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What was it about the way [Ella Fitzgerald] sang and the material she sung?

What isn't great about Ella Fitzgerald? I've, they're the things that we hear all through the fifties into the sixties, you know, this just clear, lovely voice, this phrasing that never goes off, it's perfect pitch, and this unerring sense of what, what the right rhythm for a song is. But, I think, when she hit in the 30's, it was this combination of what audiences would have thought they could only hear in two separate, segregated fronts, in, say, musical theater or in white radio and band singers. You were getting these, you know, little jazz girl, light, airy phrasings. Then there were the blues records where you were getting, you know, the more Southern, earthier. Ella actually was fusing those two. The phrasing, you know, had a kind of ease and lightness that was definitely coming from black music. Blues into jazz into swing. And yet, the voice had this ebullient girlishness that, you know, didn't read as Southern or black, which of course, you know, made her very marketable. And that, I think, was an absolutely extraordinary combination. She's a very witty singer as well. And swing music is, is, it's witty music; it's clever, her sense of phrasing is, it's witty. You know, it genuinely is, "A-Tisket A-Tasket" is an enchanting little song. You know, here is this naughty, you know, it's, it's Ella being Lolita who, here is this naughty little girl, you know, singing a nursery rhyme and turning in, you know, to a cute little sexpot along the way. It's just, it's wonderful. She didn't sing only lousy songs. There are a lot of little junky ones but she sang "My Last Affair." Then she sang "My Melancholy Baby." You know, they were all so nice, better pop songs of the day.

Mary Lou Williams and discussion on women in jazz. Democratic music but no room for women.

No form of music, when it comes to women, has been fully democratic – folk music, jazz, classical – it hasn't. And I think, you know, let's move up through the centuries. I think that once you get past folk music, the criticism that keeps coming up is women don't have the guts. You know, they can't seize, seize the emotional moment and master the form. And if they don't, or haven't, that's in the large part for two reasons. One, guts in, guts are partly a social entitlement, social and, you know, the culture encourages men to have guts, you know. And to claim them even if they're a little lacking. Women have not as, as anything other than singers had that kind of cultural blessing and encouragement bestowed on them and believe me, it matters. Any artist, you know, talking about encouragement versus, "You can't do this. Your people can't do this." We'll talk about that. Women have taking every risk that singing could possibly allow them. So it really comes down to what was permitted in terms of composing and also how many women were given the instrument in the family beyond the piano. Women have not been given access to the kind of instrumental training that men have. And if they were playing an instrument, you know, you're going to, you're parents are then going to allow you to play after hours in a little night-club? There were so many social and psychological forces operating against this.

Mary Lou Williams.

Yes.

What do you think of Mary Lou Williams?

Mary Lou Williams was a fine pianist and composer-arranger and she always cites hearing and seeing Lovey Austin, this tough, old blues-pianist and songwriter, you know, sitting over piano with, I think, a cigarette hanging out of the side her mouth, pounding out a tune that clearly, you know, gave her something to hold on to, some, you know, gutsy, imaginative, oh forgive the word, model. So let's say representation. And Lovey also. That is interesting because in blues, you will, you were more likely to find that kind of a woman who would be, many women employed women. Ethel Waters had some women musicians working with her. By no means always. Some women were, more women were writing some of their own songs. And they were directing, often, that little ensemble. So it's not at all surprising and I suppose not surprising in that case that Mary Lou would fit into a more blues-oriented band.

Probably had some pretty tough living there out on the road with a male band.

I'm sure...

I can't imagine how she ...

I'm sure she did. She doesn't seem to talk that much about the details and, you know, the religion seems to have, at least later in life, taken care of . . . Oh dear, I don't have anything else to say about her, yeah.

We wanted to talk a little about her. Ok.

I think she's very good; I don't think she's great.

General statement about Louis Armstrong

Yes. Well, Louis Armstrong is, is going to become, he's born just as the century is starting. He bursts out as America hits the jazz age, becomes, you know, a kind of imperial power in the best and the worst sense. In my mind, he really is one of the, one of the great master of ceremonies of popular American culture at the moment that it's also becoming a transcendent form of high culture, popular and high are really joining forces in ways that certainly, you haven't really seen in yore. Now is that happening in movies? Yes. Of course it is. It's happening in other places, but Armstrong is doing it in jazz. He's bursting forth with his voice and with this instrument. And the improbability of having that kind of rough, edgy, coming out of blues voice. Everything we don't think of as traditional beauty and this horn with its rhapsodic high notes. You know, that kept getting classical musicians, you know, to compare it to Baroque and castratto singers, you know, etc., etc. It's, how could one human being have all of those things and be setting, phrasing, timing, abandon with control in motion both as a singer and as an instrumentalist? It's, it's versatility and it's utter generosity. It's not modernism as that kind of prohibitive, "I'm doing something that none of you can understand." It's generosity. And it's fearlessness that isn't boasting about being fearless.

The jazz age. What are the cultural forces.

No.

Why did music sound the way that it does, given what's going on in the world and why people like it.

Well, you've got, the war has just ended and World War I just ruptures Victorian culture in every way. Victoriana. War changes rhythms, genuinely, the rhythms of a culture. It really does. It severs, bonds, you know, and I think, I think, just the sheer weight of, you know, the guns and the artillery and the armory and the, and the mass scales of killing. Sentence structures were changing after the war. Lines of music had to, too. Certain kinds of dissonances were entering every art form. Painting, music, literature. The economy, huge boom. Again, America is becoming this vast world power and it's interesting. When a country becomes very, very powerful and money starts spreading around, it entitles, in a strange way, the younger generation, I think, especially following a war to become very angry at, at

what's gone before. You know, it's as if the freedom gives them the freedom to want to break away and to say this is loathsome, what you've done. But, but the money and the prosperity do help. In America, you have, all right, so you have soldiers coming home. In America you have a mass migration of blacks from the South to the North. In terms of music, that means, music that has been making its way up in a slower way and dances are en masse coming. And so are audiences for this music if so many blacks are moving, are moving North.

Jazz is a very sexy music. Do women really like the saxophone?

Well, women like the saxophone when it's well played. And, and we even like soprano saxophones; they don't just have to be alto or tenor. It's a beautiful instrument. Jazz musicians, you know, working with that line and that sound, it's, it's so sexy and sensual. But, you know, men feel all of that, too. Men love the saxophone, too. And they, yeah.

We're playing "The Man I Love" at that time. "Surrey With A Fringe On Top."

Oh, oh that's nice. Yeah. Yeah.

We're going to hear "Sketches of Spain" coming up.

Oh God, yeah. Yeah.

So Miles Davis with the sound he plays, gutsy.

Miles Davis in that period that we here are all still so wrapped up in. You know, "Miles Ahead," and "Sketches of Spain" and all of that. I do remember first hearing it, you had a sense of just pure beauty, purity and beauty. I would almost say it's odd. There's something detached, if clinical were not a cruel word, I would use it, but you feel, you feel the order along with a certain... Voluptuousness is hinted at. But it's not fully voluptuous, you know, Charlie or Parker or Tadd Dameron are much more so. It's this kind of suspended beauty that's, that's quite uncanny. This is an odd comparison, very odd. But if you see certain Balanchine ballets, you get the same sense of sensuality, romanticism in some perfect state. They're human, but we know, you know, they're beyond the way we actually experience those things.

Is Miles sexy?

That's a different kind of sexiness, isn't it? I wouldn't say he makes me want to open up the bedroom door. But he makes one think of, and that's why I thought of Bal..., of Balanchine. Transcendent. Sexuality as a transcendent state.

Duke Ellington's childhood. Didn't have to obey rules. Parents said he could do anything. ...put him in a certain category.

Yeah.

Do you think that the shapes his outlook on life?

Oh, Ellington's upbringing shaped the, the manners, the distance, the elegance, the assumption of privilege that his talent and accomplishments gave him. The black bourgeoisie is raised that way. In that, and in that generation it was much less likely to have been oh, corrupted so immediately by pure snobbery. It really had a great deal to do with racial prejudice, these manners you were taught. You would be taught, you, your, your manners, your sense of what you are capable of will carry you past these slights and insults. Always carry yourself as if you're above them because, in fact, you are.

