she became more neglected by the jazz community. But if you look at her impact in the 1920s, you'd realize that a lot of the young musicians of that period, including Bix Beiderbecke and Louis Armstrong, were in awe of her, they went to see her perform whenever they could. And she had a tremendous influence on the way popular songs are sung. And this is the most important thing. Along with Bing Crosby, along with Armstrong, along with Mildred Bailey, along with very few other singers. She made the transition from blues to popular songs. And she was able to take those songs and sing them in a way that was modern and important. They weren't torch songs when she did them. They weren't sentimental when she did them. They weren't flowery when she did them. And just to give you one instance of how, the kind of impact she had, Sophie Tucker, who was considerably older and who was, you know, the queen of vaudeville, a great, great star, paid Ethel Waters money for singing lessons when Ethel was, you know, just in her 20s, just getting started. Because Sophie Tucker realized that the day was changing and she better find out what this new singing is all about. And by the 1930s it's hard to think of a popular singer or jazz singer who isn't influenced by Ethel Waters. But by that time, she'd become such a great theatrical figure, with her rolled r's and her wit and her comedic manner of performance that people forget the impact that she had. But she is a real innovator.

That's great. That brings up the question of singing and jazz. How is singing part of jazz and why is it important to remember the singing?

Well, okay, I think that the person I would want to talk about here would be Armstrong.

Okay, great. Some people tend to discount his singing as pure entertainment.

Right, right. Singing has been part of jazz since the beginning. The very earliest performers, ragtime pianists, many of them sung, all of the ensembles that worked in the dives in New Orleans and in Chicago and New York when I came north, there were always singers involved. In there were many, you know, in the speakeasies, it was the singers who drew the

customers in. Sometimes they weren't really jazz singers, but they were working with jazz bands. I think Louis Armstrong is the perfect example of the indivisibility of instrumentalism, instrumentalist and vocalist influences in the music. I, I, you could almost, certainly it wasn't his first vocal record but a perfect example of this would be "The West End Blues," the most famous of Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and Hot Seven recordings, where he played, begins with a trumpet cadenza, then there's a one chorus statement, and then he comes in singing a vocal, you know, trading with one of the other instruments, just scat. And the quality of his voice is just as, is, has just as much import as the timbre of any of the instruments, and Armstrong could be equally expressive singing or playing. There are certain things he couldn't do as a vocalist that he can only do as a trumpet player, and vice versa. But by the time you get people who are completely virtuoso singers who aren't instrumentalists at all, people like Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan, Jimmy Rushing, Big Joe Turner. You realize that the voice, it is just indispensable part of this music.

Let's talk about Jimmy Rushing.

You have a question?

Well, …having him in the Basie Band.

Jimmy Rushing was a glorious singer and he's also been neglected in recent years. He is part of the original Count Basie Band back in Kansas City. And he had a big, huge sound, it was just, it just rang from the rafters. And he could sing blues, and he could sing ballads, and he could sing novelty songs. And he did them all with Basie, which made him a little unusual. It's, it's odd that if he had been more limited, if he'd only sung blues, he'd probably be better known in the way that Big Joe Turner was better known. Not that Big Joe Turner did the singing, ballads, but he was primarily a 12 bar singer. Rushing, there was something about Rushing, the quality of his voice, it was very high pitched, and yet it had a big, fat sonority, no matter where he placed his notes. And he swung, he helped to swing the Count Basie Band and he also could give it a tremendous poignance. One of my favorite records of all time is Count Basie's "I Left My Baby," in which he's accompanied, Jimmy Rushing is accompanied by Lester Young and Ablogado. And then the whole orchestra plays a series of riffs behind them. But it's a somewhat dura lyric and he gives it so much feeling and then you turn around and there's another Basie record of "Georgie Anna", sweet "Georgie Anna." And he just, you know, he romps and he stomps and he's, you know, swinging just as hard as Lester Young or Buck Clayton or anybody else in the band. He had that quality. And he kept it, into the 1950s at least, when he made some of his very finest records. He had a long contract for Columbia Records. He made an album called "The Oddessy of James Rushing, Esquire." Beautiful record. And he was still, he used to live in Queens and he would come in the 60s and 70s on weekends until his death, and he would hang out at the Five Spot and do a few tunes, big man, huge man, they used to call him "Mr. Five

by Five." And he would sit on a chair in the middle of that stage, hold the microphone, and Al Cohen or Zoot Sims or somebody would be playing "Ablogado" behind him and you'd forget what time it was, he was just a magnificent performer and a man of extraordinary kindness. I have to tell you that the first time I went to see him was at the Village Gate, when I was about 16 or 17 with a date. And we were lucky enough to get a ringside table. And he saw these two conspicuously young people, everybody else was, you know, 10, 15 years older than us. And he walked over and he, he started doing a kind of a twisting thing. And, you know, winked, and then at the break he just came right over to the table and, you know, asked us who we were and where we were from, and I thought, "Wow, if this is what the New York jazz club life is like, that's for me."

Okay, Bing Crosby. Why should we put him in our film about jazz?

One way that you can see the evolution of popular song into jazz is to look at the singers. Because there were so few singers who understood what jazz was about, even in the early and middle 1920s. Most popular singing of that time was theatrical singing like Al Jolson or Eddie Cantor, or operatic singing. And, one of the first singers really on the scene who understood what jazz was was Bing Crosby. This always amazes people, but when Bing Crosby came down from his hometown in Spokane to Los Angeles with his friend Al Rinker, who's sister was Mildred Bailey. They put up with Mildred Bailey, who was herself one of the great early singers. And Mildred Bailey said, you know, "Crosby, you have a lot of talent. You should, you should learn about this man, young man in Chicago." She was talking about Louis Armstrong. And Crosby was one of the first people who really understood. But he also was even a little bit advanced, more advanced than Armstrong in singing ballads, and in singing them in such a way that they worked well and with a jazz beat. Bill Challis who was the key arranger with Paul Whiteman's Orchestra told me that Crosby was the only singer he ever knew who could improvise range at will. Which means that he would be, they would be doing, say "Old Man River," and all of a sudden Bing would come into the climax and go one octave above where the written range was and he would make it work, even though nobody in the orchestra was expecting him to do that kind of a thing. He had exceptionally good time, he had really superb time. A lot of producers have, have remarked on the fact that he could sing, you know, a rock song, or a country song, no matter what kind of a song you threw at him or what king of arrangement, he would get the time right. He never sounds corny. And of course, he was a marvelous ballad singer. So I think Armstrong was a little bit influenced by his ballads, just as Crosby was profoundly influenced by Armstrong's whole approach to rhythm and time and timbre. And it's a mistake to completely ignore him when we're trying to understand the way this music came about.

So, first time you heard "West End Blues," it changed your life. Tell me about it.

"West End Blues" is an amazing recording and I guess everybody can remember the first time they heard it. I, when I was 15 I bought a copy of Louis Armstrong and Earl Hines. And I put it on and the first track was "Basin Street Blues" and I was so astounded by that that I had to take the needle off the record and just kind of get my breath. It took me about 6 months to get through the whole side of the record, you know, memorizing and learning each track before I would go on to the next one. And I've, no doubt in my mind that Armstrong was, you know, just the greatest figure in contemporary music and where could he go beyond that? And then I turned the album over after some six months and the first track is you hear that cadenza bop, bop, bop, boo, dop, boo, dop...... "West End Blues." It was a complete kind of, kind, it confirmed everything that I already believed and it transformed me in ways that I would never have thought possible.

Tell us the story about the music professor who played it for his students.

I played "West End Blues" once for a music professor when I was an undergraduate, who was also the lead violinist with a very well known string quartet at that period. He had one of those peripatetic music boxes, a turntable that he wheeled from class to class and it, this was after the classes were over. And I brought him a copy of "West End Blues" and we put it on the turntable and we played it once and he said, "Play that again." And we played it again, again in complete silence and he said, "I think that may be the most perfect three minutes of music I've ever heard in my life."

Do you want to talk about more modern jazz?

Okay, but did you want to do Armstrong as entertainer?

Oh yes, I'm sorry. Many people think of Armstrong as an entertainer and not as a musician. How can we reconcile these two halves?

The greatness of Louis Armstrong is the multi-faceted nature of his talent. He was a musical genius. He was also a phenomenally rich entertainer. He was a comical figure in the best sense of the word. He could sing, he could play the trumpet, he could entertain audiences of people who didn't know anything about jazz and make them jazz enthusiasts or at least make them Louis Armstrong enthusiasts. Not too long ago I was watching "Cabin in the Sky," in which he is billed fifth but has a very, very short role. And it's a scene with a lot of legendary black comedians who today are, a lot of people are embarrassed by the stuttering and the eyeball rolling and that kind of. But they were brilliant talents for what they did. People like Mantan Moreland and Willy Best and Nicodemus. And here is Armstrong working with these real shrewd vaudeville trained pros and he holds his own every line of the way. And in fact, he gets all of the laughs, most of them anyway. Armstrong would had a tremendous theatrical ability. I mean if he had been white, he would have been a major film star. He would have been a star in theater. I don't

think there's anything that he couldn't have done. It's ludicrous to me to deny oneself the pleasure of all of the things he could do and then say that you're doing so in the name of art. Because the art is there. You want "West End Blues," there's "West End Blues," but if you want "Hello, Dolly" that's there too. And the two of them together are the full genius of Louis Armstrong.

Do you want to talk about Ornette Coleman?

Ornette Coleman is the musician who asked all the difficult questions and then created a music that answered them, or answered, gave at least some plausible answers. For example, Charlie Parker played in the upper reaches of the chords. At some point if you go far enough out of the chords, the question arises, "Why use the chords at all? What would happen if we get rid of the chords and we don't have a harmonic contour? What if we, we just improvise melodically?" Okay. Another question is, "Why do we have to play 4/4 time all the time and where is that written? What would happen if we don't? What if the drummer could improvise a kind of time that responds moment to moment to whatever the soloist or whatever the ensemble is playing?" And if you don't have chords and if you don't have standard time, what does the base player do? How does he find his place? He doesn't have, you know, a pre, a pre-designed plan to follow. Does he, who does he listen to, does he listen to the key soloist, does he find, does he try to be contrapuntal, does he try to be harmonic? Does he try to be melodic? And Ornette Coleman put a quartet together that did that. It played a free music, it had written heads, and then it had solos that were not based, now of course, if we look back at it today, we could see that it was a fairly primitive stab at free jazz in the beginning, and that there's certain harmonic patterns that are implied frequently. And there are constantly implied rhythmic patterns. But still, there was another component here that made the music really sound like it was from Mars and that is that Ornette himself, as an alto saxophonist, played a kind of quarter tone timbre. Instead of hitting the notes on the tempered scale, he hit the notes that you would hear in the crack on the piano between the two white notes that are just together. He, he played a quarter tone pitch and his ears are so good, his ability to hear pitch is so exceptional that he could be in tune with himself even though he's out of tune with everybody else in the world who's playing on the tempered scale. So this music can sound very, very difficult. For one thing, once he starts playing, you know, you don't have, you're not hearing choruses, you're not hearing a 32 bar chorus or that, there's a certain place where you know to take a breath and say, "Okay, I'm gonna rest here emotionally or physically." And then go on to the next chorus. There is, there are no rest stops, there are no points of, of collusion where everybody will be playing on the same chord, the same harmony. And so you have to listen moment to moment, following him melodically and rhythmically, and the whole ensemble harmonically, to see where they go. So if it's an eight minute performance, it means almost like you have to, take a good breath of air and listen for eight minutes to see how he's gonna follow through to the end.

It seems like that's expecting a lot of the audience.

Well, avant garde music always expects a lot of the audience. And there's always gonna be a very, there's only gonna be a small percentage of the audience that wants to, that cares about the fact that Shoenberg has developed a twelve tone method of composing music which also defies the harmonic, the tempered scale. You know, some people are gonna be interested in Schoenberg, most people are not. They'd just as soon hear Brahams' symphonies. And anybody who does anything like that, whether it's Ornette Coleman or Cecil Taylor or John Coltrane, if they go outside of the range of what's expected, they're going to be limiting their audience. But they're not thinking about that, they're thinking about the possibilities that this music presents, and does it work or does it not work?

And does it work?

I think Ornette Coleman's music works beautifully. I think the initial recordings he made for Atlantic in the early, late 50s, early 1960s are among the masterpieces of jazz recordings. I know they will never have the kind of audience that Armstrong's "Hot Fives" or Charlie Parker's Dial recordings, for example, will have. But I think that if you give them the attention they deserve, you'll be rewarded in a similar way.

Great. Weather Report, talking about fusion?

I'm the wrong guy on fusion.

Okay*.*

I really dislike…

That's fine — we want to hear that.

I'll try it, but I'm not guaranteeing anything.

That's alright.
"Birdland." Is that jazz?

The question about whether "Birdland" is jazz should be changed to, "Is it music?"

Ah.

I'm not sure if, whether Bird's "Birdland" is jazz or even if it's music. I think that it's a pleasant enough melody and it made the pop charts and it pleased a number of people and it probably brought some people into the jazz audience. But it doesn't have the spontaneity, it doesn't have the invention,

it doesn't have the vigor that jazz ought to have. And I think the problem with a lot of the fusion music is that it's extremely predictable, it's a rock rhythm and the solos all play, the soloists all play the same stuff and they play it over and over again and there's a certain musical virtuosity involved in it. I mean I can understand why some of these drummers and base players become cult figures with all of their equipment and the incredible amount of technique they have. But there's very little that I think satisfies you intellectually or emotionally.

Cecil Taylor and his piano — different from a lot of other people.

Cecil Taylor is always a controversial figure. People are either drawn to him or they're so completely turned off that they can't even imagine what it is that other people find appealing. I discovered when I was teaching that women seemed to be more drawn to his music then the men in my classes, and especially those women who had some training in classical piano. I don't know exactly what that means. And I also note that his, the majority of his disciples in the '90s are women. Marilyn Crispell, Myra Melford and others. And yet it's such a complicated, difficult, you know, thunderous, two handed physical music that you probably would expect extremely robust men to be trying to master it. Taylor is a phenomenal musician, however. He brings together so many influences from jazz and the classical world and he makes them into something new. He is a resourceful and some would say relentless improviser who goes on at great length. And it's very difficult to hear him at first because you're waiting for the caesuras the pauses, the places again to kind of rest up, he doesn't give them to you. But after you listen to him for a while, you can become mesmerized by the hugeness of his attack and his sound. And then it can become quite thrilling. I find that I need a fix of Cecil Taylor's music at least every six months. And a number of his records that I know very well because I played them so often simply by virtue of the familiarity have come to be very meaningful in ways that I would not have originally expected.

Let's hear what's important about avant garde in jazz.

It's worth remembering that the avant garde is the longest lived movement in the history of jazz. It's been with us for 40 years now, much longer than swing era or bebop or even Dixieland. And it's stronger now than it's ever been, with more places in which it's performed than ever before. So while it always has a narrow audience in terms of size, it has an extremely devoted audience.

Charles Mingus.

Mingus is another one of the musicians who combines a lot of influences from the classical and the jazz world. And from the pop world in some respects. For example, Mexican popular music from the Cantina, which is so much a part of his Tijuana moods. Mingus is, he's another figure who's multifaceted.

He's a great base player, I love his base playing. It's frequently underappreciated and Mingus himself said that the reason he never became as great base player as he should have is because he spent too much time composing music and leading bands. But I love that big sound he has and the fact that he doesn't have to play a lot of notes. I love the very few examples we have of his great solos in the way that he develops them. As a composer, as a bandleader, probably the most important thing he did was to create the Jazz Workshop. Which was a kind of, which is an ensemble in which it used a lot of the precepts of Charlie Parker and Art Tatum, Duke Ellington certainly. But it opened them up, it freed the soloist, it did a lot of things with tempo changes and counterpoint and exciting and explosive uses of timbre. And he created a completely original sound for the small band ensemble. One of the very few musicians who really picked up on it and extended what he did in the small band ensemble was David Murray.

Let's go right to David Murray right now.

I think that the worst period, the most fallow period in jazz history was about 1968 to about 1974. Some good musicians came up in that period, but for the most part, rock had terrified the whole music. And so many of the great figures had escaped to, you know, Las Vegas and pit bands in Broadway and studio orchestras and that, that kind of thing. And very few of young musicians came along. And all of a sudden in 1975 there was a virtual migration of musicians from Los Angeles, from St. Louis, from Chicago. They all came to New York to play. And of them, one of the most extraordinary was this young twenty year-old saxophonist from Oakland named David Murray. And he gave his first concert in a loft on the Bowery, where he was living. And he introduced an original composition called "Flowers for Albert," which was dedicated to Albert Eiler. And so everybody thought, "Oh, he's another one of those avant garde guys like Albert Eiler. But he turned out to be nothing of the kind. He turned out to be a musician who had many ambitions to have a big band, to have an octet, to have a trio, to have a quartet, and he did all of these simultaneously. And became the most recorded musician of his generation. I think Murray is an extraordinarily volatile and exciting tenor saxophonist, who plays in all the registers, who plays with tremendous conviction. And tremendous feeling, and a tremendous sense of joy. And for me, more than almost anybody else of his generation and anybody else who came along in the 70s, he's really restored that sense of, of excitement that the classic tenor saxophonist introduced in the 1930s.

Do you want to do Coltrane?

Coltrane is beyond big.

Coltrane is beyond you. John Coltrane.

