



Heile, B. (2015) Play it again, Duke: jazz performance, improvisation, and the construction of spontaneity. In: Heile, B., Elsdon, P. and Doctor, J. (eds.) *Watching Jazz: Encounters with Jazz Performance on Screen*. Oxford University Press: New York. ISBN 9780199347650

There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/91072/>

Deposited on: 27 May 2015

Enlighten – Research publications by members of the University of Glasgow  
<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk>

## Play it again, Duke: Jazz Performance, Improvisation, and the Construction of Spontaneity

In his *Jazz Icons*, Tony Whyton cannily summarizes the mythology of jazz with a quotation from the gangster Vincent in Michael Mann's *Collateral* (2004): "Most people, ten years from now, same job, same place, same routine. Everything the same. Just keeping it safe over and over and over. Ten years from now. Man, you don't know where you'll be ten minutes from now. Do you?"<sup>1</sup>

Jazz, according to this myth, is defined by its spontaneity, its unpredictability, or, in Frederick Garber's words, its "upfront immediacy."<sup>2</sup> As Ted Gioia has put it, "jazz music lives and dies in the moment of performance," summing up jazz's essence as "spontaneity, creativity, variety, surprise."<sup>3</sup> A recent, authoritative textbook, Scott DeVeaux and Gary Giddins's *Jazz* uses the word "excitement" three times in the first two pages, twice in the opening paragraph alone.<sup>4</sup>

Since they enable an analysis of the nature of performance in jazz, audiovisual documents provide a particular opportunity to interrogate the jazz myth critiqued by Whyton. This in turn provides deeper insight into jazz not only as an art form but as a socially defined culture, lived experience, an experience not least shaped by the mediatic forms in which jazz is encountered.

In the following, I will refer to footage from European tours of American jazz bands, primarily the tours undertaken by the Duke Ellington Orchestra in 1969 (Ellington's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday tour) and 1971, and, to a lesser extent, the Giants of Jazz (Art Blakey, Dizzie Gillespie, Al McKibbin, Thelonious Monk, Sonny Stitt, and Kai Winding), also in 1971. The reasons for these choices are overwhelmingly practical: it is for these performances that the greatest amount of footage can be found. The bands' tour dates were frequently recorded and broadcast by national or regional TV stations, enabling a comparison of the concerts given at different places within one tour or indeed between different tours. Furthermore, despite the undeniable effects that the presence of film cameras and artists' and audiences' awareness of them will have had on the proceedings, the cameras to a certain extent acted as witnesses: the concerts captured were not staged for the cameras but were primarily live concerts for the benefit of the paying audiences. In this way, these materials grant insight into the mundane nature of jazz performance. Whereas, due to its indebtedness to scholarly approaches to European high art, jazz studies have traditionally prioritized the unique and extraordinary – the focus on the jazz 'greats', canonic recordings and legendary solos with all the trappings of genius worship – I am more concerned here with the ordinary: the everyday lives and performances of musicians and the experiences of audiences at events that may not necessarily be regarded as 'legendary' and immortalized in history books. This much is apparent from my choices: in the mostly neatly periodized jazz histories, the late 1960s and early '70s are not normally characterized as the age of Ellington, Gillespie, and Monk. While the material discussed here features many fine performances by some of the greatest jazz players ever, I am as much interested in them as documents in the media and social history of jazz as in their artistic value or their place in a stylistic history of jazz.

---

<sup>1</sup> Tony Whyton, *Jazz Icons: Heroes, Myths and the Jazz Tradition*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Garber, 'Fabulating Jazz', in *Representing Jazz*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Duke University Press Books, 1995), 71.

<sup>3</sup> Ted Gioia, *The Imperfect Art: Reflections on Jazz and Modern Culture*, Reprint (Oxford Paperbacks, 1991), 83 and 111.

<sup>4</sup> Gary Giddins and Scott DeVeaux, *Jazz* (W. W. Norton & Co., 2009), xi–xii.