...And don't let them degrade you. For Duke Ellington it worked wonderfully. Absolutely. Because he also made a grand performance out of all of that. He didn't turn into a kind of retro, you know, anxious, imperious snob. He turned into a gentleman dandy who was also a brilliant artist.

He's not going to let you in.

No. No. He, Duke Ellington is, is remote. There is always that remoteness. I think it's even there in the music. It's very, very beautiful and opulent, you know, and yet, there is a certain, certain distance, I would say. I would say, yes. He was what? You know, you better stop for a minute 'cause I know I have to get...

Duke was a race man. Creating Negro feelings. Presenting African-American life in a certain kind of way.

In certain kinds of ways.

Thank you. Thank you.

Yeah.

Music can say things that words can't say. What was he saying at that period?

When people talk about Duke Ellington as, you know, the man, a man who was constantly, you know, propagating the ideals of the race. Ellington the race man, the race-leader. What he was doing, was opening up every kind of tonal, harmonic, rhythmic possibility and saying all of these things are, are in our culture. All of these things are within, you know, our means. Some of them are African; some of them are European. Here are all the possible

mixtures. Oh, here's a, you know, here's some Eastern stuff thrown in. Well, why don't I set, you know, a Tchaikovsky to music. Now here's a pure swing ballad, these, you know, these interesting textures he's always giving you to a blues, things you didn't expect. The point is, there's no limit. You know, that race, race is a set of possibilities and inventions. It's not a set of rules and orders, and only struggles.

One more Duke question. His sound.

I think it's basically in the, I think it's in, a lot in the harmonies. You know, it's these, it's these, these textures, you know, it's which are kind of, a little bit exotic and very rich. And then these kind of slightly, often slightly meandering melodies. And, and yet he's also swinging. It's a very strange combination, you know, a very, there's always something meditative, you know, and yet it is, it is moving forward. It isn't that pure propulsion like Basie has, but it is swing.

Bessie Smith – she expressed something we couldn't put into words.

Yes.

Mahalia Jackson, she says, "We've just see Blackwater..."

Blackwater, Blackwater Blues, yeah.

Mahalia Jackson said, "She expressed something we couldn't put into words."

Bessie Smith is, genuinely is, I think the greatest of the women blues singers. And she's just one of the greatest blues singers, period. It's, first of all that, that voice which, of course, Mahalia Jackson would connect to, having a similar voice, it's just big and rich. It's like some weighted, perfectly weighted object. And then you put that voice together with the blues form, you know, which is condensed and her own sense of economy. She never dripped or dragged out lines emotionally or musically. And every song she sings, you've got the bowl and you can pour any mixture of emotions into it and they're never going to tip over or weigh the bowl over on one side. It's just this perfectly contained set of feelings and reflections. She can be also, you know, a little, she's c..., she's self-contained oddly enough, but deeply emotional.

What kind of emotions?

Rueful grief. The kind of humor that says, "Oh, good God. Is this what life is giving me? Is this all I've got? Well, guess I'm going to pack my clothes and head down." It's, it's, the thing about the blues that's interesting is, it is always about more than one feeling.

How incredibly popular she was.

Bessie Smith.

What makes her go over so big?

Of Bessie. That, well the blues genuinely were and are cathartic but especially for audiences massing to these black theaters. Many of them from the South but not all, in the twenties, when this music is first, you know, being heard on radios and in big concerts, you know, it partly must have felt to audiences like, "Oh, my God," you know, subconscious memories, things I haven't heard since my childhood, you know. Or old bits and pieces, you know, coming back, old things from back home or that I heard my grandmother singing. And yet, the blues in certain ways, as Bessie sang them and as some of the other women did, they had a very modern almost living newspaper quality, you know. She would sing about, she was also, could be very funny and that was part of her stage-craft. But she would sing to women about the kinds of men that they'd better watch out for, you know, pinchbacks, take them away; if a man is doing this, you know, you can't trust him; if he, asks, you know, if he asked to borrow money, no. Forget it. You know, they're very, they were very contemporary, too. And I think particularly for women. Sexual, sexual license, if you will. Just meaning the license to be open about lust and heartbreak and, yeah, self-abnegation. There's plenty of masochism in the blues. And there's plenty of sadism. And guess what? That's life as we know it. And, again, that, that, that catharsis that comes from mixed and contradictory feelings, you know, being brought together, you know, in this, in this, in this whole. And she had a wonderful, wonderful way of doing that.

Ethel Waters.

Ethel Waters in "Am I Blue," it's much more fun to think about what she's doing as a singer than to see it on the screen because what she's doing, what she has to work with in this clip is what, you know, most black artists who were appearing in movies, in a visual medium had to work with which is, you know, a series of costumes, looks that were insisting on their being at best, servants, at worst, utter fools. So, you know, there she was, dressed in this kind of, and umm, kind of mammy. Also this, you know, the obsession with perpetuating images of the old South, you know, were really quite amazing. Then you listen to her doing the song and there're two choruses. The first is more straightforward, but Ethyl Waters is a great collagist and also a parodist. And she is taking, as a singer from every single thing she is hearing. She can, she can imitate art songs. She does great imitations on records of Bessie and Clara Smith. In the second chorus of "Am I Blue," she just goes all out. She gives you blues growls, she gives you trills, she gives you high sopranos, head tones, you know, she gives moans and she is just doing away with any confines that the costume and the ostensible plot or your assumptions about what a pop song based loosely on a blues mode

should be. She's just bursting all of those and creating some new song structure and singing structure instead of expectations.

Love that woman.

Bix Beiderbecke. Imagine this white kid in Iowa, parents love Mozart and Beethoven, and here he hears jazz and has to go that way.

And he was first, Bis, Bix Biderberk was, B..., Bix Beiderbecke was first hearing jazz on the riverboats. Is that right?

He heard records first.

He heard records first.

Heard his first jazz band in 1917.

Oh, that's what he first heard, okay.

... It would've been some release. You know, emotions are always set going to music by rhythm, melody, etc. But original Dixieland Jazz Band wasn't great. They were doing "Darktown Strutters Ball." That was their first record. So what would he have heard? Some kind of explosion, I think of rhythm and sound possibilities that must have matched things inside him that he knew had nothing to do with what his parents wanted for him. They laid out certain midwestern manners, conventions, expectations, not just musical. But all of that, Davenport, Iowa, the Midwest, which I'm from, you know, the, the cultural rhythms are very four-square and so are the emotional rhythms his parents would have imposed on him. And to hear this music would have broken all of that. And that was clearly what he needed to become something, to become himself.

Benny Goodman was a virtuoso.

No.

What's he seeing or hearing in jazz?

Benny Goodman would be hearing musically possibilities to improvise his way into a whole different kind of world. Imaginatively, eventually that would become, you know, socially as well. But I think, all right, a poor ghetto kid hears a kind of music that depends on invention and constantly, you know, bettering what you can do and testing yourself against your colleagues, your friends, your mates. And that's, boy, that's a clarion call, isn't it? That's much more interesting than kind of proving what you're parents can prove which is you can fit in with what's already been done.

Relate it to Armstrong and Oliver.

They also, you do hear Ethel Waters and Bessie Smith, don't they?

We've haven't gotten to Ethel Waters and Bessie Smith yet. You can mention them but we won't use it.

That's why women don't feel entitled to be.

These white kids in Chicago having to go up against the world they're coming from. The prejudices having to confront.