I consider one of the really defining recordings of Coltrane to be "Chasing the Train," which he made in 1961. He recorded it live at the Village Vanguard. And it's, it's a transitional moment for jazz in some ways. He begins as a blues, quite ordinary 12 bar blues, and he plays about one or two choruses improvised on the blues. And then suddenly he kills, he just, he blows right through the structure of the 12 bar blues. And within another minute or so, you can no longer count it.

And Elvin Jones, the magnificent drummer Elvin Jones, who became so much a part of the John Coltrane quartet for the next several years, follows him. He follows him right through this breaking down the barriers and until you can't count a four-bar measure anymore. I mean a four beat measure. And by the time it's over, then he goes into, it's a 15 minute solo and a lot of people were really insulted. I remember Downbeat said it sounded like an extended air leak or something like that. And a lot of people just called Coltrane playing anti-jazz and the whole thing was a farce. But for some of us who were a little bit more open to this music, this was an exhilarating thing. And in a sense it really showed another way of doing free jazz without going the Ornette Coleman direction of, of quarter-tone pitch. And, and while still swinging. 'Cause they kept a very, very powerful rhythmic feeling throughout.

Tell me where you think jazz is heading today.

I once asked a musician where jazz was going and he said, "It'll go wherever we take it, we're the musicians." And I don't know of a really better answer. One thing I do know about the future of jazz is that nobody has adequately or accurately predicted it. Nobody in the swing era predicted bebop, nobody in the bebop era predicted the avant garde, and certainly nobody in the avant garde predicted fusion. Some young musician's gonna come along, hopefully it'll be someone really thrilling like Armstrong or Parker, but somebody of extraordinary gifts, and he or she will play a music that no one else has heard and that will be the next movement. And unless you're that musician, you can't really know what that's gonna be.

You're optimistic about jazz renewing itself.

I'm optimistic about the future of jazz with reservations. Jazz is now a hundred years old and it has been nothing but one thrilling leap after another for decade after decade. I think we're gonna be hearing a lot more about repertory and a lot more about classicism. Whether it will continue to make those kinds of leaps again, or whether it will become a classical music in the sense that European music has become a classical music, I don't know. That would distress me. I would hate to think that this music is gonna be nothing more than an heirloom music played in great concert halls in which everybody can say, "Well, you know, tonight we're gonna hear Charles Mingus imitated," or something like that. No, my, my money is on the idea

that there will be another David Murray. Don't know where he's gonna come from. But, and that he will keep the music honest and earthy and real.

Uncorrupted humanity of Charlie Parker's music.

I think the real legacy of Charlie Parker is the uncorrupted humanity of his music; that's why it lives. You can analyze it all you want, but ultimately it's the, it's the beauty and the perfection and the refusal to compromise in any way that moves us and will continue to move us.

Louis Armstrong - tell us about the world he grew up in.

Louis Armstrong was born and raised in a rat's nest called Jane Alley in New Orleans. It was a wooden tenement, and across the field there were the outhouses. So there, Armstrong, when he had his first bathroom was a major achievement which is why his bathroom became a shrine in the house that he finally bought. It's completely mirrored with gilded faucets and all of that. A lot of people living in a very small quarters, him living in the same room with his mother and her lovers. And his sister. But the myth of Armstrong, that he came exclusively from this appalling poverty and from an area of New Orleans so violent that it was known as the battlefield is a little bit off. Because one, I think it's very significant that Armstrong also had another aspect to his childhood which was a place about 50 or 60 miles away from New Orleans called Boutie and his mother had relations in Boutie and she would take him there on most weekends. Now, Boutie at that time, it's since been destroyed by the oilrigs, at that time was an idyllic place it was, it was the country. It was it was free of the racial segregation because it was primarily a mulatto community and Armstrong used to tell a story, he loved to tell this story about his mother asking him to fetch water from the creek and he said, "Mama, there's an alligator in that water." And she said, "Don't be silly, that alligator's more afraid of you are, than you are of him." And, and he said, "Mom, if that alligator's more afraid of me, that water isn't fit to drink." But beyond that story he didn't talk too much about Boutie and so there, you know, the myth, I think it's, I think it's very important that the nurturing mother and this nurturing community in a sense softened the violence of the area into which he was born. I think this is one of the things that distinguishes him from a lot of the kids he grew up with.

He thought he was worth something at a very young age.

Despite the fact that his father left immediately, practically at birth, his mother managed to instill in him a sense of value and worth. I mean, he was working at what, nine, ten years old. He's stealing food scraps from apples to help. I'm sorry, stealing food scraps from barrels, you know, rejected, scraps from restaurants. He was selling papers which he stole, that's how he got in trouble, he used to steal, kids used to steal the papers and then they would, they would sell them. He sang on street corners; he drove a coal truck for a while, which was a terrible job, when he was a little bit older. He did get into

trouble. He was in a reformatory for a while which is where he began playing cornet seriously. But, he did have, and he was very open to reality, you know, he knew that his mother turned tricks from time to time, he could accept that, he didn't, he didn't see her do it, but it was an assumption he could make and he could handle that, you know, someone said of Armstrong, uh what it's, the old, platitude that nothing human was foreign to him or unknown to him, or offensive to him. And I think that's part of his music. When he recorded *Mack the Knife* in the early fifties, he did two versions, one became a big hit and then he recorded a duet with Lottie Lenye because she was absolutely overwhelmed by Armstrong's performance. He said, "This is the, this is what I grew up with." You know, the Brecthweil version of the beggar's opera. *Mack the Knife,* all that violence. This was, this was the battlefield. These were the kinds of honky-tonks and clubs and bordellos that he that he knew.

There's something about what music meant to him as a child. He heard music all around him and there was something about the effect of just hearing music and wanting to be a part of the world of music. What do you think, as a child, was it just a way out? Or was there something more?

I think, it's a general rule that children look for heroes, they look for people to emulate. And in that community, at that time, you were going to either emulate the guy with the pistol who, you know, whipped his whores in the bar in front of everybody to show what a man he was, or the musicians because the musicians were very highly respected, they were an essential part of the community. Every family function from a birth to a any kind of a party, to a Sunday picnic, to a funeral, was a musical event. Musicians were important. They dressed well; they were treated well. They were paid well. He was surrounded by musicians of who were almost dandies in a way. And they liked him. He was a likable kid. And, of course, he had an instinct for music. He had a natural ability, so people like King Oliver took him in.

Keep that story separate. Tell me what else about his childhood that you want me to understand.

In addition to the nurturing from his mother, of equal, if not, certainly of equal importance, as Armstrong himself told it, he was adopted by a Jewish family of immigrants that came into New Orleans and they had a rag business, a trash business and he got along very well with the son and the parents liked him. They fed him well, for the first time in his life he had good food. They used to sing him songs. He learned Russian lullabies from Mrs. Karmofsky, the Karmofsky family. He, all of his life he wore a Star of David to commemorate his gratitude to them. They gave him his first instrument; it was a brass instrument. The myth is that he never saw a cornet until he went into the waifs' home. That's not true. They bought him a horn, probably he didn't play it, but went he went into the waifs' home, they gave him a bugle at first and he quickly worked his way up to actually playing a cornet. And he

began to study. He had a very good teacher there. And he had a natural affinity for it, and you have to remember that the cornet was the most prized of instruments in the jazz world at that time. It was the trumpet, or cornet players who were the kings, you know, King Buddy Bolden, King Buddy Petit, King Oliver, and naturally, with his, then also with the whole nature of his music which is a kind of, you know, celebrating the glory of God in every note, the trumpet is the ideal instrument.

Joe Oliver was important to him. As a young kid, he got himself associated with Oliver. Why is that so important?

I think, of all the musicians in New Orleans, the one that Armstrong most responded to was King Oliver. He was a big, impressive-looking man. He had a gorgeous sound. He had a lot of authority and he knew how to put together a band. And Oliver obviously liked him. Armstrong was allowed to carry his trumpet, which was an honor. And I think he took him kind of under his wing. And it's the relationship really becomes important because after Oliver leaves New Orleans and goes up to Chicago, Armstrong's reputation is , traveling, you know, it's already traveled to Texas through the steamboats, it's already traveled up the Mississippi to , Iowa where a lot of important young musicians heard him. Mostly white musicians who came into jazz as a result of that. But he doesn't want to leave New Orleans, he doesn't want to leave his mother. He's a little bit afraid of the North. He's a rube, remember, he's a country boy. And Fletcher Henderson comes down to New Orleans and hears him and immediately tries to bring him to New York and Armstrong won't have it. The only person who could have brought him out of New Orleans, I think, was King Oliver. So when he got the telegram from Oliver, "Join me at the Lincoln Gardens in Chicago." His mom packed him a trout sandwich; he got on the train; and he was gone. Now he gets to Chicago and he gets off the train and everybody's like giggling when they see him because he looks like an undertaker. He's wearing a box-back black coat, a suit, and his hair is kind of combed in the front and he really doesn't understand city ways yet. It took him about two minutes to become the king of the city, but that's another story. So they bring him down to Lincoln Gardens and Oliver has this fantastic band. Probably the ultimate example of the New Orleans style. It was really crystallized in the original Creole jazz band of King Oliver's. It was very popular. Armstrong comes in as second trumpet and he's happy to do that. He's happy to play second to this man he admires so much. The only figure that we really hear in Armstrong's music by way of influence is King Oliver. There were Oliver phrases we can hear transmuted into Armstrong's music. Even some of Oliver's sound but almost instantly, Armstrong overpowers him. I don't think it was an intentional thing, I think it was something that couldn't be, you couldn't put the cork in the bottle. And they go into the recording studio, they did, first of all, I should say, they developed in the Lincoln Gardens a routine that used to kill the audience where they would improvise, apparently improvise simultaneous unison breaks, usually two measure breaks, and the audience, especially the musicians would wonder, well, how did they do that? You

know, a musician could take a two-bar break and another musician could play a contrapuntal two-bar break, but how did they get unison breaks? Armstrong once explained that right before they started to play the break, Oliver would lean over to him and just show him the fingering and Armstrong could pick it up from that. So they really were a team. Now they go into the recording studio. . .

King Oliver and Armstrong going into the recording studio. Armstrong is competitive.

Armstrong was enormously competitive. And I'm sure he was really challenged by a lot of the musicians in the band who underestimated him. You know, he when they saw, what a, what a country boy he was. Didn't know the ways of the city and of course he could, he could outplay them all to the point where they had to either relearn their music or leave the business. But as competitive as he was with contemporaries, he wasn't, he didn't have an Oedipal problem, he didn't want to cut his father, who was King Oliver, I mean, he stayed with King Oliver and his wife, Stella, for a while and they took care of him. And he, he admired them enormously. But he had this strength so they go into the recording studio and the first thing that they notice is this is this is one of the great mythological tales of early jazz. Is that the band is, used to record around a horn and then you would cut the sound into a wax disk. They couldn't work with Armstrong standing around the horn because he overpowered everybody else in the band so he had to stand ten, fifteen feet behind the rest of the band, they had to open the door and have him in the hallway so that his sound would be balanced against the other musicians. He didn't quite understand dynamics yet. On top of that, they make a record and I think this is unquestionably a landmark moment in the history of jazz, called *Chimes Blues*. Now this is a, like most early New Orleans pieces, it consists of a series of strains, it's not like a song and then you improvise on the melody of this song. There are two or three strains, it's like a writ a written piece of music. And Armstrong is assigned as his first solo, the trio strain which is to say, a written piece. He's not required, or asked or nor do they desire him to improvise a single note. But he plays this trio strain with such bravura and such rhythmic intensity that when you listen to it, you hear the future. It's more intense and exciting than all the improvisation that the entire ensemble is doing around him. And that might, that holy sound that he has, at that moment, you know that something is in the works. And it's never going to be contained. And it's only two years later that he finally goes into the studio under his own steam and virtually codifies what jazz is going to be for the next half century.

Let's go to that going to the studio in the next two years, the Hot Fives and the Hot Sevens. We did West End Blues last time. But I want to talk about when you say that he codifies what jazz is going to be. Help our audience who has no idea how that fits in the history.

Can I begin with a kind of general statement about this?

Please do.

As late as the 1920s and probably for some years afterwards you have all of the Harvard Brahmins the Northeastern musical establishment routinely meeting and discussing where is American music? Where is it, how are we going to develop a truly American music? Of course, they're assuming that they're going to find the great American musician in the only place they know to look which is the Academy, their home. And they assume it's going to be in the only tradition they know, which is in the European tradition. So they're not at all conscious of the fact that at the same time that they're agonizing looking for an American Bach, that he's there, but he doesn't fit their description. He's black. He is by their standards musically illiterate. But, when the Hot Fives and the Hot Sevens come out, it becomes very clear that there is a new American music. It's not where they thought it was going to be. It doesn't even have a name yet. Let me just think for one second. I want to focus on this. I think the most important thing that you can say about the Hot Fives and the Hot Sevens is that for the first time, we know that jazz is an art. It's not to say that there haven't been interesting recordings before then. King Oliver's recordings are very significant. Jelly Roll Morton's. But nevertheless, at the moment that Armstrong makes these records, all of a sudden, Oliver is dated. Morton is dated. What does he bring to this music that has not previously existed? First of all, he establishes, almost single-handedly that jazz is going to be a soloist's art, not an ensemble music. Number two, he affirms for all time that a fundamental basis for this music is going to be a blues tonality which is going to be as fundamental to jazz as the tempered scale is to Western music. It's not to say that jazz can't walk away from it and play around with not using the blues, but it can't go away for it, from it for that long. It will always come back. It's the blood, it's the life of the music. The blues tonality. Third and most significant and I think this is maybe the great innovation in American music. And it's the most astonishing to contemplate, Armstrong invented what for lack of a more specific phrase we call swing. He created modern time. The approach to time that was completely divorced from marching band time. From 2/4 from downbeat time from Europe. He made the music swing on an even 4/4 articulation with an even 4/4 articulation that becomes also the basis for the way the music's going to develop. The rhythms are going to be changed in all kinds of ways but they're always going to proceed from where Armstrong created so that not only jazz but pop music, rock and roll, rhythm and blues, anything you want to talk about that has a modern rhythmic feeling goes back there. Now, I have to say here that I spent the last twenty-five years trying to listen to every record I could find that was recorded before 1924, 1925 to disprove this theory and I have never been able to find an example of a musician who prefigures, even, the kind of rhythmic vitality and brilliance. He makes rhythm equally as important as melody and harmony. He makes it thrilling in a way that it had never been before and he does that on a series of records made between 1925 and 1928 that are generally known as the Hot Fives and the Hot Sevens.

Bravo. He invented the role of the soloist. What does that mean?

When you think of traditional New Orleans jazz, it is basically a polyphonic music which is to say that a lot of musicians are playing at the same time. You have a trumpet lead, you have the clarinet playing a kind of pretty filigree around that, you have the trombone rrrrarrrumph, all happening at the same time. There is some soloing, the primary solo is the break which is two bars or four bars at best. But Armstrong comes in, he can't be contained in a two bar break. So he gets rid of the polyphony and he starts making recordings like *Muggles* which is nothing but a succession of solos. The trombonist gets his twelve bars. The clarinetist gets his twelve, the pianist. Then Armstrong comes in. Of course the wonderful thing about these records that shakes you up is that they all, they all sound like Wright brothers aircraft and suddenly Armstrong comes in like a jet. One of the remarkable records from that period that I especially love and that illustrates this is a thing called *Tight Like That,* in which he actually plays three choruses which is considered a lot in those days. Three blues choruses and it's quintessential Armstrong, it's got the operatic quality and the quotations. He takes a completely frivolous da da da da da which is a kids' thing from the First World War and he turns that into a piece of very, you know, BUP BA BA**.** He completely rephrases, re-invigorates it and makes it an essential part of the solo. Also the solo has a logical, it's coherent, it's a story. All of Armstrong's solos became stories. It has a beginning, it has a middle, it has a glorious, climactic, fireworks close. But there's something else about this record and this gets to the the whole point of why so many people were disturbed by Armstrong and could never quite accept him, entirely, which is that Armstrong was a regular guy. Not only didn't he come from the Academy, but he didn't look like it and he didn't act like it. He was from the street. He was bawdy. He was friendly; he was open. And he liked corny jokes, off-color jokes and this record has them. This there's this little dialog going on, it's supposed to be a man and a woman. It's very risqué and it's happening at the same time that he's playing this magnificent solo. So you have the high and the low simultaneously. But to me, part of Armstrong's greatness is the fact that not only didn't he, wouldn't he acknowledge high low, but he wouldn't accept it when it was offered him. When critics finally in the in the fifties and sixties and later, were saying, you know, "Well, Armstrong should be locked up like Rapunzel in some kind of an ivory tower so that he doesn't have to be on the road singing pop music like *Blueberry Hill* and *Hello Dolly."* They missed the whole point. This was his life. He loved to do that. He was, he is the musically the last great democrat. He liked being out there with the public. He liked getting the response. He liked the competition. He liked songs that that communicated with people. You can't separate this artist who codified jazz in 1926 from this staggeringly exciting, volatile entertainer. That's what makes him unique.

Story of going on the Henderson and bringing the . . . . he's on the bandstand . . .

Well, Armstrong was on the bandstand and the, they were doing a rehearsal and there was a pp. mark which is pianissimo, the whole band has to go down in volume, and Armstrong just kept leading out and Henderson, you know, rapped the music stand and stopped him and said, “Mr. Armstrong, didn’t you see the pp.?” And he said, “Yes.” And he said, “You know what it means?” And Armstrong said, “Pound plenty.”