What is the focus here is the serial nature of performance with its repetitive qualities, which is contrasted to the prioritization of uniqueness in the jazz myth. Without wishing to debunk individual moments of greatness (e.g. seminal recordings, phenomenal solos etc.), we should not forget to what extent their singularity is based on a distorted perspective. While we may experience a live performance as unique, it is more often than not one in a series, and while a recording may capture a specific moment, it is normally one of a series of only marginally different takes. Even live (audio) recordings, which are comparatively rare, typically feature performances that have acquired a singular status or are marketed as such: Benny Goodman's 1938 Carnegie Hall concert, or, more directly relevant in this context, the live album from the Duke Ellington Orchestra's legendary 1956 Newport concert are cases in point (the fact that, as has transpired much later, only around 40 per cent of the material on the latter was actually recorded at the gig only goes to illustrate the cachet of a 'very special' live recording).<sup>5</sup>

### **The Primacy of Live Performance and the Centrality of Recording**

There is another reason why the concept of spontaneity and its primacy in jazz myth need to be interrogated, and this has to do with the problematic relation between (audio) recording and live performance in jazz. According to the myth, jazz can only really be appreciated in live performance; recordings serve, in Jed Rasula's ironic formulation, as "a secondary substitute for the 'living presence' of actual performance."<sup>6</sup> They aren't really primary documents in their own right but are only acceptable as signifiers of the absent 'real thing.'

This view is not only held by uncritical aficionados, but it is also shared by many leading scholars. For instance, although critiquing the common denigration of recordings, Frederick Garber nevertheless insists that "jazz is an art of performance," which leads him to question the authenticity of recordings.<sup>7</sup> In a subtle and wide-ranging argument, Rasula has described recording as a "seductive menace" for jazz studies.<sup>8</sup> Ted Gioia, for his part, has gone so far as to claim that recordings have a "dehumanizing effect."<sup>9</sup> Nor are jazz studies alone in privileging live performance. In an argument that, although coming from a very different area, is redolent of the jazz myth, the performance theorist Peggy Phelan argues that "Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be recorded, saved or documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. ... [performance] becomes itself through disappearance."<sup>10</sup> Without wishing to subordinate American popular culture to concepts derived from the history of European high art, it seems to me as if this privileging of immediacy and spontaneity owes a lot to Romanticism, something I will outline in more detail below.

Jacques Attali appears to have been the first to invert the customary hierarchy between live performance and recording, stating that "[t]he advent of recording thoroughly shattered

---

<sup>5</sup> Ellington's concert has been issued as Duke Ellington, *Ellington at Newport 1956* (Sonybmg, 1999). For an account of the material on this recording see John Fass Morton, *Backstory in Blue: Ellington at Newport '56* (Rutgers University Press, 2008), 201–211.

<sup>6</sup> Jed Rasula, 'The Media of Memory: The Seductive Menace of Records in Jazz History', in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 135.

<sup>7</sup> Garber, 'Fabulating Jazz'.

<sup>8</sup> Rasula, 'The Media of Memory: The Seductive Menace of Records in Jazz History'.

<sup>9</sup> Gioia, *The Imperfect Art*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (Routledge, 1993), 146, <http://www.amazon.com/execute%bidos/redirect?tag=citeulike07-20&path=ASIN/0415068223>.

representation. First produced as a way of preserving its trace, it instead replaced it as the driving force of the economy of music... For those trapped by the record, public performance becomes a simulacrum of the record: an audience generally familiar with the artist's recordings attends to hear a live replication."<sup>11</sup> This view has been taken up by Philip Auslander, whose arguments are a direct riposte to the romanticizing views expressed by Phelan and others. According to him, live performance in what he calls "mediatized culture" is subservient to the primacy of electronic mass media. In a celebrated essay, "Tryin' to make it real," he specifically argues that in rock music, live performance's function is to recreate the recording.<sup>12</sup> In a somewhat surprising twist, however, Auslander, not unlike Gioia, has mostly exempted jazz from this economy of mediatized representations and contrasted it with rock, arguing that, in contradistinction to rock, "nonimprovisational jazz is arguably an oxymoron,"<sup>13</sup> which would presumably make it unrepeatable (more recently, Auslander has revised his position somewhat, as will be outlined below). This binary opposition between jazz and rock is also established by Garber who asserts boldly that "in jazz the performance is privileged, in rock and roll the recording."<sup>14</sup>

The jazz myth constructs jazz as the last refuge of liveness, a music of pure immediacy, created in the moment in an act of spontaneity and utterly unrepeatable, unsullied by reification and commercialization. What they overlook is to what extent the music and the discourses surrounding it were and are dependent on the technological and commercial processes of recording. As Rasula points out, what we know of jazz and its history, what we read in books and are told at university, is embodied in sound recordings.<sup>15</sup> It is through a body of seminal recordings that we know jazz, that we have created a canon or canons of masters and their works; it is on this basis that style and period labels, such as Chicago, Swing, Bebop, Cool Jazz, Hardbop etc. have been coined. David Horn further reminds us that Louis Armstrong's seminal Hot Five and Hot Seven recordings, arguably the first canonic masterworks of jazz, were studio-only recordings; any witness they bear on live practice is indirect at best.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Scott DeVeaux emphasizes the influence exerted by one particular body of recordings, the *Smithsonian Collection* [later *Anthology*] of *Classic Jazz*, in shaping the dominant view of jazz history, a point also taken up by Prouty.<sup>17</sup>