Yes. Well, you know, despite the jazz age, we've... Despite, you know, lots of liberation of, we've still got, you know, mass lynchings, you've got a Ku Klux Klan, you've got a lot of, you know, de facto and de jury segregation. Chicago was a city that, like New York, had a huge black migration. So, you know, all of that is unsettling the city in certain ways and yet it's attracting. For one thing, Chicago's attracting as many good jazz musicians as, as New York. So here are these kids and here is this new music that is not legitimate in any way. Well maybe when they first went to hear it, it was just part of something, you know, the sort of excitement rebellion, you know. Then they hear it and they realize, "Oh, you know. Here are these alien people." You can't grow up in America without just at that point having had your head stuffed with all kinds of notions of, you know, Negro, read, loud, maybe amusing, oversexed, maybe stupid, etc., etc. There they are with some of those ideas, little notions knocking around and they are hearing music that not only, what?, seems exciting to them but is deeply, emotionally satisfying. It seems complicated. It seems demanding. It isn't like sitting in the audience, I think, at a Minstrel show and saying, "Oh, my God. Look at those antics." They wanted to be musicians. And then, to feel that you wanted to model

Yes, as white kids growing up in America, their heads are filled with images of everything from buffoons to monsters, you know, who deserve to be lynched. Too, I would imagine a lot of stuff about these people invading "our Chicago." You know, taking jobs, you know, ruining the neighborhoods, loose morals. So, they go and hear what is clearly, in their minds and heads and hearts, great music. And it must have been an extraordinary experience because they not only want what an Armstrong, a King Oliver, a Bessie Smith, an Ethel Waters have to offer, they want to be part of it. They don't just want to take, extract this and turn it into something else or move over to some other higher form as they see it. They want to join this world. They want to be jazz musicians. They want to become part of something that's new and great. They have to sense that and that these black people are in command of, have to teach that.

World War II period. Irony of black Americans fighting for freedom overseas and not having it at home.

Yeah, well, you've already had this, you'd already had the, the problems of World War I, you know, so blacks were learning a second time that they were going to be done in. You know, this really is the second time around for a whole lot of people. Are you going to be allowed to fight? Well, you're going to be put in segregated camps, units. Perhaps if you're riding on a train, with other Army people and you may be the only black on the train, there'll even be a curtain put between you and some of the other whites there. It really is, I suppose, the beginning of the modern Civil Rights movement. Black radio becomes more militant. The newspapers become more so. You know, the fights more, you know, the fights are marshalling against legal segregation on every front.

Connect this to jazz musicians.

Yeah, yeah. I think bebop is loads of things, but it is also a kind of musical assertiveness and increasingly complex response, you know, to all kinds of assaults, if you will. Assaults of the music industry. All sorts of conventions, the conventions of what had become a fairly pallid kind of swing on many fronts. Again that sense of, translated into art of not taking a kind, a certain placidities and, and, and pieties that older generations might have. It, when you hear some of those early bebop numbers they recorded in 1945, they're the opening riffs sound, oddly, kind of like, kind of almost army calls. I'm thinking of da da da da dum, "Now is the Time." Alright, take the rhythm out of that and just doo doo doo doo doo, you know, it's like an army bugle call in a sense. "Billie's Bounce" the same. Doo doo doo doo doo do de duh. You know, it's, wake up. Wake up people. And then, you know, we go off into this, this grand conversation, you know, it's like a group of, musical version of a small group of writers or artists sitting around saying, you know, "And this is how," you know, "We're going to break apart," you know, "The landscape." Or the whatever, the language. "This is how we're going to do it differently." All those voices and lines, it's great.

When you hear it even now, I, I sometimes will put on early bebop right after, you know, a piece of very good big band jazz just for the fun. The shock. You know, recapitulating the shock of the new. And you go, "Oh. My God. Was it possible to say those things out loud?" You know, it's really, it has that feeling. It's amazing.

Back to 1910. Vogue for dancing. Ragtime.

"Ballin' The Jack," yeah.

Yes. Calling these things the fox-trot, the one-step, you take these, the uglier, more suggestive animal names away.

Well, the Castles were lovely dancers. Basically very much toned down and essentially eliminated, eliminated a very active torso-pelvis area, you know. They kept more of the ballroom uprightness and politeness. They smoothed

out, you know, some of the more elaborate, let's say contorted feet. And they were physically, you know, they, they, she, they dressed like an elegant, modern, but elegant ballroom pair. He was English, you know, he wore tails. She wore beautiful gowns that also became terribly fashionable. Magazines took her up, you know, the Irene Castle look was everywhere. So they became style icons, the way... No, I'm not supposed to go forward; I won't mention Fred Astaire. They, they became middle class and even upper middle class style icons. They danced, you know at the top of very nice hotels. You know, they were terribly chic. And they'd been popular in Europe. That helped a lot too.

James Reese Europe.

Yes. They absolutely did.

What did he add to the mix?

He... What, Jame, James Reese Europe made sure that they, they weren't simply elegant, slightly speedier ballroom dancers. It's the syncopation, you know, it's, it's the added little motions. Yeah, basically it's, it's the cleverness of the rhythms. And that really is coming from his, his peculiar version of ragtime with this infusion of WC Handy's Memphis Blues. You know, clearly they were very rhythmically adept. They were rhythmically adept.

What did that result in? What happened?

What do you mean?

His rhythms and their dancing. What was the new kind of dancing?

It, it brought social dancing which had been associated mostly with again this kind of genteel ballroom dancing and something that would later be called jazz dancing. Let's call it black dance, you know, coming again out of the cake walk, and out of all these mostly Southern, you know, little, little hall room, and ballroom, and dive and nightclub dances like the grisly bear, the turkey trot, it brought those dances in to some kind of working relationship. At, which means it set things moving for every kind of popular dance that was going to come. Which we were going to see at the Savoy, you know, the Lindy Hop, all of that.

First jazz records were Dixieland. Ushered in this phenomenon.

Did it? I mean you know this better than I. I mean I know it did, but...

Why did it strike a chord with so many people?

Well, when the original Dixieland Jazz Band records, their records are released in 1917. Alright. This is three years after the Castles have had their

terribly successful all-city tour and that kind of dancing has been launched. So already, America, you know, is dancing and listening to a music that is clearly moving past, you know, the old, the old ways and the old habits and the old pieties. 1917, you get, you know, you are getting on records, you're not getting the best jazz or the first jazz, but you're getting the sound of the first thing to move beyond ragtime. It's poised right between the ragtime craze, interestingly enough, you know, in its last, last incarnation and 1920, '21 is going to see the recording of the first blues record. So, you know, you're also getting a nation able to hear this. And try out their dance steps and try new dance steps. And the jazz age is being launched in other ways, you know. Of course, everybody is tired of the old social habits. A new age demands a new music. WC Handy had a wonderful line. He was actually talking and this was earlier. This was earlier in the century but all of these things had been building up. He was actually talking about music that was played in whorehouses. The phrase is, "The shuttered houses of the new world demanded a new music." Well, you know, the streets, the homes, you know, the middle class homes, the working class homes of the new world. Of America entering, utter modernity demanded a new music. And that was the speed, the wit, the cleverness and also the passion of jazz.

What would it be like to live in Fargo and here comes Ellington.

I think it, the big bands criss-crossing, you know, and coming in and setting up this, you know, magic for a night or two. It, they must have replaced, they must have taken over the role that traveling theater companies had taken, had played in earlier generations, you now, even showboats, even the early minstrel bands, you know, with the circus coming to town. This, this sudden, you know, arrival of sound and, and rhythm and you're able for a night, you know, to just get up and, and get out of yourself. And, and become someone else, I think as much as you would sitting in the audience at an old melodrama, you know, or some old comedy. But you're participating so that, that, that ability to watch and have the theatrical experience but also as a dancer be the participant. It just must have been absolutely thrilling.

Swing/Commercial music. Is there a lot of music called swing that is not really jazz?

Well, sure. But, but this is the nature of what we now call pop music. You know, every form has its kind of pure, pure, clear, and sometimes we're a little self-righteous about that, incarnation, and then it has its delusions and, and derivations and that's what you call pop-swing, or ersatz-swing, or bogus swing.

How would you characterize that sort of music?

Very predictable riffs, kind of the rhythms are becoming as four square. Well not as drab, as predictable as, you know, as non-swing rhythms would be.

You know just what's coming. The singer has a very predictable voice, she's kind of a, if it's a man, you know, it's he's a kind of smooth crooner, if it's a woman she's a songbird. Doesn't matter, you know who's who. Very, very all-purpose. Very all-purpose.

Harlem in the 1920's.