Improvisation, something that Armstrong invents that’s American. What is that about?

Improvisation, of course, exists before jazz. Beethoven was a celebrated improviser. Bach’s theme and variations are developed in, improvisationally, but you can’t document improvisation, you can only document the finished work which exists on a score which is written. There’s no way of taping Beethoven’s improvisation and then transcribing it. But Armstrong and jazz comes along at the same time as a technology that can document. At first there’s naturally a prejudice because it’s a written culture, we’re prejudiced against an oral culture. But Armstrong, in those 1926 and 1927 and eight performances proves for the first time that an improvisation can be just as coherent, imaginative, emotionally satisfying and durable as a written piece of music. It’s there on tape, it’s on records, it’s, now it’s on compact discs. They’re going to last as long as written scores. And the the fact is that they have proven timeless. The music that Armstrong improvised in 1928 excites us today. And if that’s not classical music, I don’t know what is.

Glaser. It’s a complicated thing. Why would he [Armstrong] want him to take over his affairs. What it was like then.

Joe Glaser was a foul-mouth mob-trained guy who was not educated on any level. He was tough, he was brutal, he used to have salamis hanging from his office. The terrible odor and if he liked you, he’d pull down a salami and give it to you. But Glaser was, he claimed to be part of the Capone mob in Chicago and he had a lot of influence. When prohibition ended, he was suddenly in a kind of a bad state. Armstrong was also in a bad situation at that time, he was big in Europe but he hadn’t been able to work in, in America for a while because of mob problems that he had had in Chicago. Glaser was able to help him. Now, any black artist at that time, the cliché was you need a white guy, his hand on your shoulder. And Glaser became a real father figure to Armstrong. The most profound father figure in a way supplanting Oliver. And Armstrong’s devotion to Glaser, however much Glaser may disturb the rest of us, his devotion to Glaser was real and it was absolute. We know that from his letters. We know that from what he said to his intimates. He used to say, “First there’s the trumpet. Then there’s Mr. Glaser and then there’s my wife Lucille.” I don’t know what more you can say about that.

Armstrong's relationship to civil rights. Strong feelings about the way African-Americans were being treated.

I think Armstrong always had, as any intelligent African-American would, a sense of of injustice and the complete insanity of race. It's a very interesting to me that when he first came to Chicago and he saw Bill Bo Jangles Robinson for the first time, that was a revelation to see a black entertainer who didn't wear "black face" who didn't play into all the servile stereotypes. It influenced him enormously and he was somebody who extended that, of course, into all kinds of areas. Well, in the 1950s he, for the first time, really broke out publicly in a way that he had not before. There was a, the troops were engaged at Little Rock, they were trying, a couple of little, two little Black girls were trying to enroll. Governor Faubis was standing out there refusing admittance. Eisenhower, who was opposed to Brown versus Board Of Education, was trying to do nothing and Armstrong, in a sense, pushed his hand although nobody wanted to admit it. And Republicans won't admit it to this day, he gave a press conference in which he said that he refused first of all to go to the Soviet Union on a tour. He said, "How can I play there when they treat my people like this at home?" And he had some very dark words for Faubis, he called him an uneducated plow boy. And he criticized Eisenhower for not going down there and taking that little Black girl in his hand and marching her into that school. Well. From any Black entertainer at that time, that was powerful stuff. But from Louis Armstrong? So, he goes to sleep and his press agent calls a press conference while he's asleep. I think the press conference was in New York, so there was a two hour, he was in the Dakotas when this happened. And he says, you know, "Louis had a hard day, he didn't really, he didn't mean it." Armstrong looked up and he saw the newspaper headlines and he called a press conference and said he did. All hell broke loose. A columnist in one of the right wing New York dailies, I forget his name now. He used to write books like The Day Christ Died, demanded a boycott. People shouldn't go to his concerts or buy his records anymore. He was scheduled for a Steve Allen television show to perform with Van Clyburn. He appeared on the show, but then Van Clyburn's agents would not let him appear at the same time with Armstrong. This thing blew up for quite a while and finally disappeared and Armstrong never really got over the incredible intensity of the anger that was directed at him. Finally, Eisenhower did do something about Little Rock and he sent him a very genial telegram saying, "Take me with you daddy." How ironic that in the 1960s at the height of the civil rights era he was then being accused of being an Uncle Tom.

"Hello Dolly" — Why do you think people bought that record?

A lot of jazz critics kind of, put down "Hello Dolly." They couldn't figure it out, it's not much of a song. Not the greatest Louis Armstrong performance. Why that? I think they're missing the point. The thing about "Hello Dolly" is it's a damn good record. It's a canny record. It's basically Armstrong's group, and Armstrong plays a full thirty-two bar trumpet solo. It's the real thing. It's Louis Armstrong. But it has, it's dressed up in two ways that I think made it

marketable. One, it's got a banjo introduction. The banjo was the most archaic of all African-American instruments, it's it was a 19th Century instrument, it's virtually disappeared in our time except in blue grass and musics like that. So, just in a top forty context, to hear that ringing sound of banjo immediately says, you would say, "What is that?" The other thing is they had a very quiet kind of string bass that softened the effect of the music. At a time when the top forty was completely dominated by the Beatles and by those kinds of English groups, this was really the last gasp of another age. And it was potent, it was powerful. It was great fun and the song had a hook to it that people responded to immediately. And I don't think it's surprising at all that it had, it got the attention that it did.

Armstrong got ill. What is your take on why he played when he was very sick?

You have to remember about Louis Armstrong that this was a guy who, who made millions for Glaser, for himself. I mean, he wasn't hungry. He was a very successful performer. He was a movie star, he was a television star. But he traveled in a bus when he was in his sixties to be with the guys in the band. He liked being on the road. He liked working. That was his life. People say, well, you know, he was ill, his, the trumpet playing wasn't as good anymore. So then he went out as a singer. He shouldn't have done it. He didn't, what was he going to do? He's going to just sit around his house, listen to old records? That wasn't him. He, this is a man who hardly ever visited his home, he was so often on the road. He went into the studio once for the Disney Company to make an album of Walt Disney tunes. It was really the last time he played great trumpet. One of the tunes is the "Ballad of Davey Crockett." Is there a more banal song in American music? He's inspired. He, he's singing for kids. He's singing for people. Davey Crockett gets a whole new life. And then he plays this incredible trumpet variation on that tune. I mean, Armstrong was powerful to the last moment and finally the doctors virtually took the trumpet away from him and then he tried to go on as a singer. But he was showing his age and audiences were a little embarrassed. Should he have stopped a little earlier? Sure. But this is Louis Armstrong.

You wrote something very beautiful about his music. Wynton said to us that his music has that life in it. Something spiritual and something very celestial.

For me, there are two figures in Western music that I can always count on to raise the goosebumps, bring tears, make my heart beat a little faster. Bach and Armstrong. I see tremendous similarities between them and I think the primary thing is an inherent spirituality. The concept of playing for the, as a tribute to God. To have God inside of you. To play for the greater glory of the world, of mankind. A ringing intensity, a constant inspiration. It's in the sound of his music. It's in the way he phrases, it's in the way he organizes his notes as it would be for any other great figure in music. Armstrong is, in

a way, the American, American music's Bach, American music's Dante, American music's Shakespeare. Why? Because he comes at a point in the music's history. It's not the birth of the music, it's been around for thirty years. But it's the moment when it becomes an art form. He is the figure who codifies, who assimilates everything that's happened before and he shows where the future is going to be. And he does it, and maybe you need that intensity, maybe you need this kind of almost mystical quality. To have that kind of power. So there can never be another Armstrong any more than there can ever be another Shakespeare. But that spirit of his is there in the music. It's in every great figure who's come along since, or will come along.

His sound had a human roughness. What does his sound feel like?

Roy Eldridge had an extremely personal sound. In some ways, it's almost antithetical to Armstrong's. Armstrong's, it's brilliant, it's golden, it's all the fullness of life. Roy Eldridge's sound has a very human quality to it. There's a cry in it, there's a roughness. There's an edge. You feel like it's him speaking at times. It seems to come from right inside his belly and work out and you can hear all of the effort that goes into it. It's never a pretty sound, even though he was a beautiful ballad player and he had such a sophisticated and really an advanced sense of harmony that all the musicians of his time and generations later always looked back to him as one of the great innovative figures. But one of the things that makes him so unusual, and I think, why he is the major influential figure on the trumpet after Armstrong all the way up until the arrival of Dizzy Gillespie is that he was very competitive. He couldn't compete with Armstrong. He tried all the time. He was always playing Armstrong's tunes and trying to play them higher and faster and the whole bit. But what really turned him around, was, instead of trying to learn from other trumpet players, he was influenced by saxophone players. Now saxophone because of the nature of a reed instrument, you play a lot faster, you tend to arpeggiate a lot more. It's a more facile instrument and he adapted that kind of facility that he find in the music of Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young and Benny Carter and others to the trumpet and that's one of the reasons that he seemed to just have a whole new flight plan when he started playing.

Cecil Taylor. His music is difficult and demanding. What was his audience supposed to be?

Cecil Taylor once said that he prepares, the audience should prepare. He's very demanding on audiences. I know as a teacher, when I have got to the Cecil Taylor era and I play a two or three minute excerpt, my students invariably get very excited. They're not at all intimidated by the music. They immediately want to know where they can find it. But then I have to warn them that. . .

But then I have to warn them that I have excerpted two or three minutes from what might have been a fifteen, twenty, or forty minute piano solo or

even a longer work with other instruments involved. You have to learn to listen to Cecil Taylor in the way that I think in European music you had to stretch your willingness to hear a piece of music develop. You know, when the when the third symphony was first performed by Beethoven, critics said, "This is absurd. No one will ever sit still for a forty minute symphony." They were used to the fifteen-minute symphonies of Hayden. So Beethoven's response was to write a ninety-minute symphony. And Mahler wrote longer symphonies and we've learned how to hear more complicated and longer music that makes greater demands on us. Cecil Taylor's music is a is a music that will hold your attention but I think you have to in a sense train yourself to hear the way it works. The way different units of material, as he calls them, passages, episodes, he calls them units, are wedded together to make a longer piece of music with improvisational sections placed to expand those units. And it's a very elastic process. A piece of music by Cecil Taylor can last fifteen minutes or forty, the same minute, the same amount, the same piece, fifteen minutes or forty minutes, not because you're just playing chorus after chorus as you could say a blues could last fifteen minutes or forty minutes, but because each piece, each unit in the piece can be played around for a couple of minutes or a lot of minutes depending on what the level of inspiration for the musicians is.

More modern stuff. David Murray - most important thing was his background and his coming up in the church.

David Murray is probably the youngest musician I am aware of who actually lived the old story of *The Jazz Singer*, the old Al Jolson movie which is which is that your father is a is in the ministry, basically, it's really a Black story more than it is a Jewish one because blues and jazz was considered the Devil's music in African-American communities. And that's the way it was when David grew up. His father would not allow him to play jazz. It wasn't a sanctified music. Not until David's mother died did his father begin to relent and allow him to play, practice in the house. And play with local rhythm and blues bands. David's brother is a pretty good gospel singer. So, David comes to this music with a church background. He's not the only one, Cyrus Chestnut is another, but he comes to it with rhythm and blues, he comes to it with the church. He comes to it with an openness to the avant garde. And a traditionalist ear for the history and the tradition of the tenor saxophone. And he brings all that to bear on his music.

Avant garde didn't just spring from the brow of Coltrane, avant garde has a whole history of kind of a continuum. How can we understand where the avant garde comes from?

The avant garde is the longest lasting movement in jazz. It's virtually a parallel world to mainstream jazz. Swing era was what, ten years? Bebop in its pure state was about five. The avant garde has been with us for forty years. It is a music that is based on asking questions and knocking down rules, trying to set up new rules. It can be anything. It goes back as late, as

early as the late 1940s when George Rushal, Russell was writing arrangements that were based on scales instead of chords and when Lenny Tristano was doing completely improvised recordings without any kind of harmonic pre-determination. And it developed in this, in the fifties with the arrival of Cecil Taylor, Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Eric Dolphy, later in the sixties with Albert Eiler, Archie Shepp, many other musicians, Don Cherry. And it has continued with the Art Ensemble of Chicago and Richard Abrams and musicians right to now. It's never going to go away. Because every art form, every musical form certainly is going to have to have a parallel world where the so-called avant garde, the people who are not in the mainstream who are willing to ask these questions can survive. It will change its form, but it can never go away as long as there's someone who is willing to say, "I'm not going to do it that way. I'm not going to only play a twelve-bar blues. I'm not going to work with those chords. I don't think I need bar lines. I don't need 4/4." As long as you're going to ask those questions, you have this other world in which you can operate.

Avant garde is more closely related to the avant garde of the European music than it is to jazz. And basically because these guys are black, we're calling it in the jazz category. Why is some of this jazz and not categorized as Europeans?

Jazz, Dexter Gordon once described jazz as an octopus. He said it would, it as its tentacles into every music. It would use anything it could. And that is the history of jazz from the Louis Armstrong recording operas to Woody Herman putting Stravinsky into his swing band arrangements, you name it. The three major figures of the avant garde in the 19, who came around in the late 1950s is very interesting. John Coltrane comes out of jazz itself. He comes out of Dexter Gordon, Gene Emmonds, the jazz tradition. Ornette Coleman comes out of rhythm and blues. Cecil Taylor comes out of the Academy. So you have, three separate worlds leading into this one music. Of course, there's European influence, there was a European influence at all points in jazz. Maybe it's a little more pronounced because, if you get rid of swing, if you, if you, if you get rid of the blues tonality, then you seem to be operating on a different territory and you might lean towards other schools of new music to bolster it. But, to me, Ornette Coleman is a pure jazz musician, as pure as you can get. Cecil Taylor is an, is an improvisational giant. I'm indifferent to what inspired them, whether it came from Mesian or Bud Powell, what's important is the final work.

Richard Abrams. How he could play anything that he chose to do in avant garde music. What was he about?

Muhal Richard Abrams is one of the great teaching figures as well as a great musician. He organized the experimental band in Chicago which became the AACM which he eventually brought to New York in his own person and that of some other musicians. Muhal believes that the original tradition of jazz, before Armstrong started paying, playing popular tunes was that you

composed your own music. That you created a body of music that was original with the musicians playing it. And he has been very determined to do that. He is an excellent mainstream musician when he wants to be. If you offered him a nightclub engagement with a trio, he'd play all the pop tunes that he would expect that, he assumes that the audience expects in that kind of a situation. But when it comes to recording, he won't do it. As good as he is, when it comes to recording and to his own concerts, he insists on playing music that's generated either by him or by the other musicians that he's associated with.

I'm trying to untangle what is the nature of Ellington. This is a hard question. He's a bandleader, a composer and a conductor. What is it about him that brings all these qualities together?

Ellington is the pre-eminent jazz composer and he will remain that way just as Armstrong will remain the pre-eminent jazz improviser. One of the things about Armstrong is that, excuse me, one of the things about Ellington is that he is self-taught. He is the ultimate autodidact. He figures it out as he goes along. He's not the kind of guy who say who learns that you voice a trumpet section in one three five and then he just goes and does it that way. He'll voice the trumpet section and throw in a baritone or a bass clarinet. He'll cross-arrange with trombones and saxophones. He, almost from the beginning, certainly from the time he went into the Cotton Club, he evolved his own sound out of these instruments. He had such an incredible harmonic gift and at the same time a melodic gift. He's one of the very few figures to come out of jazz who was a great songwriter, who had major hits as a songwriter. That he was immediately stood out from all of the others. And then, he also had a personal quality that was very important, you know, somebody once said about Duke Ellington that he smiled, he didn't grin. Which was different from a lot of African-American performers in that period who were trying to perform primarily for a white audience, or at least in many venues. Like the Cotton Club. Ellington wrote music for the specific men in the orchestra, now this is truly innovative and it's a very difficult thing to do. He'd hire a guy that most bandleaders wouldn't have hired who might have four good notes. But maybe nobody else could play those four notes the way this guy did….

If you could pick one musician. . .

Ellington composed music around specific musicians, musicians he liked for reasons that might have eluded other band leaders, musicians who might have very limited chops, but who had a couple of notes that nobody could play like them and Ellington after he, after they were around for a while would start writing concertos and pieces of music to bring these notes. He had a baritone saxophonist named Harry Carne who joined with him when he was about seventeen years old, who had the most gorgeous sound on the baritone that has ever been heard, so Ellington made the baritone the

leading voice in his reed section instead of the alto being the lead instrument and the baritone being the anchor, he would voice the baritone out front. This immediately gave him an original sound. He hired trumpet players beginning with Bubber Miley and a trombonist named Joe Nanton who were virtuosos of the plunger mute, that rubber mute that gets a wha wha quality. That became a specialty that so-called jungle sounds of the Ellington orchestra. Every time he hired a new musician, he hired Ray Nance who was a tremen, like an Elfin spirit in the band who played cornet, violin, who could sing, who could dance a couple of steps. Ellington would figure out a way to put all of that in. He was like, he was at one time, he was at once a great composer with a kind of vaudevillian soul, he had believed in spectacle which really came out in his later years with the sacred concerts and he knew how to use musicians in such a way that many of them, even Johnny Hodges who was universally regarded as one of the three great alto-saxophonists in the music's history, did his most important work with Ellington when he left the band, he had a few decent years but he du just wasn't as effective. Ellington knew how to take a musician like Johnny Hodges, or Cootie Williams, these are great players, but he created portraits, great settings for them that would become portraits of these musicians.