But it is not only critics and scholars who have relied on recordings: musicians too have employed them and continue to do so. Rasula, Katz and Berliner, among others, have pointed out how essential recordings were and still are for the training of musicians, who often copy or play along with their idols.<sup>18</sup> The beginnings of jazz as an identifiable style or genre coincide with the rise of recording: while the various musics that are said to have acted as precursors to jazz, such as blues,

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Attali, ed., *Noise: Political Economy of Music* (University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 85.

<sup>12</sup> Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2008), 73–127, <http://www.amazon.com/execute%bidos/redirect?tag=citeulike07-20&path=ASIN/0415773539>.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>14</sup> Garber, 'Fabulating Jazz', 78.

<sup>15</sup> Rasula, 'The Media of Memory: The Seductive Menace of Records in Jazz History'.

<sup>16</sup> David Horn, 'The Identity of Jazz', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, ed. Mervyn Cooke and David Horn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13.

<sup>17</sup> Scott DeVeaux, 'Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography', *Black American Literature Forum* 25, no. 3 (1991): 556, fn. 15, doi:10.2307/3041812; Kenneth E. Prouty, 'Toward Jazz's "Official" History: The Debates and Discourses of Jazz History Textbooks', *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 1, no. 1 (2010): 19–43.

<sup>18</sup> Rasula 'The Media of Memory: The Seductive Menace of Records in Jazz History', 141–142; Paul F. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation (Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology Series)*, 1st ed. (University Of Chicago Press, 1994), 23–24; Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*, Rev. ed (Berkeley, Calif. ; London: University of California Press, 2010), 81–87.

gospel, ragtime and marching band music, were disseminated orally or through the 'old' technology of notation, jazz was the first musical style to adopt recording as the medium of choice. As Garber, citing James Lincoln Collier, puts it: "jazz would not have developed as it did, perhaps would not have developed at all, were it not for the phonograph."<sup>19</sup> It is the mobility of records (and later broadcasting) that enabled jazz's sudden rise to global prominence and that, as Michael Chanan argues, provided musicians with a tool to adopt a style that had been created many miles away.<sup>20</sup>

This reliance lets the much-vaunted primacy of live performance in jazz appear in a different light. It almost seems as if this emphasis deliberately masks the dependency on technological and commercial mechanisms that haunts the jazz scene like a Freudian repressed memory. This would of course explain the prominence granted to improvisation in jazz, given that it is improvisation that underwrites the claim for the uniqueness and unrepeatability of live performance. Without improvisation, there is little that substantially distinguishes one performance from another. Of course, improvisation wasn't and isn't unique to jazz: most traditional and orally transmitted musics, including many of jazz's precursors mentioned above, involve forms of improvisation. Yet only jazz has elevated improvisation to the status of an ideology.

In the terms provided by Walter Benjamin, one could argue that improvisation is the attempt to recover the "aura" of the unique work of art that had been lost due to the latter's mechanical reproduction.<sup>21</sup> This would also explain why improvisation is transformed from something quite mundane and unremarkable to something that is highly valued, from unmarked to marked: before mechanical reproduction, the uniqueness of the moment of performance went without saying. This would explain the strange and problematic dichotomy between live performance and sound recording in jazz discourse. Although or because they are conceived as absolute opposites, one cannot be thought without the other. Note too how, somewhat paradoxically, improvisation seems to thrive remarkably well on sound recording: in Rasula's words, "[i]t is a perennial irony that we trace the legacy of an improvised music by listening to 'definitive' performances on records."<sup>22</sup> Some, such as the philosopher Lee Brown, have argued that improvisation becomes something else when it is recorded, namely composition.<sup>23</sup> However, this seems a potentially facile way to resolve the paradoxical status of recorded improvisations. For, what is lost in such an explanation is how improvisation not only guarantees the uniqueness and primacy of live performance but also the authenticity of recordings.