Harlem isn't a neighborhood in the '20's, Harlem is a city within a city. And it has everything there. It has old-time, you know Victorian, Victorians running churches and newspapers, it has its own hospitals, it has, if you come to Harlem and you're a black person, you'll see a black policeman for the first time in your life, If you're coming, say, from the South. Or even from Iowa where a few blacks were in fact coming from. So, you know, it's, it's an entire, entire Metropolitan structure. The Harlem Renaissance as we think of it is, is again the, the jazz age, the 20's rebellion of the young intellectuals against their Victorian elders. But it's a double rebellion because they're rebelling against black Victorians and the strictures placed on everything from self-expression to race expression. But they're also rebelling against obviously white strictures on them which, they're, of course they're aware of the legal and political strictures but it's still, it has a great deal again to do with white definitions, artistically of what a Negro is, should be, can produce as an artist. So it's, it's this twofold, twofold young rebellion taking place within this self-contained city. But they're also moving out, you know, into larger New York, the Harlem Renaissance.

Well, the writers are listening to the music but it's not really as close an alliance as we might like it to be in retrospect. You know, it really isn't. Some of them, music appears in the novels, etc. I would say that a Duke Ellington, a Fletcher Henderson, they definitely belong to a Harlem renaissance but also Fletcher Henderson belongs to a Chicago renaissance. They, they are new Negroes in that sense. You know, they are, they are part of this expansion, creation of new art forms. But they're not, they don't work with the, the painters and the writers so, so intensely.

Paul Whiteman - Fletcher ...

Yes, well Whiteman is taking jazz influenced, inflected bands, band arrangements, really his, his music is coming as much out of that kind of marching/symphonic band tradition, you know, your su su, your prior band with some jazz inflections. It's coming as much out of that as it is out of anything to do with jazz. And that's, that's fine. He, but he takes this into a concert hall and George Gershwin's there, you know, with "Rhapsody in Blue," so you're getting there a kind of pop-symphonic tradition influenced, inflected by jazz and that's, you know, what thrills everybody. He then gets called, you know, the kind of father... What's the, what's the, what's the title they gave him? You know, he gets ...

The King of Jazz.

King of Jazz. Suddenly Paul Whiteman is the King of Jazz and of course, it's driving black, many blacks at the time and since crazy because, you know it's all too obvious. Paul Whiteman, you know, is King of Jazz. Whiteman himself actually never seems to have pretended to be any such thing. Fletcher Henderson was a, you know, wonderfully gifted and innovative arranger and pianist. He played for some of the blues singers too whose arrangements, who wrote some arrangements for Whiteman and whose arrangements Whiteman is well as Benny Goodman later, had great success with. Henderson himself could n., did not but could not, you know had he been the smartest businessman in the world, you know, had ever had that kind of success and that was strictly race, racism. Strictly race prejudice. So, these, these relations that were often I think friendly between two musicians had to be so freighted with, you know, the, the reverberations. Resentment, maybe guilt, thence justification, self-justification on both sides. They must have been very tricky.

Miles Davis...Is there something that it's romantic and is evocative? The lonely piercing tone that he has.

Yeah. It's, it's very, purely beautiful with those Gil Evans arrangements, you know, he's just not afraid of pure, kind of sumptuous beauty. But it's very hip. And that combination, you know, it's, it's like how Miles looked: these incredibly beautiful clothes in some of those pictures, you know this, this wool coat, you know and then there's a cigarette and then there's this, you know, kind of slicked back hair and this combination of total upright elegance in the coat. Then there's the slight hipster posture and the outlaw hair. You know, it's really quite wonderful. And the, so you know, you're feeling this is the essence of kind of sublime. The sublime in romance and, and, and sexuality as a kind of a dream state. But also there is this incredibly hip, you know, dangerous thing going on. And I think that's, that's in the music as well as in Miles himself, you know, just oh! Where did that phrase come from?

You know, here was this gorgeous orchestration propelling him and then Miles does something you don't quite expect. The note gets places, you know, there and it's so piercing and so beautiful. Oh!, you know?

Tell us about this network of hotels and restaurants that support these black bands going to segregated America.

Yes. There, there really was, as Harlem was a city unto itself, there was a black world, you know?, throughou..., within the world of America that would support musicians and in fact, would support other blacks just, you know, traveling through. They had their own hotels. Blacks would often open their homes, you know, to musicians, to ones they knew. Not all blacks, but, but, but some, you know, a friend would know a friend would know a friend. You would have gone often to high school or college with one of these musicians so then you might call someone in another city and say, "Put up my friend."

There were all sorts of ways of helping out on the road. Blacks, sometimes had their own restaurants or would just cook food for musicians, you know, when there were no restaurants for them to go to. It's, it's strange to think back on because it had to still be so grueling and obviously some musicians could handle it better than others. Nevertheless, the, the support, the resourcefulness, the respect and the affection were very much there. The sense that this was worth taking care of. That these people, these musicians were a resource and were, you know, people to be attended to. And helped. That's very nice.

What draws you to jazz?

Ken! (Laughs) Shame on you! What draws one to jazz? Probably, first off, if one's thinking back, the mixture of this quite irrepressible, you know, pulse. And this extraordinary flood of melody. It really is, you get both of those things, I think, with equal intensity, when you first hear jazz. So, there's something that's... Melody, see, tends to be more reflective and pulse drives you forward, and I think that must be terribly exciting, when you first hear it.

Do you remember that moment...?

The, what I associate it with is grown-up glamour. It's that classic childhood memory of being on the stairs, and watching your parents have a party, and I could see these blue note records. They were on the record player and you would hear, would hear Erroll Garner, or it might be Bud Powell or... I remember that more than the vocalists, and you'd hear the glasses clinking, you know, cocktail glasses and martini glasses and the fingernails, the beautiful painted nails, a cocktail dress, and these, these voices rising and falling and the laughter going with this music and sometimes they'd fall silent to listen to something or, you know, suddenly someone would be dancing to it. It's some adult sensory, totally secular, but also in some way, aesthetic experience, I think.

If jazz is a metaphor for American life, what is it saying...?

Hmmm. Hmm. Something about intelligence, improvisation, and by, let's say, prepared intelligence and improvisation as invention, and the way they can be put together and continually generate something new and beautiful out of deeply improbable materials and seemingly impossible circumstances. Maybe. Some....

What is it about America that allowed jazz to happen...? Why did jazz happen here?

Yes. It, this, this clash and confluence of cultural, musical, social traditions, sometimes coming together deliberately, in some musical setting, but sometimes, you know, it's, sometimes it's happening just as various little folk-loric communities are springing up. You have America is a self-made and

self-taught culture, and it's even making up its proper high culture. Before, as ragtime and then jazz are coming along. So you have, you know, band instructors, figuring out ways to teach, you know, instruments to this wild range of kids in public schools. Earlier than that, you have people figuring out first how to adapt a sound they know from the old country, where, whatever the old country was, whether you were brought there or immigrated from it, to a new instrument. Or you have an instrument like the banjo, let's say, ti..., trying to, taking the place of what old instruments and what other instruments, let's say, in Africa did. You have people doing things wrong and coming up with new sounds. You have also, because of the nature of our, of our entertainment, these big spectacles, and these jumbled theatrical things, you have orchestras that will play a ragtime tune, an opera overture, you know, all at, all at the same time. You have singers who will be doing a blues number, but will also feel they need to do an aria from "La Traviata." Every time someone does something like that, even if it's preposterous, the possibilities for technical im..., technical changes for rhythmic, melodic inventions get changed. And of course, there're more specific reasons, but...

Why did jazz grow out of an African American tradition...?