Ellington was always trying to break out of molds. And one of the molds that he and every other musician in the world was forced into was that of the three-minute recording. Because of the three-minute recording, especially in jazz and because so much of big band music was associated with dance and pop numbers and show tunes. The people began to think of the music as though it couldn't work beyond those limitations. So Ellington in 1935, he actually had written an earlier piece called *Creole Rhapsody*, which was an extended work, but his first really extended work was *Reminiscent in Tempo*, which he wrote for his mother, I think it was in 1935, which required four sides, four 78 sides. The critics didn't like it. I don't think it's one of his major works. It was a very ambitious piece, but Ellington didn't usually mind what the critics had to say anyway, he knew he was on the right track, which he surely was. And from that point on, he started regularly thinking in terms of longer pieces even an opera, which he never completed. And suites, he began thinking in terms of extended tone poems and so he moved the music beyond the three-minute level, between the whole, the dance band restrictions. He began to explore areas of the music that no one else had been willing to wade into.

Ellington's highland.

My favorite of Ellington's extended pieces, the one that strikes me as most nearly flawless was originally called *A Tone Parallel to Harlem.* It was commissioned by Toscanini of the NBC orchestra although he never performed it. Ellington wrote it on the Isle de France, traveling to the United States from Europe. It's a piece that I've always thought, and this is my opinion and speculation, I can't prove it, but it's a piece that I think is

Ellington's response to the *Rhapsody in Blue*, you know, the *Rhapsody in Blue* was a very important work in 1924, and it's a marvelous piece. It's just, it's an American classic. But because it has the word blue in it, a lot of people think somehow it's a blues piece or it should be played in a ponderous bluesy way, which is absurd. Gershwin comes out of the theater and it's a jaunty work basically for the most part. But look at the comparisons. They are the same length to begin with. The *Rhapsody in Blue* begins with a clarinet in an ascending arpeggio. Harlem is built on a descending trumpet arpeggio. *Rhapsody in Blue* has a series of, as a rhapsody would, a series of rhythmic and thematic figures that finally, about two thirds through hits on one gorgeous Gershwin melody that is, becomes the theme for all the variations that follow through to the end of the piece. That's exactly the way Harlem is constructed. Two thirds through, the trombonist stands up and plays the most gorgeous hymn that Ellington ever wrote and the rest of the piece is basically a series of variations on that hymn. The piece doesn't have the transitional problems that some of Ellington's longer works have. It doesn't have any dull space. It has a gorgeously exciting high trumpet climax and it moves so quickly. It takes so much of Harlem. It has Latin rhythms, it has of course the hymn, the Sunday church movement. It has the Saturday night function. It swings, it rocks, it does all kinds of things and at moments it's very, very moving. It's a piece that you, you want to listen to more than once.

Cotton Tail.

Cotton Tail was one of the pieces that Ellington wrote in the in the early 1940s that was considered the greatest period in the in the band history. Some people think of all time. I would say at least until the middle 1960s. *Cotton Tail* was actually written by Ben Webster and he wrote the saxophone chorus which everybody just assumed was Ellington's, but it's written in the Elllington style and it's a perfect example of what a great orchestra he had.

It's one of the things about Ellington that's very important. Bass, he really made the bass an important instrument in jazz.

Ellington in the late 30s and 40s, the bass. . .

A lot of things happened to the Ellington band in the early 40s. First of all he gets a disciple who can write in the Ellington style and can take some of the pressure off him and who has a creative energy of his own in Billy Strayhorn. He finally gets the tenor saxophonist he always wanted, Ben Webster, who created *Cotton Tail*. And he finds a young, I think he was a teenager when he met him, a bass player named Jimmy Blanton. Now, I think you can argue that Ellington had as much influence on the development of the bass in jazz as any bassist. He loved the sound of the instrument. At one point he had two basses and in the twenties, he was actually writing for archal bass to be voiced with the, the rest of the orchestra. So he made a lot of use of it. But

Blanton comes along and he's the first musician who can play pizzicato bass with the same kind of agility as a soloist on any other instrument. On a and a wind instrument. And so naturally Ellington begins writing pieces to feature that. Like *Jack the Bear* and many others, *In A Mellow Tone,* in the introduction. A lot of pieces where you can really hear that thumping bass. Well, the music changes, right there. Every bassist who comes after them is a child of Jimmy Blanton.

In the 1960s, that was the high point and it went downhill from there. But you think the 60s was a really important. . . What is he hearing?

I loved the band that he had in the sixties. He had the best of all possible worlds. He had a lot of the great soloists that he always had. He still had John. It's very interesting to remember that these musicians so adored Elllington that they gave him their lives. You don't find this anywhere else. Johnny Hodges, his entire adult career was on the road with Duke Ellington, Harry Carne, a lot, twenty years was nothing for an Ellington musician. So now in the 1960s he's still got the great soloists he's still got Hodges and Carne and Cootie Williams and Lawrence Brown but he also, for the first time allowed himself to hire some section players. Instead of every guy in the band having a solo responsibility or some idiosyncrasy that he could use, he started using players who could beef up the brass section, both in the trumpets and the trombones. He had terrific rhythm sections. I think there was a major change over in the band when he hired Louie Bellson on drums in the early 1950s and after that he wanted that kind of a drummer, somebody who could play a good bass drum, but someone who was a very swingier kind of a, you know, a very modern vital moving kind of drummer as opposed to Sonny Greer, his drummer of the 30s and 40s who was a drummer more as an accompanist to the band. Now he was using drummers that he would count off the tempo when it would set a kind of plate on which the orchestrations could sit. So then, also, he develops as a composer; he's been through the period of writing for Carnegie Hall. He's been through the period of trying the suites. He seems to have ac achieved a real maturity in pieces like *Far East Suite*, he's listening to what other musicians are doing. *Ad-lib on Nipon*, the *Afro-Eurasian Eclipse*, these pieces have a tremendous wit to them and a new kind of style and he seems to have found ways to use all of the musicians in new combinations, and I think the band took on a terrific energy and it just sounded so precise. It had a marvelous precision. Of course, I'm prejudiced to the 60s band in part because I heard it. I saw it many times. Maybe if I'd been alive in 1940, I wouldn't feel quite as strongly, but I have to say and I and I, this is something that people will have to live with as great as the records are, none of them capture what that band sounded like in person.

What is modal jazz?

For thirty years from Armstrong into the 1950s jazz improvisation was based on chords. If you look at a piece of sheet music, you see the melody notes on the staff and then you see the little chord symbols on top, you know, C major, B flat, whatever it is. That means that when you're improvising, when you're on that measure that's C you play any note that will fall into that chord, when you get to the B flat, you play any note that chord. Well, after years of this, it became like going through very familiar hoops. That everybody was making up licks and phrases that followed these harmonic figures. Modal jazz provided an alternative, basically it rid the staff of all those chords and it re replaced it with a scale. Any series of notes from C to C, from D to D, from F to F is a scale. Now, the record that really popularized this in the, in the late 1950s was Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue*. One of the tracks was called *So What,* which is basically a 32 bar song except instead of all those chords, he had the basic part of the song written, I think it was in a, in a D minor scale. So Miles begins his solo, he plays something like Ba boo dee ba, boo doo be da ba baba, well, you know, I can't sing it, but if you transcribed the solo, you'd see that every single one of those notes, it actually falls into a D minor - scale. I mean, he's very rigid about it unlike Coltrane on the same record who could go all over the place but still stay within the D minor tonality. And scales became more and more common so that by the 1960s and 70s and right to today, it became a standard kind of improvisation where you would think in terms of keys, in terms of basic tonalities and not of having to go through the hoops of a different chord change every measure.

Fats Waller, happy go lucky.

Fats Waller was a musician who it is impossible to dislike and I have played him for all kinds of people and they always run out and look for Fats Waller records. It is the most pleasurable form of music I can think of. He's full of joy, he's full of life and he's very, very funny. That joy is in his piano playing, it's in his singing, it's in the kinds of bands that he led. But there was another side to Fats Waller. He also came from the church background and he had some hard times, he sold songs for hamburgers, people, hamburgers, people make this sound like it's so, he was so brilliant that he could just knock it off in a taxicab, but the point is, he, he gave away a lot of valuable copyrights that other people made into hit songs. When he played the organ, you heard that other side of him. When he played the organ, whether it was a spiritual, or an original composition like the *London Suite*, you hear a different kind of feeling, a greater depth, a greater meditative quality about him. He was a big man, he was a fat man, he was called Fats, for Heaven's sake. And people like that are expected to be jovial and he was willing to play the part, for the most part. It's when you hear some of the original pieces and when you hear the solo piano you realize that he's a musician of enormous depth and of great learning. He knows the piano repertoire in the European tradition as well as in jazz. He's one of the first great jazz pianists, incidentally. And his rhythm is incomparable. He is, he doesn't need a band, he swings so hard.

Let's cut to Ella Fitzgerald. Let's talk about her in the suite era. She had a musical rapport with the decline of the depression and you said she was the definitive voice of this.

Ella had a lilt in her voice. She sounded like a swing singer, she sounded like, she was the right voice to come out of a big band in that period. She was a kid. She was very young. So it was appropriate for her to have a big hit with a nursery rhyme like *A Tisket a Tasket*, unfortunately then they kept throwing that kind of, real junk at her like *Chew Chew Chew your Bubblegum* and not the kind of standards that she later became identified with. She resented a lot of that and, in fact, at one point in her career she didn't like being called a jazz singer. She said, "Sometimes I'm a jazz singer, of course, but when I sing the Cole Porter song book, why, why am I a jazz singer? And if Frank Sinatra does it, he isn't." She had a gorgeous instrument, nobody had a more beautiful voice. She had a tremendous range. And she had a rhythmic quality that was always there so that she always is a jazz singer, whether she likes it or not. Because even when she's singing a slow ballad, and nobody could sing Gershwin or Jerome Kern or Ellington, any of those great songwriters, Harold Arlen, better than Ella. No matter what the arrangement was, you could hear that time, that sense of swing, that undercurrent of rhythmic panache that makes the songs even more vivid and timeless, I think, than they otherwise would be.

Sarah Vaughan.

Sarah Vaughan is my favorite singer. She came out of the church in Newark. And she had the most astonishing range of any jazz singer. People make the mistake of calling her operatic and saying that if she wanted to, she could have been an opera singer. And I think they're entirely missing the point. She had the range, but she had no interest in that kind of singing. Her whole approach to phrasing is much more oriented around the church and around jazz. She had something else that made her unique. She was extremely sophisticated harmonically. I mean in the way that Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie and all the great instrumentalists of bop for she was on that level, so she could embellish melodies as she was singing them with notes that went into substitute chords that no other singer would be able to get back from. She could go all the way out on a melody. She could create a whole improvised variation on a melody and she could, she could bring it back. She had tremendous time, she had great spirit, great humor, she was a delightful woman. I loved her dearly. I was very proud to know her. And all of that is in the music. She is, for me, the ultimate jazz singer because she took so much pleasure in the quality of her voice and in the quality of the songs that she was able to bring into some new sphere that the songwriters never could have imagined.

General idea, the role of the singer, some of the purists say that the singers aren't musicians, just window-dressing. What do you say?

Grow up. Excuse me. I can't imagine jazz without singing. I can't imagine any music without singing. Music begins with the voice. Jazz is no different from any other music and it's had great singers from the very beginning. Who would, Jimmy Rushing, to me, can be as thrilling to me in the Count Basie band as, as Lester Young. How can, can you imagine the Ellington band without Ivy Anderson, Chick Webb without Ella Fitzgerald? Louis Armstrong without his singing? No, the great jazz singers are as much a part of the music as the great instrumentalist. They are among the premier figures in the development of this music.

Lester Young recording into the late 40s and 50s

Lester Young had a terrible experience during the war. Everybody knows that and his music changed. I think some of his very best work was done right after the war. *DB Blues* is a famous record. *Blue Lester*, I think, is just exquisite. I don't know of any other record quite like it. But as he got older, he had some rough times. He stopped eating and he started drinking. And there were some, there are some bad performances. There were performances where he could barely fill the horn with air. But there were also some of the most moving performances of his career where he, he refined his music down with a terrific economy, playing one note where he might have played ten earlier. Using riffs in a very cagey and expressive manner. It was no longer the jubilant, easy-going, carefree Lester that everybody loved in the 1930s. He was a grown man who had seen some very dark things and he transmuted that into his music and if you're willing to travel with him in those years, I think it's enormously rewarding.

One of the great things about the later period in Billie Holiday's career is that she had pretty much complete control over the songs she could choose which she didn't have in the 1930s. She would use a lot of the great standards. And she was able to invest them with a wonderfully personal and sometimes dark, but sometimes very light and joyful quality even though her voice had been a bit eaten away by time and, and a certain amount of abuse. But she also continued to sing a lot of the songs that she was associated with. You have to remember that in the 1930s the record business was to some degree controlled by song pluggers. So, if you had a Bing Crosby or a Frank Sinatra, they got the good songs. They got the first choice. By the time they got down to Billie Holiday who recorded primarily for a juke box audience in the 1930s. She got stuff like, *Ooh Ooh Ooh, what a little moonlight will do to you*. But she did them so brilliantly that instead of being able to just get rid of them, people associated her with those songs all of her life so you hear her in 1957, a couple, or '58 it may have been shortly before she died up at the Newport Jazz Festival and she's singing Ooh *Ooh Ooh, What a Little Moonlight*. . . and it just breaks your heart. She's singing the song, but there

is so much, there is so much depth and irony and feeling that the words, however trivial they may once have sounded, now have a profound meaning.

There are people who would like to say that we only know about Benny Goodman because he was white.

There's no question that Benny Goodman had advantages because he was white that were denied Duke Ellington namely, a radio, a network radio hookup which was pretty much forbidden to black entertainers. But I think it's madness to blame the racist society that Goodman benefited from to the point where you deny his brilliance as an artist. He is one of the great clarinet virtuosi of our time and he's one of the great jazz players of the 1930s and onward. And he did a lot to give back. I mean, it is Benny Goodman is the guy who more than anyone else broke the color barrier by hiring Teddy Wilson and Lionel Hampton and using them as a kind of entre-act on his concerts with the Goodman Trio originally and then the Goodman Quartet. He always kept an integrated band. He seems to have been color blind in most of his actions. He was the guy who accompanied Billie Holiday when she first started recording and he was a superb musician. Was he the king of swing? No, of course not. The king of swing, if there was a king, was probably Count Basie. The inventor of swing was probably Ellington at least in the big band realm. But, that was a publicity thing and it was racist. And the question is how did Goodman use it? And I think he handled it pretty well. I think he did well by jazz. I think he was an honorable man, in many respects. However difficult a son of a bitch he might have been and a lot of musicians hated working with him. I thought, at least his public stature was, you know, admirable.

The songs they chose to do. Popular songs. Why did he become so famous. What were they doing?

Goodman was a very cagey musician. You have to remember that he had spent a long apprenticeship in jazz before anybody ever heard of him. He was a very prolific studio musician. Everybody wanted him on their sessions. When you listen to Billie Holiday's, *What a Little Moonlight Can Do*, what knocks you out in part is that fantastic clarinet playing by Benny Goodman, who was unknown then, outside of musician's circles. When he finally became known, Benny was a mandarin. He believed that the band should be perfect. He didn't have the best soloists. His solos weren't nearly as good as Fletcher Henderson's soloists. But the ensemble was spit and polish. So Henderson loved writing for Goodman because he could hear his arrangements played, you know, the way he imagined them. Even if the soloists were mostly derivative of the great black soloists in Henderson's own band. As a clarinetist, he was his own man. Benny Goodman was a superb blues player, a superb improviser, he had a gorgeous tone and he swung like mad. And he was a very canny recording artist in the sense that he, his producers, with his producers he would, for every two jazz instrumentals he would do, he would do two pop vocals. That was the stuff that made all the

money, maybe, but it enabled him to keep playing jazz and he never sacrificed the jazz end. I mean, he always kept up at it. He was a guy who hired a lot of the most advanced arrangers of the 40s like Eddie Sauter and a lot of the most advance musicians all the way from Charley Christian, from Teddy Wilson to Charley Christian to Wardell Gray.

What made him just the perfect person to entertain during the middle of the depression?

Benny was a good role model. He was, of course he had to be white. For the same reason that Elvis Presley had to be white. Nobody denies that this is a racist society and they were not going to give the same kind of plaudits to a black musician even if he was a bonafide genius as Duke Ellington no, undoubtedly was. But here he is playing the role and why is he so good at it? Well, he's not entirely white, he is Jewish which gives him a certain ethnicity and a certain minority status. He is an eccentric. There's a perplexing quality about him. He talks, he has a kind of strange Oxfordian accent and at the same time he mumbles. He is extremely absentminded. He seems like a regular kind of a guy and he comports himself well. The band comports itself well. And he's exciting musician, he comes out, he looks like a gentleman and then, in the middle of a clarinet solo, all of a sudden, he's got one foot raised and he's hopping around, then he sits down on a chair and he practically falls over and he becomes completely consumed in the music and this is mesmerizing for an audience because it's not a show, it's not a put-on, it's Goodman.