The paradoxes do not quite end there: as we will see, live performance is inevitably and essentially a form of repetition, while, contra Benjamin, the *contents* of recording is unique: for instance, although there may be millions of copies in circulation, each of which can be played countless times, there is only one 1941 Duke Ellington recording of Strayhorn's "Take the A Train" with Ray Nance's *original* solo – a solo whose authority and authenticity is every bit as fixed in time as any canonic work by Beethoven. Furthermore, Irving Townsend has explained how Ellington used to compose a lot of the music in the recording studio, so we cannot even assume that the recorded

---

<sup>19</sup> Garber, 'Fabulating Jazz', 74. Cf. also Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*, Rev. ed (Berkeley, Calif. ; London: University of California Press, 2010), 80–93.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Chanan, *Repeated Takes: A Short History of Recording and Its Effect on Music* (London: Verso, 1995), 18–19. Cf. also Bruce Johnson, 'The Jazz Diaspora', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, ed. Mervyn Cooke and David Horn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 33–54.

<sup>21</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), 217–252.

<sup>22</sup> 'The Media of Memory: The Seductive Menace of Records in Jazz History', 144.

<sup>23</sup> Lee Brown, 'Phonography, Repetition and Spontaneity', *Philosophy and Literature* 24, no. 1 (2000): 119–120.

pieces had a previous existence in live performance before they were recorded.<sup>24</sup> In more senses than one, they originate in the recording studio.

The relation between live performance and recording in jazz can therefore be likened to that between speech and text according to Derrida. Like text in relation to speech, recording acts as a supplement, both an addition to and a parasitical substitute for “the self-presence” of live performance, and just as in the case of writing, recording’s subaltern status in relation to live performance is only apparent. When, quoting Rousseau, Derrida writes: “Languages are made to be spoken, writing serves only as a supplement to speech,”<sup>25</sup> we only need to replace “languages” with “music”, “spoken” with “performed” as well as “writing” with “recording” and “speech” with “live performance”, to accurately describe the understanding of the relation between recording and live performance according to the jazz myth (more than in other forms of music). But, as Derrida continues: “Writing [recording] is dangerous from the moment that representation there claims to be presence and the sign of the thing itself. And there is a fatal necessity ... that the substitute make one forget the vicariousness of its own function and make itself pass for the plenitude of a speech [live performance] whose deficiency and infirmity it nevertheless only *supplements* [italics in the original].”<sup>26</sup> In other words, while recordings seem to depend on the primacy of live performance and only add to it, they at the same time threaten to replace it: “But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory [*suppléant*] and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place* [*tant-lieu*].”<sup>27</sup> Note too how Derrida’s characterization of the supplement as “dangerous” – itself indebted to Rousseau – reappears in Rasula’s de Certau-inspired formulation of the “menace” of recording.

## **Comparing Audiovisual Footage from Duke Ellington’s 1969 and 1971 European Tours**

Audiovisual recording complicates this mutually dependent relation between live performance and audio recording. For one thing, audiovisual media offer a stronger illusion of presence by capturing more of the stuff and texture of the real thing. For jazz, this was perhaps a misfortune in disguise: despite the love affair between jazz and film during both their early decades, jazz has generally not fared well in the televisual age. Although its eclipse by rock ‘n’ roll and subsequent waves of popular music may be largely due to other factors, the fact remains that it is not infinitely transferable between different media and that, specifically, it did and does not suit visual mass media particularly well. If Attali and Auslander are right, rock offers the promise that the real thing can be experienced equally on record, on TV or in a stadium concert. Even genres of jazz with genuine mass appeal such as big band swing, by contrast, seem to insist on the primacy of the live event, which anchors the chain of mediatic representations, and such a live event has an inbuilt limit in size beyond which the direct contact with the musicians, which defines it, becomes unsustainable: even if giant video screens had been available earlier, it is easy to see why they seem acceptable in rock but not in jazz

---

<sup>24</sup> Irving Townsend, ‘When Duke Records’, in *The Duke Ellington Reader*, ed. Mark Tucker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 319–324.

<sup>25</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (JHU Press, 1998), 144.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, italics in the original.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

(similarly, with some qualification, show effects such as laser shows, smoke etc.).<sup>28</sup> As a child of the gramophone, jazz is ultimately acoustically defined and any visual excess needs to be reconcilable to the musical text.