Oh, that's hard. That's... Those causal answers are tricky for me. You obviously had from, you know the ar..., earliest inhabitation of these shores, you obviously had strong musical traditions, that Africans, soon to become Africans Amer..., African Americans had come with. People do art music, folklore, dance, do become intense, intense outlets for people. They should become outlets for people at all times, but when you are denied all other kinds of outlets, every kind of creative energy goes into that. You also had that strange mixture with free Negroes in towns as well as slave Negroes on the plantations. You had this, these strange segregated and yet, overlapping cultures. So you would have slaves playing for white dances as well as playing in their quarters. You would have, when Fanny Elssler, the ballet dancer, from Europe came to town, apparently slaves would go through street, reciting little minstrel, you know, show-kind of rhymes about Fanny, about Fanny Elssler and Marie Taglioni. You, you know, you were listening to everything. I, it's an odd thing but I think also mimicry... the, all of the various reasons for blacks to mimic, from mockery to longing, to aspirations, social aspiration, whites and vice versa. This obsession that black speech patterns and movements and gestures, really, the, the, you know, the, the obsession it became for whites, but, you know, it, it goes, it goes both ways. That, too, I think helped, helped create jazz.

I think it's pretty ironic this liberating music was founded in such oppressive times. Can you paint race relations at the turn of the century...?

Well, we're, w..., with turn of the century, we're talking about ragtime and blues going into early jazz. Ah, well, pre-World War I? Is that what we're talking?

Yes.

Good Lord. You have this, you have all of the hopes of post-Reconstruction, recently, not all of, but most of, challenged to dash, too brutalized by the reaction against Reconstruction. You have a high rate of lynchings. You have laws. You're being rescinded, and passed, both of, oh, both with the intent of getting blacks less, taking them out of public facilities, denying them voting rights, et cetera. You have a very limited range of occupations possible, what is it that black women around that period are doing? Domestic service seems to be the, the largest occupation. You have, you have various riots in various cities. So, you have legal, social, professional, seg..., official segregation with the understanding being that segregation means all opportunities and facilities for blacks are less. You know, as minimal as they can possibly be, that is sometimes enforced with violence as well as by law. And you have the attendant emotional atmosphere. You have these furious debates between those who are liberal, black and white, and those who are reactionary, but, because it's the turn of the century, and you have Darwinian, you know, ideas floating everywhere, the debates are really horrifying to read when you think not only of their legal and social implications, but their psychological, you know, when you re..., a writer like Charles Chestnut trying to explain why, in fact, blacks do think, you know, this is an horrifying (laughs) appalling thing...

And out of this fiasco comes jazz.

Well, out of this miasma come a series of m..., mus, musics, out of various conditions that add up to jazz. And they, but they all come, it's such a strange business, they all come out of some peculiar conjunction of talent, opportunity and utterly, socially unrespectable deprivation. You have ragtime coming from a group of men who are deeply musical, some have gotten some formal training, because you have got, you know, both some blacks who can teach them at this point, and a few whites who are going to teach them. They are also in cities, most of these men. Which means there are certain opportunities, whether you're listening or whether you can...

So, out of this miasma...

Yes, you've got jazz, and you've got ragtime, you've got blues, you've got fragments of classical music, you've got marches. You've got mass culture starting to develop. You've got music as a form of entertainment, springing forth, which means, for example, ragtime moves from brothels and small black clubs to the World's Fairs, you know?, and to sheet music, et cetera, et cetera. Blues, it moves from the deep South; it becomes the me..., music of vaudeville shows, minstrel shows and it, also you have these economic avenues opening. Blues for example, becomes the way by which black women enter show business. There is no other way, unless they're somebody's dresser, they're going to enter it. You know, so, the, you have

these, these really do become ways of, you know, making yourself... Oh! Of leaping over all sorts of things. Not just economic success, becoming famous, important, you know. But, it, it's the attachment to entertainment culture. You have dances sweeping the country. Jazz is intimately connected, which we tend to keep forgetting. You know, too, these dances. These dance phases, you know, whole, whole body of vernacular dance that nobody, no other country in the world has ever seen, is springing forth out of ragtime, blues and then, and really being codified as comes in entertainment. Via jazz, as well as art, dance halls, you know, et cetera, et cetera. And then, you know, you have these strange cross-class and, and race things. Suddenly, they're not listening always to the same people; the boys at Princeton are probably listening to Paul Whiteman and Bix Beiderbecke, but you know, that's who they're listening to. The boys and girls at Fisk or Howard would be listening Fletcher Henderson, but they're all going to hear Fletcher Henderson if they go to the Roseland in New York. And you're going to hear Earl Hines if you go to the Grand Terrace in Chicago. And then radio. For all the segregation starts taking this up too.

One of the things that you bring up - if you go there, you're going to see singers...?

Ah, yes. Well, musically, singers have this dual job of being the actor, if you will, and women do like to be called actors nowadays, not actresses. You are the actor, you are as responsible as if you were in a film or in a Broadway musical, for conveying a certain story, an emotional thing. You are doubly responsible, if you are a female singer because the story you're telling is a stand-in for sexual allure, or sexual excitement, glamour, et cetera, et cetera. You're also, you have musical demands. You must be, if you are a jazz singer, you must be percussive. You must have that percussive, rhythmic facility. And it is a very complicated and delicate thing, to match, you know, look at this body of American popular song, to match this range of lyrics, some of which are just impossibly preposterously stupid, and silly, some of which are divine and witty, many of which do require, for a thousand reasons you do, you know, utterly project your voice and character somewhere else and yet, at the same time, be using, turning those notes, and those words, using words as music as note, as sounds, you know, palpable sound. It's, it's, it's a wild thing.

Let me go specifically to some people.

Sure.

Sarah Vaughn.

Ah, well. You want to start that late? OK. She's actually, Sarah Vaughn is an... fascinating, well, a genius, illustration though, of that pull between your instrumental capacities and your dramatic, theatrical feminine, I would say, responsibilities, as jazz, as American entertainment traditionally defines it.

Harmonically, melodically, this woman can do anything. She was always an experimentalist, you know? She, and she was always a little, a little ahead of just the singing. She r..., actually joined Earl Hines's band as a pianist as well as a singer. She was recognized like Ella Fitzgerald, as wonderfully talented, but many people felt, "Well, she's just not pretty enough. This is going to be a problem." It was, the way people talk about her, it, they loved her but you would think they were doing her a favor. They're proud of themselves that they could overlook her, you know, less than wildly glamorous looks and hear the voice... No one reacted to a male musician that way. Everybody doesn't look like Duke Ellington, you know, or Teddy Wilson. That must have been appalling. There's a, a bassist. Oh wait, now let me get it straight who it is. Who is the musician..? Yes! It's Curly Russell, who in an interview I once heard on radio, was talking about the early bebop days. And he said, "You know, we had to hold Sarah back. She was right there with us. You know, she would go out. She would do anything everything, we had to hold her back, because the girl singer is supposed to, in fact, know also how to sing a pretty ballad." Now at the time I heard him say this, I was beside myself with rage and horror. I also understand, he's talking about commercial and practical demands as much as anything else, but she, this double life and you hear it in the singing. You know, you hear when she's just utterly enjoying herself musically and doing really, really brilliant things. You hear her very complicated relationship to lyrics, you know, the way she will distance them often, play with them, parody them, claim to forget the words, which I'm not at all convinced she always forgot, you know, and substitute scat. I think all of that bespeaks a chaffing at the boundaries of the popular song as a, as a jazz musician.

Ella Fitzgerald.

Ah. Very different temperament though socially and sexually many of the same...

... we don't know who the lady is.

Yes. Alright. Ella yes. Ella Fitzgerald also, a just delectable musician. A little, you can feel, in the critical responses to her career, this pull with the singer also, between acting out the lyric and being the pure musician. Ella is always criticized for not being as emotionally deep, as say, Billie Holiday. Well, by certain standards, she's not, but to me it seems rather like talking about Carol Lombard not being as emotionally deep as Bettie La..., Davis. Carol Lombard is after something else, entirely, you know? She's a great, great sparkling comedienne. Ella is, you know, a light, airy, ebullient force of, you know, music at its purest, cleanest. She is closer to Mozart, for example, and the kinds of pleasures Mozart gives, than let us say, to Wagner or to Brahms. Or even to Bach. That's a superb thing.

But, John Hammond didn't like her...?

Well. Oh.

Tell me about some of the.....?

Listen she...

...she had the ugly problem...