Goodman wanted Teddy Wilson in his band. Something about the way he played.

Teddy Wilson is often described as the Jackie Robinson of jazz because he was the guy that, traveling with Goodman, kind of broke the barrier of segregated bands. Goodman heard him at a party and he, there was never been a piano player like, like Teddy Wilson. I think one of the things that distinguishes him from all the piano players who precede him, Earl Hines, Waller, Duke Ellington, is they had a very percussive tack. Teddy Wilson had a light, lyrical tack. It's an exquisite sound. He makes every key sound like a chime or a bell. He's wonderfully lyrical and he's very fast. He's very astute in a way, as an accompanist, he's terrific left-hand intense, falling all over the keyboard. Listen to him accompany Mildred Bailey or Billie Holiday or Goodman and his lyricism and his empathy for what they play is just extraordinary. But then you have to listen to his solo piano and you realize that no one has ever made the piano sound quite like that. After two measures you know it can't be anybody else but Teddy Wilson.

Sonny Rollins. Ego and self-doubt

Sonny Rollins? Yeah, I know what you mean.

What does he sound like?

Sonny Rollins is a Titan. He has that ebullience that I associate with Louis Armstrong and I think very few musicians have that but Sonny is an old-style musician in the sense that he distrusts records. He doesn't enjoy recording. He believes that records are basically commercials to bring people into the concerts. That's where the music really takes place. He's a live performer who likes to respond to the moment. But he's such an honest musician, that if he's not inspired, he won't simply play by rote the way most musicians will and turn out a perfectly acceptable performance that the audience won't be able to tell there's anything wrong. No. He'll riff all evening, or goof off or play the same tune for half and ho, I've seen him play the same melody statement for twenty minutes like he can't get out of it. He can't, there's really nothing he really wants to play but you catch him on an inspired night and he'd tear the hair off your head. He's a musician of real genius at his peak. He's often been credited with innovating thematic improvisation which is simply a way of saying that he likes to hold on to the melody instead of just discarding it and then playing a series of variations that don't reflect the melody. He likes to actually embellish the melody and then play variations that allow the melody to poke through the variations so that there is a coherence from the beginning of the solo to the end. He is, like Armstrong, a soloist who believes in beginning, middle and end. He does climax. He does know how to bring a solo to a glorified moment, a usually a cadenza that, you know, has audiences cheering and he needs that cheering and you don't get it in a recording studio. He also has the most glorious sound on the tenor saxophone and I think of modern players he has a big sound weighted to the lower register of the instrument and it resonates. It reaches into every corner of a concert hall.

What was it about Dizzy Gillespie?

Dizzy came out of Roy Eldridge. He came out of the hippest trumpet player that preceded him. He used to call Roy Eldridge the Messiah of our generation. So he had a harmonic sense and he had an innate gift for harmony anyway and rhythm and he had a tremendous facility that was very unusual for the trumpet. At first he did all the apprenticeship and we can hear him developing, he played in the big bands. He arranged for big bands. He did everything so that by the time he meets Charley Parker, he's really ready and he understands what Parker's doing. He understood the harmony, the rhythm the melody, he understood everything before, but he said, "Parker showed us how to get from one note to the, to the next." And Gillespie instantly became what he once called the other half of his heartbeat and so together they really created the new jazz movement. Parker, of course, died, went out like a flame in his thirties so he became a myth. Dizzy went on to play great music for another forty, fifty years and so I think his contribution, his later contribution has been much underrated because in

some ways he became an even greater artist, a more beautiful tone, he started playing on scales. He started doing all kinds of things, but boy when you listen to those records he made in the 1940s with his big band, that is some of the most exhilarating trumpet playing you'll ever hear.

Dizzy's great innovation in the modern jazz movement was that he introduced what he called the Afro-Cuban rhythms. He loved that sound and he used, originally he used a conga player from Cuba named Chano Pozo. And together they wrote *Manteca* and they did a number of other pieces and after that he became very much associated with the whole Latin-jazz movement, the whole Salsa movement. It really traces back to Dizzy. He became a pretty good congas player, himself.

You said he heard the music of the spheres. He reached a higher level.

I think Armstrong boils down to how do you define genius. And I guess it's partly that you hear something that no one else has heard. Where does Armstrong come from? It's impossible to, I mean, we talk about jazz coming from Vaudeville and spiritualism and all this kind of thing but we don't hear a precedent for Armstrong. So, what, like Mozart, like Bach you can say that he heard the music of the spheres. He heard rhythms and melodies and a sound, a way of extending his voice into the trumpet, all of which was original with him. And the result is so overpowering and so spiritual, it's enough to make the angels weep.

Jerry Mulligan.

Jerry was an arranger/composer who rather reluctantly became an instrumentalist as well. It was the only way to make a living and he happened to become the only star baritone saxophonist in the history of Western civilization. He was able to become a major star playing an instrument that was considered very cumbersome, but he was able to play it in the higher register and come up with a very beautiful and lyrical style. He's the guy who really put cool jazz on the map. He was out in California in the early 50s. Of course, he had nothing to do with the West Coast, he was from the East, but what he created became known as West coast jazz. And he put together a quartet with Chet Baker on trumpet, Chico Hamilton on drums, and Bob Whitlock on bass. No piano. So it became immediately known as the piano-less quartet 'cause that was considered innovative at the time. And the band was so serene and it just sounded like the Pacific Ocean, that that the waves, you know, the air wafting over the West coast and young people loved it. It became very popular on campuses. *Time* magazine did a piece about it and in no time at all, there was a new movement, cool jazz or West coast jazz. But Jerry was a lot deeper than that. He hated being stereotyped with that and I think a lot of his greatest work comes later when he has the sextet and then when he begins to concert jazz band which is

really the chance for him to do all the things he ever wanted to do as a conductor and as a composer and as an orchestrator. But I guess he will always be remembered primarily for this, the way a big, tall man, with red hair, later a big blonde beard and the way, or gray beard, and the way he just made that baritone seem like it was nothing more than a plastic toy the way he just wheeled it around. So beautiful, so lyrical.

Stanley Crouch will probably tell me that cool jazz is a pastel imitation of real jazz. Would you like to respond to that?

Cool jazz is it's easy to stereotype. A lot of it is pretty bad. I never liked a lot of it. It's limpid, it's dull, it's kind of a dishwater music at times but you have to distinguish between the imitation and the, and the fashion and the really good players who had something to say in it. I mean, when Miles Davis made the *Birth of the Cool* records, those are going to live forever. Those are very important recordings and Jerry Mulligan was a gorgeous player. I mean, he could take a tune like *My Funny Valentine* and do variation after variation, you can't, you can't deny the power of that music simply because the word itself became descriptive of a lot of music that wasn't, wasn't very good. The same thing could be said of hard bop which was the East coast equivalent of West coast jazz. The same thing could even be said of bebop, there's a lot of bebop, let me tell you, that sounds like a parody of it. And was belittled properly at the time. You've got to distinguish between the really gifted musicians in any area and the fashion that the publicists and the critics and the fans come in and invent around them. The fashions disappear, it's the art that we care about a generation later.

Miles Davis. The later years of Miles and what drew him into fusion?

I think Miles' decision in the last twenty, twenty-five years to move his music in the direction that he moved it is complicated. I think first of all, he's genuinely an artist who could not stand still and he had to move in some direction because he wasn't going to keep playing the same way after a few years. And in the 1960s you can see him moving from scales into more and more elemental forms for improvisation. You can see him, slowly, one instrument at a time, going electric, adding extra percussion, using a lot of younger musicians. I think at some point he also had to finally admit to himself something that he had never been willing to admit before which is that he liked performing. He was an entertainer. He might have hated that word, but he liked the adulation of young black kids coming over and pulling at his sleeve and asking for autographs. He had always refused that, he'd always been too hip, too cool. But I think he really enjoyed it and I think when he realized that the music was successful on that level, it encouraged him to keep going. The music he created in the last twenty, twenty-five years of his life is, first of all it's a huge, it's the majority of the music he made in his life. And some of it I find unlistenable, at some points, he can't play. He, he's lost his chops and the only interest is from the other musicians. But some of it I think is very exciting and very interesting. There

are moments when you really feel that he's, he's broken a doorway down and moved into something that really works for him. Even if the fusion movement that built itself around it was pretty banal for the most part, I think Miles found ways to say, to be very expressive within the so-called fusion idiom.

What is the importance of the music generally? Why will it always have power?

I think the profundity that people look for in jazz or ascribe to jazz is no different than the profundity that you ascribe to any other art. It's a music that has endured way beyond what anybody thought it was going to in the 20s, 30s, 40s as recently as the 80s I remember being in debates in which people said, "Well, you can't compare Armstrong and Bach." You know, they just wouldn't compare it, you know. But today, people have come around and are more willing to, why? Because after a hundred years, the people are still listening to, I mean Ellington and Stravinsky are contemporaries, Ellington isn't going away. He's more widely listened to today than he ever was when he was alive. Armstrong is more widely admired. There are more dissertations being written, more studies going on to try to explain their music. Why is it important? It's, it was a completely new development in music at a time when European music was becoming very arcane. When serialization of the twelve-tone row and all kinds of avant garde abstractions were driving away the audience. This music came along that could bring in an audience even though that audience was often unwilling to admit that it was serious. But it has power, it has emotion, it has it's intellectually satisfying, it has everything that we need for an art. And the only proof of this is the fact that it's endured as well as it has and it seems to be ready for to tackle a new century without any problem at all.

What's unique about the individuality of jazz?

The individuality of jazz is one of the most appealing things about it and it's different in a way it's subversive of the usual European approach towards instruments. For example, if you study in the European tradition, the violin has a sound that resides with the violin. You learn how to master the violin. After you've mastered the violin, your own individuality comes in to your playing, a style. And jazz is very different. Buddy Tate was once asked what is the first thing a jazz musician has to do and he said, "Get your own sound." You begin with that. You begin with trying to say something that's very personal. You can, any jazz enthusiast can hear a couple of notes and know if a tenor saxophonist is Lester Young or Coleman Hawkins or Ben Webster or John Coltrane or Sonny Rollins. That's very unusual for that much individuality to be expressed in an instrument so that you instantly know a Roy Eldridge from a Bobby Hackett, from a Cootie Williams even though they're all the same age and they all play the same instrument and that individuality, I think, is what stimulates the music and creates a constant competition between musicians. You're never just playing the instrument,

you're playing yourself. You can't hide, you're always revealing something about yourself.

Is there something American in that?

It seems to be a very American quality, it's a pioneering quality, it's a subversive quality and it's also, you know, it's the ultimate in rugged individualism. It's going out there on that stage and saying, it doesn't matter how anybody else did it. This is the way I'm going to do it.

Sidney Bechet.

Sidney Bechet was a remarkable musician who came out of New Orleans and for a couple of years he was the only musician in jazz who could actually challenge Louis Armstrong on his own turf, he was that good. He played clarinet but he's primarily remembered as soprano saxophonist, he was one of the four or five figures who really reinvented the saxophone as a serious instrument. And of course, he also is the musician who as a teenager, I think he was in his teens, with Will Marion Cook, I believe and was the subject of a very perceptive review by the conductor Ernst Asermet, which was the first review ever written about jazz in which he said that listening to this young black boy was like it must have been to hear Mozart or Beethoven in their prime and that he could see that the whole future of music would be marching in his footsteps.

Help our audience understand jazz - somebody who's never heard it.

When people talk about what makes jazz great, they frequently speak metaphorically. They talk about the sense of liberation and a celebrational music and a music of freedom. All of which is true. I wouldn't quarrel with it and it is especially true for people in the, high in the Eastern block. People who as Dizzy Gillespie said, literally, died for the music. But, I also think there's something, a special pleading in that because the real phenomenon of the music is not metaphorical, it, it's direct. It's, it's the beauty and the excitement and the originality of the music. This is a music in which the listener and, is constantly having a very close bond with the individual performer. Because the performer is not merely interpreting somebody else's music. They're not evaluating an interpretation, but letting you know who he or she is in terms of originality and personality. So there's a whole different level of intimacy between the audience and the performer. And there's also a tremendous amount of suspense that goes with that because, if you've got a quintet and they run through the head and then they start soloing, you don't know what they're going to play and they don't know what they're going to play. You may know some of the phrases and licks and so forth but there's always that sense that something can be played that you've never heard before. And that's really what you live for in the club. And, of course, that's

what the musician lives for. Lee Connance once said that the goal of a, of a jazz solo, every time out, is to create a perfect musical statement. You might only do it a few times in your life, but if that's your goal, then every time you sit in a jazz club and watch a musician work, you're both in sync with what the object is. And that's why jazz is the only music in the world that I know of where the audience, the etiquette is for the audience to clap after every improvisation.

Why do you love this music?

I love jazz for its variety, its incredible diversity. Ellington once said that it's much too broad to fit under the umbrella of one word and, and he said that more than thirty years ago. And of course he's quite right. I love it because it's an exciting music. I love the idea that the individual player has to make himself known in a few measures. Buddy Tate once said that the first thing a jazz musician does is create his own sound. That's a revolutionary idea. You're not trying to get the sound of the violin. The platonic sound of the tenor saxophone. You're working on expressing yourself through the instrument. I love the excitement, the immediacy, the surprise. I love the bond that the music creates with its audience. Can I tell an anecdote here?

Sure.

For, for me, the music began with a certain sociological power because the first time I heard jazz was in 1963 during the civil rights period. And we pulled up in a bus to the hotel and the first thing I saw were three doorways, "Men," "Women," "Colored Men." "Colored women," I guess must have been around the corner, I didn't see that. But, and I said, "Well, you know, the old phrase, 'We're not in Kansas anymore.'" This was, you know, really something, we were all quite stunned and New Orleans proved to be like that in every different way. I mean, when you got on a cable car and, the segregated seating and the whole thing. So then, we went to see a jazz band in the afternoon as tourists do in New Orleans. That's something you see. I was interested in that, at that time in classical music and rock. Pop music, you know, I didn't know anything about jazz. And we walked into this hotel, the Royal Orleans, I believe it was, and it was the walls and all the furnishings were a kind of red cut-velvet, like you think of a 1890s brothel or something and big chandeliers. But when you open the door, the first thing you notice was that it was a completely integrated crowd. Black and white people talking and dancing and I thought, well, I associated that with the music. I said, this is enlightened, this is the family that I want to be a part of. And it, it just intensified as the concert actually began. And in fact, that is the way jazz has been more enlightened. I mean, there has been an attempt to integrate jazz going all the way back to the beginning. If you go back to the very, very beginning in New Orleans, you find out that people like Larry Shields who was the clarinetist with the white Original Dixieland Jazz Band, was practically a neighbor of Buddy Bolden. And there, there has been a

social enlightenment attached to the music that I think still exists, however much some people might try to undermine it.

We are interested in things American. What is America? What are the essential things that connect jazz to the American culture? Why is jazz American and why did it happen here?

Jazz is the, is the quintessential American music. And the important thing that you have to begin with is that it could only happen in America. It's not an African music, obviously. It's not a European music, obviously. It's something that comes right out of this soil. Out of influences that come from different, all different kinds of cultures. I mean you bring over a slave culture from Africa, they have all kinds of musical traditions. You bring over a huge influx of Irish during the famine period. They have musical influences. And because they're at the bottom of the rung, they're associating with African-Amer, who aren't even African-Americans then. They're, you know, Blacks, they're slaves. They're not citizens. And so, there's a lot of cross-cultural mixing it up. Then you have certain kinds of music that are, are brought down on their heads, literally, by the plantation owners, by the white culture. Songs like "Silent Night" which has chord changes that are very similar to the blues. And you have all kinds of dance rhythms coming in from different cultures. And then you have the whole Jewish song writing group in the Lower East Side and they're, they're, they're writing all kinds of material that for some reason is perfect for jazz improvisation. There are certain qualities, musical qualities that exist in folk musics all over the world. The pentatonic scale, certain kinds of chromaticisms, certain kinds of rhythmic devices and all of those come together in jazz. But in jazz, unlike all of the other folk musics of the world, it blossoms into an authentic art. In which, it's never truly a folk music because it requires too much sophistication to play. And it achieves enormous elegance almost from the very beginning which is also unique and, and distinguishes it from a folk culture. So that by the time it really comes into its own and is codified as a modern musical style in the 1920s it reaches levels of emotional and levels of a beauty and communication that are equal to that of any art music that the world has ever known. And, and the world appreciated this almost from the beginning even if the American cultural establishment did not.

James Reese Europe. Is he important to the history of jazz?

James Reese Europe is an interesting figure in the early period. He's of marginal importance to jazz, but he is of some importance. Number one, he was the first really well-know Black band leader in the country. He was very famous. In a way, he was a kind of heir to Sousa's reputation. And that was important and then his primary fame was in accompanying the Castles, the famous dance group. And he played orchestrated ragtime and he gave it a tremendous rhythmic pizzazz so that his 1914 recordings are very interesting. They aren't jazz, per se, but they are definite precursors of jazz. They have a lot of the rhythmic vitality. They, they're kind of missing links

between the march and ragtime traditions and jazz which is going to come just around the corner but unfortunately, Europe died in, and did not live to see it.

Paul Whiteman, why was he misunderstood?