Furthermore, as outlined in the introduction, in contrast to the surfeit of staged and/or mimed performance of jazz on film, there is a privileged relation between television and live performance as far as jazz is concerned. A similar comparison can be made between television and sound recording: although there is no shortage of live audio recordings, it seems safe to say that in that field, studio productions are the norm, whereas for television, live performance is the norm. Audiovisual recordings of live performance are therefore arguably 'closer to' live performance than audio recording, in particular studio recording. In addition, as pointed out above, television footage in particular frequently captured relatively mundane events, often several in a row.<sup>29</sup>

The main corpus of my study is formed by the European tours of the Duke Ellington Orchestra in 1969 and 1971. Specifically, there is footage of the following concerts: Berlin 1969, Copenhagen 1969; and, again, Copenhagen 1971 (first set) and Copenhagen 1971 (second set) (see Table 1).<sup>30</sup> There are of course audiovisual documents of many earlier and some later performances, and many of these have also been studied, but they usually feature individual events with little opportunity for direct comparison with similar performances from the same period.

The overwhelming impression of watching these performances is that of a well-rehearsed routine. Every movement, every announcement, every number seems tightly choreographed and slickly presented. This impression probably arises from a combination of factors, but it crucially depends on the medium, and could not arise from an audio recording or indeed witnessing the live performances, at least not to the same extent. One essential element here is the characteristic cruelty of the camera image: in close-ups and medium-shots, the boredom and sheer fatigue of the musicians is clearly visible. This would not have been the case for the live audience members, who are never less than around 5m away from the performers and who are probably pumped up with excitement themselves. This revelation of the routine nature of performance contrasts with the image presented, for instance, in jazz photography, which consistently colludes with the dominant construction of jazz as exciting and spontaneous by showing musicians at moments of extreme intensity.

Likewise, the sense of routine is less likely to emerge from audio recordings: the playing is rarely less than crisp and tight; indeed the musicians are so well drilled that they almost always sound fresh even when the televisual image plainly shows that they are not (the rather advanced age of most of the band members is obviously a factor here). This much is already apparent from watching just one such document, but watching several made at around the same time highlights the element of repetition and routine. This perception is of course only possible with such documents: few people witness several concerts in a row, particularly during tours, and commercial audio recordings

---

<sup>28</sup> One jazz artist who does employ such effects, if, by the standard of rock and pop, to a relatively modest extent, is Pat Matheny. But this primarily illustrates Matheny's position on the borderline between pop and jazz. Compare Jonathan De Souza's contribution in this volume.

<sup>29</sup> There are of course some related audio only documents, such as the *Complete Dean Benedetti Recordings of Charlie Parker*, but these really are exceptional. There may also be extant recordings of radio broadcasts from band residencies, which were such a common feature in jazz's golden age.

<sup>30</sup> *Berlin Concert 1969 [DVD]* (Improv-Jazz, 2006); *The Duke Ellington Masters, 1969 - The First And Second Sets [DVD]* (Quantum Leap, 2001); *The Duke Ellington Masters, 1971 - The First And Second Sets [DVD]* (Quantum Leap, 2001)

of this nature are likewise rare, not least since they would be self-defeating from a commercial perspective.

Interestingly, though, the performances studied do not feature entirely standardized programs; as Timner's listing of recorded performances confirms, this makes these performances representative of Ellington's general practice (1988).<sup>31</sup> There are probably a number of reasons for this variation. One obvious factor is overall length, which may be dictated by the venue, the band's own travel timetable and wider considerations such as the overall schedule of a festival. Furthermore, not all musicians were available at all events; conversely, other gigs featured guest stars (such as Ben Webster in the 1969 Copenhagen concert, who was then living in the city). Even when being able to draw on all musicians, the Duke took pains not to wear individuals out and to also feature them reasonably equally – not to mention his, rather risky, reputed practice of handing demanding solos to drunk players to sober them up.<sup>32</sup> All these reasons would explain a fair amount of variation, and this does not even include the possible attempt to respond to assumed audience expectations or the desire for diversity from the part of the musicians themselves.

Nevertheless, there is naturally a considerable degree of similarity between the programs on a particular tour. For instance, the two Copenhagen concerts played on 7 November 1971 are almost but not quite identical. Similarly, although the latter is considerably longer, the Berlin and Copenhagen programmes from November 1969 share five numbers, "Take the A Train," "La Plus Belle Africaine," "Black Butterfly," "Things Ain't What They Used to Be," "Don't Get around much anymore" – the first five Berlin items, in fact. In general, Ellington tended to program a mixture of the Orchestra's hit tunes, such as "Take the A Train," "Mood Indigo," "Sophisticated Lady," "Don't Get around much anymore," "Satin Doll," "In a Sentimental Mood," or "I've Got it Bad and that Ain't Good" with more recent compositions or less popular numbers.<sup>33</sup> Another common element are medleys of the most popular numbers; allegedly these were a grudging concession on Ellington's part towards audiences' desire for these numbers, whereas he would have preferred to program more of his more recent music, notably his suites.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, these medleys take a great variety of forms and are rarely repeated verbatim. Finally, particularly when featuring guest stars, the Orchestra performed standards or other material composed by or primarily associated with other artists: for instance, in the period covered here (1969-71), Timner lists over 100 performances of "April in Paris;"<sup>35</sup> this is because the Orchestra toured with the organist Wild Bill Davis, who had originally arranged the tune for the Count Basie band. This is something of an exception, however, and in general the vast majority of the Orchestra's material is made up of original numbers.