She had. She had the looks problem. You know, she had it extremely, because she really was a little street urchin when she got discovered, and you know, she just didn't know anything about anything. She'd been living on the street, but Chick Webb, supposedly did not want... No supposedly about it - he didn't at first want to hire her. I don't want to be unkind, but Chick Webb was a hunchback leading an orchestra. And that was acceptable. He thought Ella Fitzgerald was too ugly to hire. Now. Is this because he felt maybe the audience can't take a hunchback plus an unattractive woman? If he felt that, perhaps he had a point, but it... You know, there's, there's so many sad and ugly things going on inside, but one of the musicians said, "You fool, you better hire her." And so he did, and became her mentor. Absolutely. Ella did very well. You know, she always that voice was so pretty, and so.... ah, what? I don't want to say, "so white" because that's just, it, that's much, much, much too easy. It was a very culturally easily travelable voice. You know, and I don't believe that, I know black, black audiences didn't think, "Oh, Ella. That's so white." You know, there's always been a huge responsiveness to all kinds of voices. But it was more easily integrated into, let's say, a standardized sound, in terms of the timbre of the voice, as well as the diction. And that means she had hits, for example, long before Billie Holiday. So, I don't want to suggest she wasn't wildly successful. But she has been a little penalized. John Hammond admits that he, when he first heard her, he didn't recognize how good she was because she wasn't sexy.

She wasn't singing the blues...

And she wasn't singing the blues, which too, you know, for a remarkable amount of time, almost to the end of her days, she would still get criticized for - why does every black person have to sing the blues? This makes absolutely no sense to me. Ella could also musically work with blues very well. She, there's an "Ella Hums The Blues," you know, where she does lovely rifts, variations, whatever, she could use the blues structure, but, you know when you say she doesn't sing the blues, there is this kind of melodramatic sense of what the blues are and mean that I really find very tiresome. By those standards Duke Ellington, you know?, isn't any closer to that kind of slightly fake authentic blues than Ella is.

Billie Holiday.

Though she actually sang there a few literal blues. It's that, it's that feeling, that rue, you know, and kind of very self-contained woe. Really, rue's a

better word, but, you know, pleasure and pain altogether, a certain kind of irony. Always the voice and the phrasing are indicating that more is going on, you know beneath the words, between the lines, between the notes.

Is that what's drawing us to Billie Holiday?

Oh, gosh, yes. What's drawing us to Billie Holiday is, is that, w... well, a number of things. First of all, it's a very uncanny voice. Probably that, next to Louis Armstrong's, is the oddest in terms of its sheer timbre and effect. It's the oddest voice...

Can you just tell me briefly about Curly Russell?

Yes. I heard Curly Russell interviewed probably on WKCR and he was talking about, maybe he was talking about Sarah in p..., Sarah maybe she, maybe he was talking about Sarah, and maybe he was just reminiscing about the early jazz days, but, he said, "You know, there we'd be, you know, Bird and Diz and all of us and we'd be doing everything, just going out, key changes, harmony changes." He said, "We had to hold Sarah, (maybe he said, "Sassy") "we had to hold her back. Because she was going to go out there with everybody else and you know, the, the lady has to sing a pretty ballad." Now when I first heard this, I was murderously angry. I'm still angry. I do recognize that jazz musicians are constantly, including the beboppers, navigating these pers..., these commercial proprieties and responsibilities and that was part of it, but oh believe me that was only part of it. And that wasn't the deepest part. That comes up over and over and you hear it always in her singing. Just as much as I love American popular song, you do feel yes, she was a diva, yes, she had the problem, gr..., people with great technical resources have of sometimes overusing them. Indulging them but she was also, I feel her constantly, pulling against the emotional and musical limitations, conventions of, of the popular song, of what was the m..., her material.

Tell me about Billie Holiday; you said that she had the oddest...?

The oddest voice. She and Louis Armstrong, these voices that if you were to simply, you know, listen to, try to describe the elements, those, just a little scratch in her voice and you wouldn't expect it to give the kind of beauty and pleasure that it does. You know, it's Ethel Waters, Bessie Smith, those are more recognizably, obviously Ella Fitzgerald, pleasure-giving female voices. Bing Crosby has a pleasure-giving male voice. Billie had that strange scratch. She had that astonishing timing ahead of notes, behind notes, everywhere. But, I don't think of her; she became tragic later, but when you listen to the early records, the blues feeling which always suggests a certain melancholy, let's say, you know, it suggests that life is going to play some, some hard trick along the way, it is perfectly balanced by this kind of insouciance. She's terribly witty. Listen to her sing "A Fine Romance" or any such thing. She's,

she's practically ebullient when she sounds in those early things like a horn, she's having the time of her life.

You said she had to be at the center of each song and yet apart from it....?

Did I say that? (Laughs) Oh, I did, did I?

Musical cubism...?

I certainly did, yes. I think what I must have meant, when I said she was at the center of a song but apart from it, is, emotionally, you get an utterly shaped little catharsis, let's say, with every song. There's a coherent little s..., little emotional tale, even if it isn't exactly what you expect, the song, from the lyrics or the melody to tell you, but the apartness comes from her reshaping it, either by shifting, not totally re-working but shifting the melody altering the timing, when she hits a note, where she places a particular note and we, when you're apart from something you can re-align it and I think that's what made me think of a, of a cubist painting. It's all of the ordinary elements, somewhat re-aligned and re-proportioned, but recognizable and perfectly shaped - that's what she did with songs.

She tried to sound like a horn...?

And she did. ... She, she did sound like a horn. And though she give credit to Armstrong the singer as well as the horn player and to Bessie Smith, she, you know, there's Lester Young. She always said, as jazz singers from Billie and Ella on would so often, "I was really trying to sound like a horn." But in her case, sometimes with later singers again, you feel that they are trying so hard to sound like a horn, that the, there's a strain, there's a pull. It's almost as if they, they're angry, you know, at Bill..., you know, at, at the limits a voice imposes. With Holiday, what she did was she took again the word that comes to me, license and insouciance. She took the license that a non-verbal, that an instrument has to make its own kind of sense, to make a sense that matches the lyric out of it, she took that kind of phrasing license and that's why I think she sounded like a horn. She knew you could get at, it's, it's very easy for singers, the actor's part of singers, to feel, even if you're speeding up a song, that, you know, nevertheless, you're still offering an interpretation that is roughly akin, you know it, it's naturalistic, let's say, in some way. It's emotionally naturalistic. She wouldn't necessarily do that at all.

Tell me about her relationship with Lester Young.

Well, other people can tell you much more. But it seems to have been a genuine, the kind of musical collaboration that you don't, that Louis Armstrong had with himself as a singer (laugh) and a trumpet player. And I don't think you see that between 2 great actors often. I don't know that you

see it so much and, you know, and with such equity between a singer and a... No, let me take all of that back. You see it but usually one or the other gets more credit, you know, usually, the singer gets, maybe, may get more credit than the accompanomist (that's what she said...) and the second has to play the accompanist. Or the instrumentalist gets the credit. They were, I think, each one embodied what the other wanted, I suppose. He does play especially when he does ballads as if, you know, he is longing in some way to be able to use the resources of language. She sings, you know, wanting to use the resources of what's non-verbal, and you know, so they must have, they heard each other perfectly clearly. Also, he has that same temperamental capacity to blend something that's very dark with something that stays very stylish and witty.

Firstly it's a complicated, it's a good relationship...?

Well, I'll tell you, it, I think it's so refreshing that essentially they were musical collaborators as opposed to, you know, storm-tossed lovers. I think that's, you know, it seems to have been a kind of brother-sister collaborator, you know, the way people who write songs together, for example, or who write plays together will often end up hating each other. But they're utterly linked together, you know, those are very complicated, those artistic collaboration relationships. The brother sister thing came in, I think, I think they competitive, in a way, I know later in life, I gather, you know, when she was having some successes but they were both very tormented, you know, he hadn't seen her for a while and he was, he felt he'd been neglected. To me those, those complications seem deeply moving because they're so outside of what we usually look for and what men and women give e..., give each other.

Bessie Smith.