Whiteman is a fascinating figure in American music. He is the first true modern superstar. And he was a champion, a very powerful advocate for American music. He started out as a classical, playing viola and then violin, and violin. And then he had a ragtime band, a jazz kind of band in California. But what he really wanted to do was he wanted to champion American music and find a way to dress it up in a symphonic kind of finery. In 1924 he commissioned George Gershwin to write the *Rhapsody in Blue*, the most famous, probably the most famous classical piece of music ever written in the United States. For some reason, he became known at that point as the king of jazz. He didn't play any jazz. He hadn't played very much jazz at all. He used a little jazz spicing in terms of rhythm and such, but that was about it. Improvisations were not really improvisations at all. But then, by 1926, 1927 jazz became a very powerful music and Whiteman knew it. Whiteman said in his own 1926 book which is called Jazz that there's a difference between what he, difference between what he does and what jazz is. And he decided, "I'm going to hire some jazz musicians." So, he looked around and he said, "Most of the best jazz musicians," he was very close with Don Redman and Fletcher Henderson and a lot of the major Black musicians.

Paul Whiteman was a very complicated guy but he did recognize African-American's contribution.

Whiteman decided that he really did want to hire some jazz musicians and he wanted to hire black musicians but he was talked out of that for obvious reasons. They would lose a lot of engagements and it would be humiliating for the black musicians who couldn't walk into hotels through the front door. So he hired black arrangers, and then the real breakthrough was when he hired the, most of the musicians, the great ones from the Gene Kolcat band. He got the best white musicians in the world, Bix Beiderbecke and Frank Trumbauer and Eddie Lang and Joe Venuti were in the band. Bing Crosby who just revolutionized singing in that orchestra and the great arranger Bill Challis. I think that Chalis' "Lonely Melody" is one of the great jazz masterpieces of that era. So, in effect, for two or three years, Whiteman though never really a jazz person, did make some very good jazz records.

When Duke Ellington died, it sort of changed what people thought about jazz history in a way. Give us a brief idea of what the importance of Duke Ellington, what direction the music was taking.

I think the death of Duke Ellington in 1974 was a, was a benchmark in the history of the music. Everything Ellington did had influence including his death because for the first time people realized that here was a huge

repertory of written music and what was going to happen to it? I mean, if Ellington isn't alive to play it, what happens to this music? Music doesn't exist, doesn't survive if it only exists on scores or on recordings. And so the whole concept of repertory really begins there. How are we going to treat this music and all the questions that evolve from that. Are you gonna just do imitations? Are you going to do it, try to conduct them exactly the way Ellington did? Well, what does that mean? Ellington did fifty different versions of Creole love songs so there's no one that's definitive. How much of the solos do you retain? Which of the improvisations are so classic and perfect that you want to keep them as though they were written and which ones can be ad-libbed all over again. Do you open up the arrangements? Do you make them longer? Do you, just how many liberties and how many possibilities of interpretation are there? And of course, the answer is infinite, just as there is in classical music. And this whole concept of jazz as an interpretive music really didn't exist before then. But Ellington created such an enormous body of work that I think his absence suddenly created a kind of C change in the whole music. A kind of, you know, shaking of the ground underneath everyone's feet.

What happened with that idea? What was the effect of that?

So what happens is people start going back and looking at all of the great written music. And orchestras came into being. Repertory orchestras that existed primarily to play classic arrangements. Not just Ellington, but Jimmy Lunsford and Count Basie and Gil Evans and Bill Holman, Thad Jones, all of the great writers. There was this huge body of music, what do you do with it when the actual composers are not there. You can't just let it die. There, there was a very conservative backwater, there still is, of people who think, you know, that the records are definitive. That's like saying that Stravinsky conducted "The Right of Spring" that nobody else is allowed to do it. So, then you have classes, clinics in colleges coming along and they begin to study the scores because the scores finally are getting published now, I mean, for a long time you couldn't even get hold of them. All you could get was stock arrangements. And now you can actually study the voicings and you have a whole generation of young musicians who are coming up not from the street, in the sense of, you know, of jazz being entirely an oral history and you're learning to play because you love Coleman Hawkins and now you're going to find your own style on the tenor. Now you have a whole generation of musicians coming up through clinics and schools who have actually played through this body of music. And what they produce, we, we still don't know for sure, what, how, what, it, in the long run, what, what direction the music will take, but we just know that this is a, this is a major and somewhat unsettling change in the music's history.

Since the late 50s early 60s you talk about this balkanization of jazz in the different camps. Is there one music you can call jazz in 1965?

Okay.

Or are there 20 different musics that are all called jazz with the different warring factions?

Okay. I would say that jazz is as vague a term as classical music. I don't know what it means because I know what people mean when they say, talk about jazz, it's a kind of shorthand and I know that they're talking about a certain kind of tradition but I also know that a lot of jazz musicians from one period will not sit and listen to jazz musicians from another period. And this balkanization of the audience and of the musicians themselves goes all the way back to the beginning. There were people in the swing era in the, in the early 1930s who just couldn't stand that music because they thought it should only be the way King Oliver and Louis Armstrong had played it in the twenties. And then there were people who championed swing who decided that bebop was a fraud. And then the young people who loved bebop thought that the avant garde of the 50s and 60s was a fraud. So there's always been a series of audiences. People who want to hear a certain kind of music just as there is an audience that only wants to listen to Mozart and Beethoven and Brahams, and another audience that's more interested in Bullez and Cage and Stockhausen.

In the sixties it's even more extreme in different camps? What happened?

I think the worst period in jazz history musically is the late 60s and early 70s and there is a reason for that. The music really becomes divided. It's, on the one hand, it's under tremendous pressure from the pop world which is achieved as almost a kind of a golden, second golden era here in rock and everybody's listening to it. And on the jazz front, the most exciting thing musically is the avant garde but this is very alienating to most people because it's a difficult music. It's a post-modern music in the sense that you have to have kind of followed the jazz travail up to that point to really understand what they're doing and why. So a lot of the mainstream people are basically disenfranchised from the music and they literally started working in studios and pit bands until a kind of mainstream jazz reasserted itself. So by the time it reasserts itself beginning in the middle 1970s you have a lot of different jazz audiences and they're really not talking to each other. There's the traditionalists, well, there's the Dixieland people who only want to hear that and you know, musicians with garter belts on their arms and peanuts on the table. There are the swing people who grew up with that. And then there were the, the modern jazz people. And then there are the avant garde people and there's very, a very small audience is really encompassing the whole music. And, I think, there's probably more critics who really feel very strongly about that than the general public.

It's a shame that people aren't enjoying everything that's out there.

I find it very disenchanting and I have to assume that a lot of this has to do with education because jazz is not an easy music. Certain aspects of it, especially older forms, I think are easy for anybody to comprehend. But a lot of it is quite sophisticated and it requires some, an educational background for a lot of people. Cecil Taylor is not a musician that you can just put somebody in a room and say, you know, "Figure this out." But, on the other hand, if you have a little bit of encouragement and and kind of a guide post on what he's doing and how to listen because it's not the same thing as Art Tatum. It requires a different kind of approach. Then, if you become more open to the music, and, and then you might find it very exciting and pleasing.

"Black and Tan Fantasy"

Well, "Black and Tan Fantasy" is maybe the first example of social satire in jazz. It's a very witty and provocative, almost programmatic piece of music. It begins with a blues theme which you could say is Black. And then it has a very kind of loopy pop saxophone theme which you could say is white. Virtually white pop. And then, as the arrangement proceeds the Black melody, the blues melody and the white melody, they kind of alternate and then they finally come together in what? Chopin's "Funeral March." That's how the piece ends. Dun dun buh dum bump ba dum dum bum bum. And then you hear a blues Whahh. Well, what is he talking about here? In part, there used to be a series of black and tan clubs all over Harlem which is the one place where black and white people would meet. And I think Ellington is saying, "No, that is not the answer. That is not going to be enough. That's going to lead to nothing." But the music, you know, is so enchanting on its own, that I don't think people thought about this and they just knew that they were hearing something very lively, very amusing and very different.

Leonard wrote a very powerful thing about Hammond's self-importance and who is he and he doesn't understand this music and he took him apart on every kind of level and, boy, but you know what John' s response was when Leonard started doing the Encyclopedia of Jazz? He financed it.

Really?

Interesting man.

What was his beef with Ellington?

John was a paternalist in the truest sense. And it wasn't just a racial thing 'cause he was associated with just as many white musicians as black musicians and he certainly was a racial, you know, he was a paragon in terms of civil rights, a very early one. But he was a, a man who preferred to

work with musicians who needed his help. When they no longer needed his help, he lost interest. This is true of Benny Goodman, of Count Basie, well, Count Basie and he became great friends for their lives. But still he didn't work with Basie later and he, and a lot of musicians. Now, Ellington was not the kind of person who needed somebody's hand on his shoulder. And he made it very clear and so Hammond lost interest in him because Ellington didn't really need him. And then he, he made the mistake of writing some very silly attacks on Ellington. I once gave John some grief in "The Voice," in a column that I wrote about something that he said about Ellington recently and he called me up. He used to call me early in the morning to chat about different things and he said, "You know, you neglected to point out that I wrote so many wonderful things about Ellington." And I said, "Really John? When was that?" And he said, "The 20s." But after that he really, he didn't like. . . he always invented different reasons. He thought, he once said that Ellington had betrayed his music because it became too white-sounding in the 1930s. His reason for not championing Louis Armstrong more was because he smoked pot. John was virulently opposed to all kinds of drugs. He virtually dropped Billie Holiday when she became addicted. So he was a man of parts, a very complicated man, did a lot of great things, but as I say, complicated.

What is it about that piece that is truly significant?

"Black Beauty" is a good example of the way Ellington was able to assimilate different kinds of music into a completely original brew of his own. He grew up in Washington DC and his first musical influences for the most part were stride pianists. "Black Beauty" is the first piece that I can think of that uses stride rhythms, but to support an absolutely lovely melody. And the rhythms change throughout the piece. He wrote it for Florence Mills who was a wonderful black dancer and actress who died in her middle twenties. She was very popular. And funerals were, there was mourning all over the country for her. And he wrote this short, but absolutely exquisite melody. It's one of the most, one of the loveliest tunes, I think, Ellington ever wrote. But with, what makes it doubly fascinating is the fact that he uses what had been considered a very brash, raucous, dancing kind of rhythm to support it.

"Cottontail?" We have great footage of Lindy Hoppers dancing. The energy and the exuberance and the vitality of that is just so amazing.

"Cottontail" was one of the great jam session tunes of all times. It's a very swinging piece and it really kind of typifies this state of grace that Ellington fell into in the early 40s when he couldn't record anything or write anything other than masterpieces with a few exceptions. It's a famous piece in part because of Ben Webster's contribution. Not only does he play his most famous tenor saxophone solo. A solo that is so acclaimed that you can't perform the piece to this day in a big band setting without somebody, either an individual playing Webster's solo or the entire saxophone section standing

up and playing it in four part harmony. But he also wrote a chorus for the entire reed section that sounds like a Ben Webster improvisation orchestrated for reeds. And that's also terribly exciting and I think when people heard that for the first time, it just epitomized what an exciting, energetic, almost liberating kind of music that it was. And so it inspired dancers.

Ellington and Strayhorn.

Ellington met Strayhorn in the 30s and hired him when Strayhorn was I think twenty, I'm sorry, he was about seventeen, seventeen when he hired Strayhorn in 1939 and Strayhorn had been a classical, classically trained musician. And when he heard Ellington's music, he decided that was the music of the spheres and that was where he was going to put all of his, his future. So Ellington hired him originally to write lyrics and in a very short time he became his, his alter ego. He became the guy he could deputize to conduct the band. To sit into the piano if he was conducting and most important, to fill up the book not only with original arrangements and compositions because Strayhorn then proved to be maybe the second greatest composer in jazz in that area after Ellington. But also, to work so closely together on, on, on collaborative pieces, on suites and and longer works and even shorter works where you can't tell whose hand is, you know, leading who. There's a story that Gordon Parks used to tell; he wrote it once, in, I forget which magazine now, but he was in a hotel with Ellington and Strayhorn and they were trying to finish a suite, the deadline was the next day, and I can't remember who's saying what to whom, but I think Ellington is asleep on the couch, or Strayhorn's asleep on the couch and Ellington's sitting at the piano and he's writing for an hour or two and then he gets up and he walks over to Strayhorn and he wakes him up and he says, "Okay, it's your turn, I left off at G major." And Strayhorn just gets up there and starts writing in G. Now, you know, this is the kind of thing that legends are made of. But it's true that they collaborated on so many, dozens of pieces that really seem almost seamless and yet when you isolate the works that they did separately you can see that there's a very powerful personality that Strayhorn has in his own music which is very different from Ellington's. It's much more romantic. It's harmonically much more influenced by the classical composers at the turn of the century, especially DeBussey. They both loved octaves. Their melodies frequently used octaves, but in a very different kind of way.

We're going to run through a series of big bands - Tommy Dorsey.

Tommy Dorsey was a guy who came up through the traditional jazz players of the 1920s. But when you put together a band, he, he really, I think, more than anybody else was able to create an orchestra that had two syllables. It could be a very good jazz orchestra and a very good pop orchestra. It could

be a sweet band playing, very sentimental tunes. He was known as the sentimental gentleman of swing, but it could also be a very vigorous jazz band and to insure its vigor, he stole the Sy Oliver way from the Jimmie Lunceford band to write those kinds of swinging two-beat arrangements. And he always kept very good soloists in the band.

Chick Webb.

Chick Webb is a, a phenomenon. There's never been anyone like him. Never will be again. He was a hunchback dwarf. Suffered from a spinal disfigurement from his childhood. An absolutely brilliant drummer. He had to have the drums scaled down to his size. But you don't hear them like that when you listen to the records. It's the most exciting percussion on records and when you think that this is, we're going back to the thirties now. He influenced everybody. All the drummers loved him. Krupa famously got down on his knee and bowed before him after the Benny Goodman orchestra and the Chick Webb orchestra had a tournament. He was the man who discovered Ella Fitzgerald and put her in his orchestra. And a lot of people complained because he began to center the orchestra around her. And so it became a much more vocalist big band whereas before it was a much more rigorous exciting big band. But the other thing about Chick Webb that's very important is he had a brilliant arranger named Edgar Sampson. And a lot of the pieces that Sampson wrote for Chick Webb became the basis along with Fletcher Henderson's music of the Benny Goodman orchestra and therefore of the swing era. It's Edgar Sampson who wrote, for example, "Don't Be that Way." If you see the Benny Goodman story, Steve Allen, you can watch Steve Allen writing the piece. But no, Edgar Sampson wrote it.

Artie Shaw.

Artie Shaw is probably the finest clarinet player that jazz has ever produced technically. A true virtuoso. Didn't have the, the bluesiness and the, the rhythmic aggressiveness of Benny Goodman and some of the others but he had a gorgeous tone. He could play classical music as Goodman could. But in a more authentic way, I think. As well as jazz. He was an excellent improviser. But he was a character. And so he, he violated the rules from the very beginning. The first time he was asked to put together a big band, he brought in four violins. And then he usually had strings with the band. He hired classical composers to write for him like William Grant Still. He brought Billie Holiday into the band when that was a very difficult thing to do and it was very hard on her especially but also him. He, he put Roy Eldridge in the band as a, as a soloist at a time when Black musicians would come out on white bands as guests, but they didn't actually sit in the band. And then he walked away from it. He did not like, he called his autobiography The Trouble with Cinderella. He did not like celebrity. He did not like being a celebrity. He wanted the money. He wanted to be able to live well. And he wanted, but he

wanted to play his music. And he could not abide, and I think this is unique, he could not abide people coming over to him and asking him to play his hits. "I already did that. It's on the record. This is the new music." And it really drove him crazy.

Jimmie Lunceford.

Jimmy Lunceford had the greatest show band that ever was. Lunceford, himself, was a kind of poor Whitemanesque figure. He wasn't really an instrumentalist. And he was a very formidable-looking fellow and had a baton and was a pretty strict bandleader. But the guys in that band were beautiful. I mean, they had the best tailored uniforms in the business and they all looked great. And they, they had routines where they would throw the trumpets up in the air and catch them simultaneously and they had all kinds of hand things and you, you didn't just have a boy singer or a girl singer coming up, you'd have three or four guys in the band come up and do like a Mills Brothers kind of thing. They had novelty vocals. They had sentimental sweet vocals. It was an all-purpose orchestra. It had a tremendous rhythmic beat. It was the ultimate in some ways, the ultimate dance orchestra. One of their biggest hits was for dancers only because it was a, that style of a two-beat. But then he also had a lot of the very young adventurist writers. Gerald Wilson got his start in that band. Snooky Young, the greatest lead trumpet player of all time was, I think, nineteen years old.

So what is this swing music?

Swing music was an electrifying development in American popular culture. It was unleashed forces that, I think, people didn't know existed. There had been dance bands, sweet bands, sentimental bands. But when Benny Goodman reached those kids at the Palomar ballroom in California, it was like twenty years later with rock and roll. I mean, he, he, he was playing a swinging rough music that had been played in black communities for years. Ellington, you know, wrote the "It Don't Mean a Thing if it Ain't Got that Swing" three years earlier and Chick Webb's band was doing it and Fletcher Henderson's. Most people around the country did not hear it. And Goodman, when he started playing those Henderson and Edgar Sampson arrangements, the audience had been listening to them on the radio, they, they already had dance steps to go with it. I mean, they, they, they became very inventive. The whole thing about jitterbugging and it was just that it, it swept the country. It was, it unleashed some kind of pent up, you know, excitement and, and, and physicality that I think nobody was quite prepared for. And it, you know, it lasted for into the Second World War. And, also, this was the depression. It was not an easy period. And this was a music that was just pure pleasure. Pure physical pleasure.