---

<sup>31</sup> Despite his Herculean efforts, Timner's data do not always seem to be correct and often conflict with the material investigated here. While it is quite possible that TV broadcasts and DVD productions have suppressed material or included material from different performances (there are some interesting cases in point), I have reason to believe that the Copenhagen concerts at least are quite accurately documented and that Timner's records are unlikely to be correct on a number of occasions. Cf. also the 'Sessions' section at <http://www.depanorama.net/> (16 March 2012).

<sup>32</sup> See Bill Crow, *Jazz Anecdotes: Second Time Around*, 2nd ed. (OUP USA, 2005), 275.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Pete Welding, 'On the Road with the Duke Ellington Orchestra', in *The Duke Ellington Reader*, ed. Mark Tucker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 329–330.

<sup>34</sup> This claim is made for instance in the TV documentation 'On the Road with Duke Ellington' and it resurfaces in Hudson 'Duke Ellington's Literary Sources', *American Music* 9, no. 1 (1 April 1991): 22, doi:10.2307/3051533. Although it sounds plausible enough, I have yet to see any evidence for it.

<sup>35</sup> *Ellingtonia the Recorded Music of Duke Ellington and His Sidemen*, 3rd ed. (Metuchen (N.J.) ; Institute of Jazz Studies and Scarecrow Press, 1988), 412.



While there is thus significant variation on a relatively stable theme when it comes to programs, the 'choreography' of the events, including the announcements and banter, is more fixed. For instance, in the longer programs during the 1971 tour, the Duke liked to have his entrance at the end of the opening number, usually "C Jam Blues," a probably deliberately subdued affair, so that the band would appear transformed in his presence. He invariably greeted his audience with the famous words: "thank you very much, Ladies and Gentlemen for such a wonderful, warm welcome. You are very beautiful, very sweet, very gracious and very generous, and all the boys in the band want you to know that we do love you madly." On the 1969 tour he introduced himself as the piano-player playing the first chorus on "Take the A Train" – starting in 6/8 (or a fast 3/4), after which he danced through the rest of the number (the announcement and the triple meter was left out in 1971, although the performance remained the same otherwise; the announcement was also used for other numbers on occasion). During the 1960s, there was also a recurring audience-interaction number in which the Duke teaches the audience to click their fingers and shake their earlobes (!) to "Satin Doll," always using the same script as it were. Everything appears slick, polished and well rehearsed.

What is perhaps more problematic in terms of the jazz myth sketched above is that practically all solos are repeated literally, note for note. Arguably the most striking instance is Cootie Williams's solo in Billie Strayhorn's "Take the A Train," the Orchestra's signature tune. It is to all intents and purposes identical in all the recordings studied here. Indeed, it is only marginally different from Ray Nance's original solo from the audio recording of 1941 – thirty years before some of the recordings studied here, a space of time easily dwarfing the ten-year horizon sketched by Vincent in *Collateral* (see above). [I've got a clip combining the performances. This should be included on the accompanying website (or failing that, short clips from the different performances.)] To be fair, this isn't any old solo. As David Berger, a noted composer and arranger who has transcribed more than 500 of Ellington and Strayhorn's compositions, has put it: "Nance's solo on 'Take the A Train' (1941) was so integral to the composition that he repeated it nightly verbatim. When he left in 1965, Cootie Williams continued playing his successor's solo."<sup>36</sup> Actually, this is not strictly correct: Nance did vary his solo; the famous 1956 Newport recording, for instance, features a number of, very minor, modifications. Similarly, Williams's solo departs slightly from Nance's – although once he settled on his version, he does not appear to have varied it in the slightest. Whatever the details, however, the overall integrity and identity of the original solo is never in doubt; all subsequent versions are *variations of* that solo, not new solos.<sup>37</sup>