Ah. A great, great singer and I want to say about Bessie Smith, I, I get so tired of her being seen as this kind of primal, pre-verbal force, practically, you know, it's it's, she's one of those people they say, everyone says, "Oh, Bessie!" and then no one says much else about her. Now this is not entirely true. Martin Williams has written well about her; Susannah McCorkle has just written a wonderful piece about her, but for years, it was enough to slightly push her over into the 20's, early 30's vaudeville blues field. You know, and then kind of leave it there. She too, there, you know, I put her right in there with Armstrong and Billie, though, you know, she is an uncertain obvious stylistic ways earlier in that ability again, to navigate so gorgeously between what's vocal and dramatic and what is purely musically beautiful. There is also a kind of, in the way she sings blues that the voice is gorgeous. But there is a restraint, constantly. The way she uses her slurs, her growls, her blue notes. All these devices that, that many singers now, my God!, they'll cram them into every measure, every phrase, melisma... The ease, the... I would almost say, not delicacy, but the, but the restraint. You know, the knowing always. The kn..., she could sing on the beat, when that worked,

she would off the beat. If you listen to her closely, she'll change her diction around. You know, she always sounds somewhat Southern but she will pronounce the same word differently, 2 different ways in the same song. Subtle. No one thinks so, but subtle.

What kind of show did she put on?

Oh well, great old, great old funny combination of th..., of minstrel and vaudeville. There'd be skits, there'd be dance numbers, there'd be, oh God, kind of country bumpkin, you know, jokes which city people, by the late 20's, thought were a little backward and embarrassing. She would also, she, she would do very, a very comic song like "Pinchbacks, Take 'Em Away" that which is really a song a kind of "to all you young women, let me tell you how you get married man who will in fact help you support yourself and help support you, you know, don't get these ones that just want to live off you." She'd do a song like that and then she would break into, you know, say, "Lost Your Head Blues" or one of these songs that people who were there describe as having, you know, m..., a mass, a kind of mass hypnotism, sending the audience into something they keep saying seems to be, you know, like what happens when you hear the "Mass in B Minor," you know, some, I'm not going to say Billy Graham because that seems debase to me, but we, you know, when you hear some genuinely spiritually elevated piece of music, apparently she could do that and then a minute later, be doing the Charleston.

You used the word minstrelsy a second ago and I want, people don't understand how black people were perceived...?

Well, the minstrel show started in the first quarter, really, of the century, and it's, it began with, you know, a, a white entertainer having m, run into an maybe not elderly, but a kind of broken down black man on a street corner who was turning around in a circle and doing a little self-invented dance, singing "Wheel around and turn around and jump just so, and every time I turn around I jump Jim Crow." Apparently some possibly some money exchanged hands, some people say he bought you know, these old street man's clothes. It does make you think - what are we missing in our street population even now? And he went, he went on stage with his company that night, did this little routine, and it was absolutely a sensation, from which came a series of kind of raw and then more finished but always crude in imitations, in habitations of what were considered the extremities of black speech, vocalizing and dancing. You know, these angular buck, you know what we, what would be called buck dancing which would later become tap-dancing. Also you know, the kind of sinuous torso movement, that you know, people can now trace back, you know, quite a bit to various kinds of African dance. The sheer timbre, black speech, what we now call vernacular, which was also called dialect, but also used deliberately in the minstrel show to a mocking and comic, not simply a comic but a racially mocking affect. At the same time, it was clearly, particularly with the music and dance coming

along, you might say minstrel shows were the first genuinely American musicals. So, obviously, something rhythmically, vocally even situationally, country bumpkins, let's say, except maybe they're ex-slaves as well as country bumpkins coming to the city. These are fundamentals of American comedy and theater in some way, and up the new, the timbre, the music, the rhythm, the melody is obviously thrilling the country but it is attached to a view of blacks, a narrative, let us say, and often, not always, a performance style that is implicitly meant to be car..., or explicitly, caricature. My hunch is a number of performers again, were of mixed minds. Particularly, some white performers and particularly, black performers who started doing minstrel shows after the Civil War so I think you were probably always getting a very strange double to triple message. Something that was meant to be repellent but thrilling, et cetera, et cetera.

They're mocking, but they're appropriately mocking...?

Exactly, exactly. They are mocking and yet, you know, im..., you know, imitation p..., satire often has contempt in it. The minstrel show had some of that, but parody always has some kind of longing and love for the object it parodies. It genuinely was an imitation that wanted desperately, you know, to, to master, you know, these vocal and rhythmic tricks, and yet because of the way one felt towards blacks or felt one had to feel towards blacks, you know, the object of one's imitation and admiration had to become loathsome and contemptible.

Can you tell me about jazz in your own family...?

Oh, sure. Yeah. My father grew up mostly in California and they had a very good public school band, training program. He learned to play the trombone and liked really many people, among them W.C. Handy whose talent he did not have. He learned to play popular and classical and also learned to play jazz. He used to play with little groups around California but always says when he heard Lawrence Brown, who became Duke Ellington's great trombonist, he knew that he was not made for this. His mother very much wanted her sons to be doctors and lawyers, so I believe, you know, short of, short of being kidnapped by Duke Ellington, he would have obeyed his parents and gone to medical school anyway.

But what kind of pride must they have felt for the black performers they were seeing?

Oh, I think it was... The bla..., you know these black performers in those days, we're talking about the 20's and the 30's, these performers were, in the way they carried themselves and performed in the way jazz, you know, a band like Ellington's or Basie's or Jimmie Lunceford had so left the degrading aspects of minstrelsy behind and so, you know, displayed, come to display this urban chic, they were in their styles of performance dressing, they were essentially creating, you know, this wonderful palette of American styles that

you were seeing only created by whites in the movies. You know, they're playing with you. If you, if you watch jazz musicians, you see that they're doing everything. They're imitating Bill Robinson here and again I'm talking dress, manner, on stage, they're imitating, little d..., a little Bill Robinson here, a little Cary Grant here, a little Douglas Fairbanks there, you know, a little John Barrymore. I always think of the women singers as really the musical equivalents of the great 30's actresses, you know, the romantic comedy heroines and the dramatists. The, the male, the band players, the band leaders, you know, they're matinee idols, they're great actors, you know, they are embodying this strange, multi-stylized American chic. And, you know, oh God, how could you as a black person not find this utterly thrilling? They're talking in a black voice when they want to, they're talking in a quote white voice, you know, they're making every aspect of American style their own.

The issues of race and class in American culture are often misunderstood... what does jazz tell you about race...?

Oh my God. What it tells you about race. Hmm. It tells you, oh so many things but probably, in some ways what it, what matters most to me is it, it constantly takes apart, you know, and goes past and then, works some wonderful variation on whatever fairly constrained, deterministic definition of the relationship of race to style, aesthetics, you know, your kinds of technical and emotional choices. Jazz always, you know, shoots any kind of limit, set of conventions or limitations out. It really does tell... I guess I'm thinking about what we were talking about before, you know, and these musicians and their extraordinary range of styles. You really can take from anywhere from any thing and find some way, if you're gifted and inventive and deeply hard working, you know to give it a coherent shape and sound and form. And it will be made up of the most disparate, and often, you know, seemingly incompatible and often kind of ugly undesirable things. By which I mean, you know, emotions and experiences, as well as techniques, genres, styles.

This music is about dancing, too. Can you make the connection for us...?

Yeah. You know, it's, it's very peculiar, I suppose there aren't... Is jazz the only music in America that...? Of course, we've got polkas, waltzes, but... Let me not say the only music in America. It would appear that it is genuinely difficult for us to take in the simplicity and the complexity of a music that can ask equally to be listened to and danced to, and may ask you to do this simultaneously. You know, if you were in, let's say, the Savoy Ballroom, apparently, I wasn't lucky enough to be, the music is being made so that you can do the simplest or the most, you know, elaborate dances, you know. And, and sit, you know, focus wildly, you know, kind of thing, to a virtuoso on the floor. But other people might be standing by the bandstand or sitting at their tables, only listening. You know, listening as you might, you know, in a symphony orchestra. And yet, they're listening, knowing that all of these

other things are going on. And that, I think it's a, it's a very, if not complicated, the elements are so... It must have been one of the first combinations of art and entertainment, of music and dance that demanded of us what the culture does now, as you sort of move through the media, which is this enormous capacity for taking in things simultaneously. You know, it would move from being terribly frivolous, you know, suddenly there's a passage that's just of such extraordinary meditative beauty, and then some horn comes in with some little joke or some drum riff, you know, fabulous taste, next to some hoky gimmick, you know, when you... And all (snapping fingers), you know, going on with a kind of beat and you have to keep switching your moods, your expectations and taking in all these things at once.