More detail. What is the geography of the big band? What are the ingredients that go into it?

The big band, in a, in a way, recapitulates the idea of the call and response of a Baptist church. The early Fletcher Henderson arrangements, I mean, you have that almost literally, the saxophones and the brasses responding to each other. Basically you have four sections in a big band. You've got the saxophone section, the reed section, which often has clarinets. You have the trumpet section and the trombone section which became more important as the years went by. Originally there usually would just be one trombone. And the trombones and the trumpets together are the brasses. And then you have the rhythm section which was originally four pieces and then they dropped the guitar/banjo guy and it became three pieces, just drums, bass and piano. And these sections work like gears in a machinery. They interlock and what the orchestrator has to do is to find really exciting, inventive ways to blend these instruments, to work one section against another and to create a new music with instrumentation that is again, purely American. It's an American invention. It's what we have instead of the symphony.

Swing music during the war- what was it about - the boys overseas thinking about the music back home. What was it the spirit of the music brought out in people during the war?

I think the swing era and all of those great band leaders of that period reminded Americans at a time when they were willing to be reminded of this, of what was unique about the country, of what a democracy was. It's no accident that Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw were Jewish. Or that Count Basie and Duke Ellington and Jimmy Lunceford were Black. And that white audiences were responding to, the whole country was making a hero out of Benny Goodman. Ellington, who had been around for a long time, and was the idol of every jazz musician was now playing for, you know, tens of thousands of college kids who were not aware of him before then. So all of these different ethnic backgrounds and the, and the fact that a lot of the bands became integrated in this period. Benny Goodman traveling with Teddy Wilson, I mean, you know, this was a big thing at that moment. And it, it, it reminded everybody that there was something special about this country and when the war started, it became even more underscored because the war, in a sense, was about, you know, ethnic cleansing. And, and jazz became identified, it epitomized the American spirit. The spirit of freedom and swing and, you know, we are a young, vibrant nation. The way we dance represents us. The way we listen to music represents us. The whole, the whole fact that you could have a serious art music that was also a showmanship music, an entertainment music. This was purely and uniquely American. This was not going to a concert hall and sitting there in your dress suit listening to virtuoso musicians. This was going out there and being a part of the music through dance and even the way you listened. Your bodily movements, your, your finger snapping, your pat, the patting of your feet.

Does Glen Miller belong in our film?

Well, Glen Miller was a, he started out among jazz musicians. He was not a good jazz musician. He was a trombonist who could not really improvise and his solos are frequently conspicuous by their awkwardness in a lot of the early recordings. But he put together the band. He eventually created a sound, the Glen Miller sound which Ellington had, you know, kind of used just as one of a million sounds, but Glen Miller made it his, his trademark. And he had some very good records and he used a number of good jazz musicians. Bobby Hackett is the best. But a lot of his soloists were not first-rate jazz players. What they were, was, entertainers and showmen and they played a kind of music that was easy for people to follow. I think the importance of Glen Miller was that he popularized swing music for a lot of people who couldn't even get with, you know, Goodman and Ellington. He made it very romantic. He created the sound of that era that, that, that a lot of people will always associate, people who were alive at that period. And it's not a negligible contribution. Certainly, it's not a, creative in a traditional jazz sense the way Ellington and Basie are. But it's a, it's a potent brew. It's a, who was it, Noel Coward said something about the music being the cheapest, I can't remember the quote. Forget it.

Peewee Russell.

Peewee Russell, now do you want me to talk about Peewee Russell in terms of the Chicago people or by himself?

If you can, in terms of that it would be great.

The Austin High?

You don't have to. Just tell us why is he. . .

Peewee Russell is, Peewee Russell is a delightful musician. He's, he's one of those true generous figures. He doesn't sound like anybody who came before him or anybody since. He's a real eccentric. He played the clarinet in his own way. So when, he looked like his own way, he weighed about, you know, eleven pounds and Eddie Condon once said, "Peewee's gaining weight under each eye." He was a stylist in the truest sense. And he could take a tune and play it almost note for note the way it was written and it would just come out with extreme originality. Nobody else could, could play it quite like he did. So I think Peewee Russell is a very important symbol in jazz as well as being a very good, great musician because he, in a way, he's representative of the kind of musician who doesn't really necessarily push the music forward. He's not a great innovator, people aren't running around retooling their styles to imitate him. But, but these are people who are mavericks. And they come up in this music and they play a completely original, expressive, in a completely original, expressive way. And they are the, the coin, the coin you know, they

make this music really, they give it a human depth that you don't only get, get if you're only talking about the innovators and the giants and the titans.

The kind of music that the Austin High School gang, their style as Chicago jazz

Yeah. Well, you had two basically jazz communities in Chicago. You had the south side which is where the black musicians were and then you had the west side which where the white musicians and Austin High was. Four or five of the Austin High kids became known as the Austin High Gang, but the phrase really refers to all the young white players in Chicago who were going out to the south side and listening to King Oliver and, and Louis Armstrong and Jimmie Noone and Johnny Dodds and idolizing these musicians and trying to play it their own way. And as they began to develop, they did develop a style of their own. Their own idiosyncrasies, their own stylistic gambits. For one thing, the Austin High records, the so-called Austin High records are among the first that have, that really leap off from where Louis Armstrong began with the Hot Fives and Sevens and replaced the polyphonic music with a string of solos so that when Frank Teschemacher gets up with his clarinet he almost invariably plays a full thirty-two bar chorus. And then there's a full thirty-two bar trumpet chorus. And they had a lot of feeling and energy and they were wild men. You know, Eddie Condon said when we came to town the Republicans, you know, ran for cover. And eventually they became the Republicans. They became the most conservative backwater in the music. But when they were young, they were among the first to go out into this, explore this black music and try to claim it for themselves.

Armstrong - "Sleepytime Down South" - signature song

I don't know. He loved "Sleepytime Down South" and he did not like being asked to change the lyrics so that you didn't have, you know, phrases that were no longer politically correct. It's a beautiful tune. He stuck with it for a long time. What personal connection he had with it I don't, I don't think we know that. We can only surmise it by how beautifully he performed it.

So there is someone in the Austin High gang. . .

Frank Teschemacher is a fascinating short-lived career and he's always neglected, I don't know why. He made very few records, but he's quite interesting. He is a self-taught clarinetist with a rather cranky tone, I think. Goes in and out of pitch. He takes a lot of, a lot of, you know, risks in his solos. And they're quite, they're quite wonderful. They stand up as, as very modern. He unfortunately died when he was very young, when he was twenty-seven and in his last recordings, you begin to hear him playing in a more conventional way which is really not as exciting as the early ones. But some of the records he made with those Austin High people like "There'll be

Some Changes Made" and "Prince of Wales." They really stand up. He's another one of those unique stylists who's inventing the music as he went along.

Armstrong had his own song.

That period in show business history, the twenties, thirties, forties, really right up until the sixties until the rock thing changed it all. It was very important for an entertainer to have a theme song. Because only the really great ones had songs that instantly meant them. When you heard "Love in Bloom," you knew Jack Benny was on his way out. If you hear "Where the Blue of the Night," you knew it's Bing Crosby. If you heard, "Rhapsody in Blue," you knew it was Paul Whiteman. "Take the A Train," Duke Ellington. So Louis Armstrong had a sentimental southern tune, "Sleepytime Down South." He was very attached to it. It loved it, it was a beautiful melody. And you didn't give something like that up lightly. So when people would ask him not to do it, of course he would take umbrage. I think almost any performer would because your theme song is something you really worked for. You earned it. You don't give it up.

What was his early crisis? What was not working well?

It's funny. Armstrong and Crosby have sort of parallel careers in that period and at the same time, Crosby suddenly gets nodes on his throat which changes his voice and Armstrong has to have lip work done. I guess the reason in his case is because he was playing all of those high notes. He always said that in those days he was playing more for musicians than for the audience. And that it was partly Joe Glaser who said, you know, "You don't have to do that anymore. We don't have to prove anything." But when he would, he would get up there and he would start playing these high C's and it would just rip, one after another and finally, there is wear and tear. I mean, flesh is not that strong. And he changed his style and he changed his sound.

And there were problems?

Yeah. Over time. I think instead of over playing the trumpet, he started to play, he produced a much bigger, fatter sound. A much more luxurious sound and it wasn't as strenuous. It didn't require as much, you know, physical power.

Did he have poor technique?

That's to me a funny question. I can't, if Louis Armstrong had bad technique, you'd have to ask a trumpet player, not me. But on the other hand, when you consider that he's probably the greatest trumpet player in the last hundred years, I, how much are you going to criticize his technique? And,

and how can you separate his technique from the notes that he produced? If he had bad technique, then, you know, more of it should be going around.

Armstrong as a singer?

I think Louis Armstrong is the single most influential singer American music has ever produced. And I think he knew it. And I think he knew it before he began singing on stage and on records because nobody wanted him to sing. Fletcher Henderson would not let him sing. That was one of the reasons he left the band. He, he had an energy in his voice and he had a great, beautiful quality. I mean, people always hear the gravel. But he, there was a lovely tenor in the early years which became lowered down into a baritone range. And he had an ability which was quite spectacular of improvising the vocal almost as freely as if he were playing an instrument and more than that, he had a way of singing the melody phrase and then singing his own obiligato to it. So he might go something like, "All of me," and then he'd go, "Open." You know, and it might be kind of a guttural thing like, "Hmmg." Or something like that. But you could almost transpose that to a saxophone obligato, to another instrument. So when you hear his great vocals, it almost sounds like there are two or three people producing all of these phrases. And he had so much energy and he took so much liberty with the song. Even great songs, "Stardust," I mean he virtually recomposes "Stardust" and, and "Body and Soul" that I don't think any singer in that period could have listened to him and not been influenced. And of course they all were. Even the singers who'd been around long before him.

He was an artist and an entertainer. In our world we separate them. We think of them as different but how did he see that?

Well, Armstrong epitomizes this whole American idea of jazz being a demonic music that the public responds to on an immediate level. He did not distinguish between being an artist and being an entertainer. He was a great artist, but he was there to entertain you. He wasn't offering his art as, you know, homework. It wasn't, it wasn't for four credits. It was to have fun. So he could do it all, he could do both. He could be a, almost like a vaudevillian and do a kind of a low humor routine with Velma Middleton. He could joke with the musicians, with the audience. He could tell slightly off-color stories. And then he could pick up the trumpet and play something that would bring tears to your eyes. He did not distinguish. And this drove a lot of people nuts, and it still does. A lot of people wish that he would just, you know, never recorded pop tunes. He should have been on some kind of, you know, ivory tower, occasionally sending forth a recording or appearing in Carnegie Hall. That's not Louis Armstrong.

Minstrelsy.

Boy, minstrelsy is a complicated subject. I don't know if I can do it briefly. But minstrelsy was the most popular form of American entertainment for about eighty years in the United States beginning in the 1840s. It produced the first body of serious pop songs, Steven Foster, James Bland and others. Songs that we still, all of us, to this day know. It produced a national humor that we all know. Why did the chicken cross the road? Who is that woman I saw you with last night? All these, these lines all come from minstrelsy. The variety show that we've all grown up with which it seems to be dead right now begins in the minstrel oleo where you have the announcer and one performer comes up and he does a kind of a vocal specialty and somebody else does a banjo thing and somebody else dances. And this idea of, you begin with a kind of anonymity because everybody's wearing the same mask. This is true of black minstrel troupes and white minstrel troupes. They're all wearing the same dark, black, it's burnt cork. So you look exactly alike. The same lip makeup. The same wigs. I mean, you're looking at a stage of seventy twins. They all look exactly like, all cloned from the same person. And they do things in perfect unison playing bones or banjos or whatever they're doing, singing their minstrel theme, you know, waving their hands. And then with the oleo, they come up and all of a sudden, "Oh." You know, that's what he does. That's his specialty number and okay now you prove yourself. And there are also duos and trios and there are skits. And there are, there are you know, one act play type, playlets you might call them. So, a lot of this is, you know, assimilated in jazz. The idea that you begin with the ensemble and then you stand up and you assert who you are. And a lot of the humor still exists in jazz as it exists throughout the culture. But the main thing I think is that minstrelsy had, it had two basic emotional qualities that worked against each, that worked with each other and then were kind of diametrically opposed. One was extremely sentimental. You know, longing for the days on the, on the old plantation or all these very silly songs that are kind of embarrassing when you listen to them now. But brought people to, you know, they'd cry and I think it's very important incidentally to note that minstrelsy was very important to the abolitionist movement because a lot of people around the country who went to minstrel shows didn't know any Black people. They never saw any black people. And all they ever heard about them was that oh, they're kind of a lower race; they're slaves; they're, you know, a step down on the evolutionary pole. Now, these might be white people doing stereotypes but nevertheless they're, they're displaying, they're, they're presenting them as people. Silly, funny, witty, stupid, whatever it is, human. So minstrelsy had a very positive effect in a lot of places around the country. You know, a lot of states where they were kind of neutral, minstrelsy helped to swing the tide.

So, minstrelsy, so there was a sentimental...

Right. You have these warring elements. You have the sentimentality of the longing for the plantation, weepy tunes. And then you have these tremendous rhythmic tunes, these kind of swingers, you know, with the throbbing banjos. So that injects a new quality into the, to the music that,

you know, keeps going. It keeps developing, it certainly meshes with everything else that goes into the beginning of jazz. After the Civil War, minstrelsy begins to open up. For one thing you have black troops. At one point, we had actually more Black minstrel troops in the country than white troupes. But then also it opened up to women. And the stereotypes opened. It wasn't just making fun of African-Americans, it was making fun of Jews, of the Indians, of Irish, of Italians, of any group that the majority of middle Americans didn't know about. And it humanized them all, in a sense. It, it may be stereotyped them, but it made them, it gave people a picture of them. Made them not as frightening as they might have been otherwise, because this is a country which is, has a long history of xenophobia about any new group coming in. And so, minstrelsy... And the other thing about minstrelsy that's, that's fascinating is that because you had minstrel troops, very much codified all doing the same kinds of songs, same kinds of humor criss-crossing the whole country, not just into major cities, but to all kinds of towns, any place where there was a hole where they could perform. It was like early television. It was the first entertainment form that everybody in the United States knew. Everybody heard the same songs, everybody heard the same jokes. This had never happened before and it wouldn't really happen again until movies.

… an anecdote about the irony of Armstrong … and minstrelsy…?

I was thinking of Charles Black who was the lawyer who litigated Brown v. Board of Education and on Thurgood Marshall's team. He was a white attorney from Texas, grew up in a very racist neighborhood. He wrote about all this, and his, you know, in his own family, and his life changed when he heard Armstrong playing at a concert. Everything that he had ever been taught to believe flew out the window when he saw this man holding up the trumpet with his eyeballs rolled back, playing this absolutely voluptuously beautiful and powerful music. Armstrong understood who he was musically, so he could do the minstrel stereos, he could do the jokes. He didn't have to, he wasn't worried about them because you could see who he was. And so, he could do Burt Williams, he cold do Elder Edemore sermons. This was part of his culture. He wasn't embarrassed about it. I mean, white people may have been embarrassed about their own guilt feelings relating to it, but he wasn't. He liked great entertainers. He grew up, he loved Bojangles, he loved Burt Williams. He loved seeing comics and dancers, and he loved the tradition of the Black humor, the minstrels' humor.

Art Tatum. Give me a snapshot the way we did for Tommy Dorsey…?

OK. People tend to often look at Tatum's virtuosity and not hear beyond it. But if there was ever a musician who really used his virtuosity to say something unique, it was Art Tatum. Completely original stylist. His virtuosity is awesome. I mean, you can't get beyond it and it's part of the delight that we have in his music is to hear those rippling arpeggios with all these chords coming in. You don't know where they're going to stop. I mean, arpeggios

that go on for 8 measures and then stop exactly on the beat. You know, you every time I hear some of those records, I still can't believe that he's going to make it. He wasn't a conventional jazz musician. He wasn't a linear improviser like most of the jazz pianists before or since. He really created his own body of music. He was not at his best in groups, although he had a successful trio. He was best as a solo artist and he really did create a body of piano music that has no parallel.

I know there's a lot of funny stories about him coming into places and taking on people and you know…

There's a, a number of Tatum legends. One, one of the stories that you often hear about Tatum is that he played terrible pianos, and the after hours joints, he'd play on these old uprights that were just completely out of tune. And he would sit down - he was blind. He was legally blind and he would run his fingers in a double arpeggio across the keys and be able to tell which of the keys were really bad. And then he would ignore them, avoid them for the rest of the evening. So, there, there are tapes where he plays the same piano as other people and when the other people play it, the piano just sounds completely insufferable. But it doesn't sound that bad when Tatum is playing it. One of my favorite Tatum stories is one that Dick Welsh did, used to tell. About a jam session in a Harlem after hours place where all the great Harlem piano wizards were congregating and Donald Lampert, a stride pianist from New Jersey was coming into town. And he was, you know, doing the whole boasting routine... "I'm going to cut Tatum and.." you know? "When I'm finished, Tatum's going to have to get a new instrument..." and this and that and the other thing. So, he walks in and, and everybody's sitting there quietly and Lampert goes up there and he plays everything he knows how to play. I mean, one piece after another or adaptations of you know, the sextet from Lucia, and all kinds of trademark pieces, and one of the pianists there was named Marlow Morris. He was a good pianist, but he was a second level. I mean he wasn't... And when Lampert finished, and walked off, Tatum turned to Morris, Marlow Morris and he said, "Take him, Marlow." (Laughs)

… help us understand the impact of the way Parker revolutionized the music, what that meant to the other players who came after him... what is the effect of Parker, the 50s?