On another note, Williams's practice here is not nearly as exceptional as Berger's wording might lead one to believe but very much the norm: practically all the solos in the famous hit numbers are repeated note-for-note; Ben Webster's solo in "Cotton Tail" and Harry Carney's in "Sophisticated Lady" are similar examples. Although his evidential basis was somewhat smaller, this practice has also been noted by Katz, who refers to Schuller's studies of alternate takes and recordings of the same tune often months apart as well as to Tucker's discussion of air checks (radio broadcasts), which show the same tendency for repetition with only slight modifications.<sup>38</sup> Noting similar practices as well as the widespread use of stock arrangements among other musicians he concludes

---

<sup>36</sup> David Berger, 'Braggin' in Brass', *Brass Player* (1994): n.p., <http://www.charlescolin.com/nybc/brag.htm>.

<sup>37</sup> There is an excellent transcription of the solo in Bryan Wendell Bennett, 'Cootie Williams Rex Stewart and Ray Nance: Duke Ellington's Trumpet Soloists 1940-1942', 2009, 50–51.

<sup>38</sup> Katz, *Capturing Sound*, 84 and 90 respectively.

that “early jazz musicians did not improvise in the studio as much as is commonly thought.”<sup>39</sup> As the present study shows, this observation holds not only true of the studio but of live performance as well (at least in later periods), nor is it necessarily confined to early jazz.

While the examples quoted above concern highly arranged big band tunes, the same or at least a similar practice can also be found in small-group solo numbers. For instance, Paul Gonsalves’s solos on “Happy Reunion” in Copenhagen 1971 (second set) and Berlin 1971<sup>40</sup> seem at first glance to fulfill the expectation one may have of a famously ecstatic and virtuosic improviser, with haunting wails and shrieks, followed by sudden flurries of semiquavers. More careful comparison reveals, however, that the two performances are virtually identical; indeed, both uncannily resemble Gonsalves’s 1967 Copenhagen performance (Ellington 2001a) – as well as presumably a long line of still earlier ones. (That said, this being a ballad, the resemblance may have to do with Gonsalves’s practice of melodic ornamentation, rather than harmonic improvisation.) [Here two or three short clips for comparison would be useful too. This is trickier, though, since the most informative comparison would be of the entire piece, and that’s 4 min long – it’s possible to select meaningful 30 sec clips though.]

Genuine improvisation as traditionally understood plays a relatively marginal role, often restricted to relatively simple jam numbers, such as “Triplicate” and “Quadruped” (for the band’s tenor saxophonists), or, also featuring the tenors, the interlude between “Diminuendo in Blue” and “Crescendo in Blue” (the occasion for Gonsalves’s legendary performance at the 1956 Newport Festival). Drummer Rufus Jones is frequently given a solo number (entitled “Come off the Veldt,” although it only consists of a drum solo with some closing chords at the end). These all often come across a bit like variety show effects (the ending of “Quadruped” typically consists of the soloists playing simultaneously in wild abandon and having to be interrupted by Ellington, since they have supposedly lost control).

The Orchestra’s practice is quite subtly varied, more so than common understandings of improvisation and performance practice would seem to allow. For instance, “La plus belle Africaine” features three solos in its central section, taken by Procope (Cl), Gaskin (Db) and Carney (BSax) respectively, but while Procope and Carney repeat essentially the same solos in Berlin that they have already played in Copenhagen, Gaskin’s solo is absolutely distinct on both occasions. [More clips?] These differences may be due to personal preference or period style (Gaskin was a much younger player and more in tune with modern and small-group jazz than the veterans Procope and Carney), although they could also reflect the differing functions of the respective sections in the composition as a whole, in that Ellington may have composed Procope and Carney’s solos as integral parts of the piece. The fact that the latter more closely resemble the composition’s overall style, notably its exoticist sound, may suggest that they were indeed composed, but it is by all means possible that Procope and Carney’s greater familiarity with Ellington’s style allowed them to improvise in a stylistically coherent manner and commit their performances to memory.

It should also be acknowledged that improvised solos are not the only kind of difference between recordings and live performances, or indeed between different instances of the latter. There are also interesting variations in arrangements, the aforementioned development of Ellington’s intro to “Take the A Train” being a case in point.

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>40</sup> The concert on 5 November 1971 in Berlin does not appear to be available as such. However, excerpts, somewhat surreptitiously merged with numbers from the Berlin concerts from 1969 and 1973, were broadcast on German TV. This programme was also marketed as a DVD by JazzDoor (JD 11023), although this seems no longer to be available. See <<http://www.depanorama.net/dems/052a.htm>> (18 March 2012).