What was the appeal of the Castles?

Oh, God! Irene and Vernon. I think a combination of modern naughtiness, you know, they really were doing these rhythmic, they cleaned up the dirty animal dances, but these rhythmic, somewhat disrespectful, sexually bold dances, but they were doing it with utter politesse. And a kind of witty gentility, you know, they were, they were charmers, so I don't want to overdo the gentility. They were a husband and wife, so that gave it a kind of propriety. They were a middle class white couple, he British, she American. That also gave it propriety. They were working with a black band leader whom they credit with having, you know, at least, co-invented the Fox-trot, the Castle Walk. You know, so that too, just the, the sight of James Reese Europe and here he was with his black band, all, you know, impeccably dressed in tails, this simultaneaeninny, simultaneity of something that was a dangerous and provocative and naughty, but also terribly elegant and proper. And contained.

Duke Ellington - I want to get a sense of his personality, who he was..?

Yeah. The, the calculated mysteries, very definitely. Oh, I, when I think of him I, you know, I always start associating with this chain of somewhat dangerous gifted leading men that might take you from... a Gothic, you know, the sort of dark, Gothic stranger, through Count Dracula, through a kind of swash-buckling that you saw in Douglas Fairbanks or John Barrymore, but more, no, something more menacing than Fairbanks. Something, you know, darker under there and a little, not self-destructive but a little threatening. And that's, that's where I think of the Barrymore, and that's where I think of the Dracula. Now, that's a terrible thing, it might seem, to say about Duke Ellington but let's think of it this way. I, I'm thinking of the man who was a kind of impresario as well as a great musician, and impresarios are ruthless. He created a band, an or..., well, an orchestra, we called it the Orchestra, a series of styles... This exchange of life blood between Ellington and his musicians. No one really knows exactly what part, you know, of a composition was his and which was, let's say,

Lawrence Brown's or Johnny Hodges's or, you know, the, the very intimate more open collaboration between Ellington and the other composer, Strayhorn. He used the instrumentalists, who were men, like instruments, he used his vocalists, very much like instrumentalists. They got back, and that's where the Dracula comparison might seem unfair, they got back an enormous amount - they got to be artists. But if you consider that the Count bestowed a kind of eternal life on people who were supposedly his victims, you know, one can retell a legend in a different way. I think it works very well, he gave them eternal life, but in some way, they were always, it seems, somewhat depleted without him.

What was his reaction when ... Billy Strayhorn died?

Well, I remember seeing an old family friend, Marion Logan, I believe, talking about this, it was in a documentary, and Billy Strayhorn died and did she call Duke? Or did he call her?, but you know, there, there he was on the telephone, Strayhorn died, he said, "I won't live another year." Boom! That's how she told it. I found that fascinating because, you know, there was this real symbiosis, and that was very, that part of it was very moving. The other side, it was channeled entirely through his sense of himself, and I found that, which I think she may have too, somewhat chilling. If you've ever seen footage of Ellington together with Armstrong, you will also see the difference. You know, if I were to put Armstrong in some sort of mythic chain, you know, it would have much more to do with your kind of humanists, you know, your, your Homeric or, or Shakespearean, you know, or something like that. Ellington, you know, no. It's this dark Byronic, but chilly... Yuh, yuh.

But he didn't think he'd live...?

No. He didn't. And you know, there I think, that's also where the the legend expands. He lived, they, you know, he lived through them. You know, he needed the musicians, the Billy Strayhorn, the orchestra. They were literally his lifeblood. When they disappeared, he died too, apparently.

Bix, ... the limitations are on him because of segregation - he's an object lesson...?

You know, it's interesting. We don't think of it that way, of the, of the limits that were imposed on Bix, but when I hear him and see pictures, and you know, listen to the Paul Whiteman Band around him. I think and read the little stories about Bix and Louis occasionally, jamming, I think, my God!, this poor man! He should have been playing with one of the black orchestras. He should have been playing with, say, the Ellington band. Something like that, and I believe it harmed him. In that way he was a victim artistically. Let's leave emotions aside. Emotionally, he was victim of many things, but he was a victim artistically, of segregation. He was not allowed to play with

musicians who were as good as, and in some cases, better than he. That's what jazz musicians need.

...I think Bix was a victim of segregation because you were not allowed publicly to play in integrated bands, units, orchestras. He was not allowed to work with and to play with musicians who were as good as he was or better which is what any jazz musician will tell you he or she needs.

Another curve ball... Miles Davis...?

I wish I knew. No one quite knows what Miles Davis's demons were. My sense would be: one demon, let, I mean the temperamental demons are so deep. One demon would be the class privilege crossing racial lack of privilege, racial disinheritance demon. The believing, the growing up in an, in, call it, well let's see... The talented tenth, the black bourgeoisie, will sometimes call itself the black aristocracy. Growing up in that very carefully secluded world, where you are taught that you are a privileged creature. You are at the same time taught that that is very fragile, and that it might be snatched away from you at any moment. But while we can lay and map out this terribly confined perfect little world, you know, you are a prince or a princess within it. I think the combination of entitlement and bigotry, assault, the assaults of bigotry and caste prejudice set something absolutely poisonous loose, temperamentally. It obviously set all sorts of other things loose. Also, the need in some way, to turn himself into his dramatic image of what a really tough street Negro would be. Which a fair number of upper middle class boys of all races like to do and they usually do it... If you're brilliant and Miles Davis, you're going to do it in a very compelling but kind of murderous way.

Yeah actually, there're a couple of things I want to add. Yeah.

So, there you are in this quite privileged cloistered little world, but you are also paying your prices for it. Miles was the son of a dentist, who wanted to be a musician. I know he got sent to Juilliard, but that must have been tricky socially to negotiate. Miles was a beautiful man, but he was extremely dark, in that world, that you will do better being very dark if you are a boy rather than a girl, but it would still have been considered something of a liability, and God knows, when you're moving to the larger white world, it would alternate between being a kind of, giving you a kind of imaginative license meaning people could project all sorts of things on you that might work to your advantage or that wouldn't at all. And a kind of, again, mark of Cain. He made himself into a beauty and a dashing man and he probably knew he was a beauty and a dashing man but he also knew, you know, that "the dark scar" somehow or another was there.

What do you hear in his music?

Well, I do think, you know, you hear, particularly in the later music, you hear so much that is convoluted and twisted, but you hear... That's, we were talking earlier about, you know, what, what comes out of the most

improbable things, you also hear this extraordinary classicist's love of a kind of formal lyric beauty, which I often associate with the way he will dress in fact. But really an, an extraordinary yearning for an ability to create these really perfect orderly structures of melodic beauty, harmonic peace, you know?

When bop came...?

Yeah.

People said that if you couldn't dance to it, it wasn't jazz...?

Well first of all, you could dance to it. Some people could - there are some great, start with professionals. Scobie Stromand does some great bop dancers. Professional dancers. You could also dance to some of it. But this, this was an art form diversifying itself, the o..., you know, again. Jazz is art and entertainment, and that's all, it's always very, very tricky. Movies, with all the money and you know, privilege, racial and economic behind them, you know, people used to debate over whether movies were art or entertainment and this, you know, this was a silly old legacy of a slight primativization of jazz and also a certain, even from its own admirers, a kind of simplistic to simple-minded, you know, this is what being hip and cool is. There's no such thing as an art or interesting entertainment form that doesn't start to claim conditions, privileges, et cetera, for itself. And jazz was claiming, you know, partly by these small units also, you know, you're gonna want to listen to a small unit; it's not the same thing as a big band in a small club, partly by the conditions in which it was made. But partly by the demands of being experimental and avant garde. You know? It was right that at that period in its history, it demanded your undivided listening attention and the dancing could come later. And it did.

The End