Louis Armstrong created the music and it evolved in all kinds of different ways, but still within the, the idiom that he created. Charlie Parker was the first musician to come along after Armstrong who re-oriented the music in its most basic structure. Every aspect - the harmonies became much more complicated. The melody lines, much more longer and, and, and sophisticated. The rhythm, you know instead of being a quarter note music, it became an eighth note, a sixteenth note music. Tempos became much slower and they became much faster. Everything was exaggerated. An exaggerated tonal personality was no longer as important, because you were

playing such incredibly fast and, and complicated figures that you didn't have the time to have the, the big fat sound or the all of the kinds of, you know, plunger-type groans and moans and, and affects. And he, he's the only musician beyond, besides Armstrong who forced everybody to change their style, no matter what instrument they played. I mean, if you played drums, you had to re-orient yourself to bop rhythms. If you played bass you had to play a different k..., you couldn't just get by with the old 2 beat, you know, walking bass lines. No matter what instrument you played, he jump-started the music in a whole new direction.

Because it's a response to bop.

Yeah, Parker caused a complete shift in the music and everybody had to... And, and an, an example of how profound it when you think of how few swing musicians were able to master his music in an authentic way and play bop rhythms and, and feel comfortable with them. Only a couple.

Dixieland revival was a reaction to what?

The Dixieland revival was, I suppose, inevitable on a number of fronts. It's a response to the modernization of jazz in part. Swing had become so commercial and, and a lot of these old, you know, jazz fans from the 20s looked down their nose at it because it was popular. God forbid. I mean they were upset when every body was neglecting it and now that people were listening to it, they were even more disenchanted. And, and then, bebop is coming... the, the revival kind of begins in 1939 when Bunk Johnson is discovered still alive and they buy him new teeth and, and he plays. And then, bebop further modernizes the music so that the revival really becomes entrenched in the middle 40s and you've got these wars going on between the, the so-called moldy figs, which is what the beboppers called the revivalists, and, and the, and the beboppers, which is itself kind of an insulting name even though the beboppers were finally willing to accept it. And it, it was inevitable in the sense that this music had a short history, you know 20 years and to discover that there were people who were still alive who were playing in the original... You, you couldn't, you couldn't neglect that. You wouldn't want to. So, in a sense, it was a very valuable thing to be able to find these musicians and to kind of remind people of the roots of the music. The problem it that a lot of the people who were caught up in the revival just simply weren't very good. And it's a little embarrassing when people start making a big deal about some rediscovered genius, and you listen to him and he can barely, you know get air out of a horn.

Some of them were good though. There were a few who were...

I think the most interesting of the musicians who came out of the revival was George Lewis. True primitive. Who played the old fashioned New Orleans style of clarinet. Big fat tone. You could hear the wood vibrating in the instrument. No virtuoso, heaven knows. But a very, a musician full of feeling,

a great character and, and a lot of expression that comes through. And I, I really enjoy his music quite a lot. A lot of the musicians were charmers.

American history comes to the jazz age - what do they have to do with each other?

Well, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band comes up from New Orleans, a bunch of Italian guys and they have a big success in Chicago and they spell the word jass. But a lot of vandals start crossing out the, the j's on their boards, on their posters so, creating a vulgarism obviously, so they change the spelling to zz. And they come to New York and they have a huge success in 1917 at Reisenwebbers which I believe is where Columbus Circle is today. And so jazz becomes part of the vocabulary suddenly. It's a new thing. Then in 1920, the best thing that could have happened for jazz, they passed the most idiotic law in the history of, of the United States, prohibition goes into effect. Well, from a handful of saloons around the country, you now have thousands and thousands of speakeasies, especially in all the major cities. I mean, at one point in New York City alone, Manhattan had five thousand speakeasies. And the, and the competition, you wanted to bring in people, you have music. So suddenly, there's work; there's tons of work for jazz musicians. Also, prohibition is loosening up morals. It's doing exactly the opposite of what it was supposed to do. Women, for example, did not drink in saloons. They sure drank in speakeasies. Shorter skirts, bobbed hair, the whole thing, a whole new liberation which was associated with this exciting new music. So the jazz age became a kind of umbrella term to this whole loosening up, this whole lubrication thanks to prohibition when everybody was drinking more than they should just to, just to defy an absolutely unenforceable law.

Fitzgerald.

Fitzgerald wrote the, the, the novel that best em, most emblematic of the jazz age. His first book, *Far Side of Paradise*, and *Great Gatsby* wasn't that big a hit but today, that's the book that we look back at and we see the jazz age in that. But I think most of all, Fitzgerald's short stories which were so very popular. They really more than anything captured this idea of young people, flappers, drinking and, and partying and, and so he became a kind representative of that period which may be one reason why his reputation kind of crashed when people got tired of the whole excess of the jazz age.

Stride piano and what is its connection to ragtime.

Stride piano which was a, I think, originally known just as Harlem style piano developed on the northeast corridor. Unlike ragtime which came, comes out of St. Louis and southern cities. Now, ragtime is a much more classical type of music in which everything is notated and in most of the pieces you have at

least three or four different strains. An A strain, B, C and so forth. And stride is much more jazz oriented. It simplifies it. Instead of, instead of a series of strains you basically have a theme and then you develop it improvising the way jazz musicians improvise and then you come back to the theme. Now, what stride refers to is just the lateral movement of the left hand usually between bass notes on say, the one and the three, and chords an octave or more higher on the two and the four. So you literally see the hand striding, boom boom boom bum, but in a very swinging way. Sometimes they're playing ten, sometimes they're doing broken stride, I mean, James P. Johnson, probably the great virtuoso master of the stride's left hand never just makes it that simple. He's always doing very interesting patterns. But this for, this creates a tremendous rhythmic feeling. And when you had rent parties, when you had small parties in apartments, you couldn't have a whole band there with a set of drums and stride piano was perfect for that because the rhythm was so powerful that people could dance just to the, to the vigorous music that came from the piano player.

Latin jazz.

Jelly Roll Morton's endlessly quoted remark was that, "You can't really have jazz unless you have the Latin tinge." And you have to remember that one of the things about New Orleans is that it was a real gumbo of different musical influences including, very prominently that Latin tinge. But it did kind of disappear from the music during much of the swing era. And then Dizzy Gillespie brought it back when he had Chano Pozo, the great conga player in his band and they began to write tunes, George Russell wrote the fabulous, "Cubana B, Cubana Bop" which was a double-sided extravagant performance, it's a 78 record. And "Montega," which is the, the kind of cutting point where Cuban music really is reinvigorated. Now, now Latins had been very popular in the swing era in the 1930s but in a very kind of watered down way. I mean, you had Xaviar Cougart and you had Desi Arnez. They were very popular, but that was Cuban music mostly with a kind of a sweetness to it. What, what Dizzy brought back in the, in the bebop period was the excitement, the fire. This wasn't, "Babaloo, Babaloo." This was, you know, very hard driving rhythm sections and blasting trumpets and that music really has stayed with us. It later became known as salsa. But the, the, the combination of jazz and Latin music has become pretty much a genre to itself. You, musicians frequently use Latin influences. "Bossa Nova" for example, Latin beats and Latin rhythms. But the salsa orchestra where you have basically a Cuban-type band playing jazz-like big band arrangements has been a constant in the music ever since.

What would you tell your daughter about jazz?

I was just thinking that when I hear a Lester Young playing "Blue Lester," you know, duh dat doo dee, bup buh boo bee, bup bup ba boo doo boo doo doo bee bu, I hear my whole childhood in Saturday congregations in the

synagogue. I feel the same way when I hear John Coltrane's "Ascension." And, and numerous other kinds of performances. And then I remember that one of the things that all folk musics have around the world is they, they have certain things in common, the pentatonic scale. Or blues notes as we call them here. I mean, this is true of all Semitic musics whether it's Jewish or Arabic. It's true of African musics. It's true of Indian music. And what jazz has done is it's taken all these very basic musical techniques and feelings and it's turned it into a sophisticated art which has tremendous emotional appeal and diversity. And it's our music. It's American music. Of course it's the creation primarily of African-Americans but that, the operative word here is Americans. They're Americans. I mean, just like, you know, movies are American. And, and when you hear it, it's just, you know, it's like when you're in a foreign country sometimes and you're feeling really alone, just having a Coke makes you feel like you're at home. Jazz does that for me, wherever I am even when I'm here. It, it, I think, let me say this, I think jazz represents the best part of America so that when I'm feeling most cynical about all of the terrible things about this country, you know, Kurt Vonnegut once said, "This country will be remembered for its humor and its jazz." I don't know if that's true or not but I think that that's, those are two of the qualities that remind us of how good we can be.

Do you think drugs affected the way the music was played?

I think whenever drugs become part of a cultural movement, of course they have an influence because they change the way you think, they change the way your brain is work. It's a physiological function. So that if you have a lot of musicians who are drinking, there's going to be some effect of that. You could hear that during prohibition. If, if it's marijuana or heroin or LSD, you're going to have, in the musical community it's going to be reflected in the music. I mean, didn't "Sergeant Pepper" represent something different in the Beatles and wasn't that at the moment when they were doing LSD? Heroin I think, I think, was important in the early period of bebop because I, I, I and I'm speculating to some degree. I think it slowed down people so that they could hear the faster melody lines. And I base that in part on a personal experience which is that the one time I ever had heroin which was sniffing the powder, not shooting anything, I remember we went down to the Half Note downtown in the village and I had been listening to bebop for a couple of years and I always found it mysterious. Intoxicating but mysterious. And I remember sitting there and for the first time, "Oh, that's what this is about. This is all melody." 'Cause it slowed it down for me. And suddenly these very fast saxophone lines I was now hearing melodic phrases. And when it wore off, I never had to do it again. That was the, you know, my mind was permanently able now to understand the music in a different way. I mean, it, it, all music listening in part one of the things you have to do is make your mind work at the same tempo as the musicians so that you're, you're hearing at the same speed. And bebop came along and whoosh, compared to the way the music had functioned before. And, so I think heroin maybe helped the time there.

Miles Davis as a human being.

Well, I didn't really know Miles Davis, but I can tell you that the first time I ever met him, I was sixteen years old, I was sitting in the Village Vanguard and they were coming off the set and he walked over to my table where there was an ashtray and he put the cigarette out in the ashtray and he said, "Keep this kid, someday it will be worth something." Miles came from an upper middle-class background and he studied at Juilliard for a while. He came out, he came to New York from St. Louis or Alton, Illinois allegedly just to go to Juilliard, but he really wanted to study with Parker and Gillespie which he did and by the time he was nineteen he was working with Charlie Parker, the hottest band in the new music. So, he, he comes from a, you know, a high, fairly high-flown background and he's a schooled musician. And he's a very intelligent man and I think he had very little patience for the silliness of people who were trying to categorize him and the blues and try to paint stereotypes around it. And so he became known as a kind of a testy guy and difficult and all this business about turning his back on the audience which all the musicians say he was just doing that so he could hear what the musicians were playing better. But, until people started writing about it, then he would purposely do it because it was good press. It gave him kind of a trademark.

George Ween & Co. started festivals. What purpose did they serve?

You have to remember that the festival was really started by the Laura Lot family. And they brought in George Ween who had a night club called Storyville to program it, bring in the musicians. But this was rich people providing entertainment for rich people. And eventually, the festival became bigger than anything they imagined and George Ween basically devoted his life to it and created this annual festival that stayed in Rhode Island for what, almost fifteen years and then came to New York City where it went on for. . .

What I want to know is in the fifties, what purpose - did it bring jazz to a new audience?

Well, I think that it, I, the only way that I can see that the, the, the jazz festivals really broadened the impact of jazz is that they created so much press. I think that's true today. There were countless magazine articles, eventually there were books, there were recordings, numberless recordings, you know, so and so, live at the Newport Jazz Festival. And because anything that brings the entire press together is good for the music. It creates a lot of attention about it. And, and also, the, the summer became the, the official jazz season which it still is to this day.

Wynton Marsalis.

Wynton came along at a time when jazz, and this is in the period after Ellington's death and there's a lot of talk about jazz repertory and there's a lot of different kinds of movements and there's as we said a balkanization of the music. And Wynton comes along and one thing that he had is personal style. And because he was hugely successful instantly, you know, winning Grammy Awards and all these kinds of things both as a jazz musician and as a classical musician. And because he got so much attention, the very fact that he wore a suits and was groomed in the way he was and presented his band in the way he was very influential. And a lot of young musicians coming up there, many of whom Wynton helped to bring to the fore, began to imitate his style and it, or, or, and it did set up a whole new kind of way of approaching the music. It became a kind of young, conservative, I don't mean just in a political sense, but a kind of socially conservative as opposed to the, you know, the wild-eyed avant garde that had dominated in the sixties and, and much of the seventies. It became a music that was a little bit afraid of taking too much risk, I think and I think that's one of the reasons that Wynton really didn't develop as a trumpet player the way everybody thought he was going to in the early period. But it certainly opened up the audience. I mean, one of the interesting things about the jazz history is that you're constantly alternating periods of tremendous innovation with periods where you're kind of working over those innovations. Now, when it's really innovative as it was in the twenties or the forties with Parker. It usually loses the audience. It's a very tiny audience. Everybody says, "Well, when I listen to jazz it was Benny Goodman, I don't want to hear this Charlie Parker." But then the next generation, Charlie Parker becomes assimilated into the music and all the pop jazz players like Ahmad Jamal or George Shearing are playing. You know, Parker's music, then it has a huge audience. So the thirties which was a kind of watering down of the twenties. Jazz is a popular music. The fifties, and Wynton did that again. The music becomes more cons, as it becomes more conservative, he brings back all of the people who had been alienated by the avant garde.

It's not a bad thing, but it usually doesn't produce the kind of music that twenty years later everybody is talking about. Like Louis Armstrong's music and Charlie Parker's music. Ornette Coleman's.

John Hammond. So there's a story you want to tell about John Hammond?

John was associated with Columbia records for most of his life and he was a company man and very loyal to the company and he knew how to get things done. When, when John found somebody that he was really enthusiastic about, and I, I learned this first-hand. He used to occasionally call me in the morning and, and ask me to come up to Black Rock where the famous building where Columbia Records was. And he called me up one morning and

he said, "What are you doing?" And I said, "Not much. Trying to make a living." And he said, "Can you come up here? There's something you've got to hear." So I go up to the office and he puts on this record. It was a, a Polish singer named Urszula Dudziak and it's all, "OOO oooo oooo ah." And I'm listening to it for a about a good five or ten minutes and he takes the needle off and he leans forward and he says, "Well, what do you think?" And I said, "Well, it's very interesting." And he turns, picks up the phone, calls Goddard Lieberson, the president of Columbia Records and he says, "Goddard, it's John. I have Gary Giddins in the office here and he thinks it's the most marvelous thing he's ever heard." They signed her.

Frank Sinatra. Is he important as an innovator or a popularlizer?

Oh, a popularizer? No, that's not fair to Frank. Frank is a real innovator. Sinatra's the first singer to come along in the popular sphere after Bing Crosby who had something new. For ten years, Crosby was completely dominant. Everybody who came along was trying to sing like Bing. And Sinatra came along and Crosby was the, he was one of the first, he made the famous line, "Voice like Sinatra's comes along once in a lifetime. Why did it have to be my lifetime?" Sinatra brought a greater depth to lyrics. He had his own way of, of rhythm, of singing rhythmically. It wasn't the traditional jazz swing. Which is why a lot of jazz musicians, or jazz critics would put him down. But he had his own way of doing it. And you notice that the jazz musicians never put him down because he, he just had everything you want from a great jazz musician. He was expressive. He had tremendous feeling. He was an original. He had a beautiful instrument. He had excellent time. He's a, it's almost impossible to imagine the development of American popular singing without Sinatra.

John Hammond's review of Ellington's music. What is the role of a jazz critic? What is a jazz critic supposed to bring to the public?

I think the critic is a liaison between the art and the audience. You don't write for art, for the artist. I don't write for the musicians. I know they're reading. And sometimes I might be self-conscious about that. But I don't, I, I'm writing for an audience and the audience is pretty much like me. What I want to know. I, I think the critic is there to evaluate the success of a performance, also to explain what's going on. I think the critic has to know, has to have an extraordinary historical background, not only of the music's history, but of the way the music relates to other cultural phenomena in the same period. And in a sense, you know, the average person works for a living all day and then comes home and may put on a record and maybe once in a while will go to a night club. The jazz critic spends those working hours listening to music all day long. Going to night clubs, you know, every night. And so you have a certain level of sophistication that very few of your readers are ever gonna come up to. But you use what you know for the purpose of evaluating. For trying to distinguish what's really original and

what isn’t. What’s really fine and what isn’t. To, to restore reputations that are neglected and forgotten. To alert your readers to young musicians they ought to know about. To warn them away from what you think is camp or kitsch. Or just plain bad. But you’re always responding to what you think the desire of the readership is.

The End