It would therefore not be fair to accuse Ellington of playing it safe and of simply repeating essentially the same show night after night. There is considerable variation, and the musicianship on display is always impressive. Nor is there a shortage of memorable moments: Gonsalves's rendition of "Happy Reunion," for instance, is breath-taking, whether or not it was spontaneously improvised in the moment or evolved over a longer period and was at least partially memorized (no mean feat in itself, given its length and complexity). Indeed, as I will explain in more detail below, I am not at all sure why such a distinction should matter. Be that as it may, the elements of repetition and routine are hardly negligible and it is not enough to regard them as inessential or as the background in front of which the unrepeatable moments emerge with greater clarity. They represent the bedrock of the performances and account for the vast majority of musicians' professional lives as well as audiences' experiences. They therefore deserve some attention.

Some of the figures are staggering. Timner's listings detail some 912 performances of "Take the A Train," of which 424 are almost certain to have featured Cootie Williams as soloist.<sup>41</sup> These figures constitute only a fraction of the number of actual performances, since Timner only lists recordings, not unrecorded performances, and many of the former will also have passed into oblivion (although, on the other hand, some reported performances consist only of a few bars, literally as a signature tune, and thus don't include the trumpet solo). All the indications are that, except for (often slight) variations to Ellington's piano intro, all these performances are to all intents and purposes identical. Indeed, rather than encouraging variation and spontaneity, these kinds of figures seem to discourage them: if you have played "Take the A Train" literally hundreds of times, how can you really come up with something new each time, particularly since the original solo is almost impossible to beat? Chances are, furthermore, that the audience members have paid to hear just that solo. It is easy to be snifty about such attitudes, but let us not forget that, despite the Orchestra's relentless touring, most audience members will have seen the band for the first and probably last time. Who can blame them for wanting to hear the music they know and love from records in arrangements that they recognize? For these audiences, Ellington does exactly what Attali and Auslander say about rock, but what the latter and Garber regard as incompatible with jazz: recreate an experience in live performance for an audience that is used to recordings.

### **Improvisation, Repetition, and Spontaneity**

Admittedly, big band swing in general and the Duke Ellington Orchestra in particular – notably in their twilight years – can hardly be regarded as representative of 'jazz.' In this sense, it may not be revolutionary to suggest that in this instance the Orchestra's practice is more akin to what Auslander and Garber associate with rock than with jazz. At the very least however, these observations remind us of the enormous diversity of styles and practices that are grouped under labels such as 'jazz' and 'rock' and of the need to be wary of erecting such binary opposites. Furthermore, it should give us pause for thought that Ellington's practice is largely incompatible with the jazz myth as it was outlined earlier. After all, Ellington is hardly a marginal figure but is routinely mentioned as one of the 'greats.' Indeed, Whyton's aforementioned critique of the jazz myth devotes a chapter to him, without however remarking on some of the ironies and paradoxes involved.<sup>42</sup> In this sense, the ideal of spontaneity may not be more representative of 'jazz as a whole' than the carefully planned and polished performance characteristic of Ellington. Both represent relatively extreme points on a scale but neither really stands for 'the essence of jazz.'

---

<sup>41</sup> Timner, *Ellingtonia the Recorded Music of Duke Ellington and His Sidemen*, 451–454 and 475–482.

<sup>42</sup> Whyton, *Jazz Icons: Heroes, Myths and the Jazz Tradition*, 127–154.

In saying this I do not in any way wish to suggest, with Hodeir, that improvisation is inessential for jazz or to denigrate the skill and art of great improvisers.<sup>43</sup> Rather, I am wondering why one element of jazz – improvisation – which is essential in some forms of it, has been elevated to a distinguishing criterion for the whole genre. To give just one example, the certainty with which Giddins and DeVeaux privilege improvisation, stating right at the outset that “[j]azz musicians are inventing a musical statement (improvising) in that space and in that moment” is startling.<sup>44</sup> One reason for this is arguably the centrality of bebop for most understandings of jazz, which DeVeaux had earlier commented on, stating that “contemporary conceptions of the term *jazz* have [largely] been shaped in bebop’s image.”<sup>45</sup> For bebop, the centrality of improvisation is beyond dispute. Another, possibly related, reason may be found in jazz’s fraught relations with classical music: where jazz was constructed as an art of improvisation, classical music was seen to be all about composition. This opposition is not ‘in the nature’ of either music: just as jazz often involves sophisticated composition, the performance of classical music included important elements of improvisation well into the nineteenth century and beyond – indeed, it appears as if the counter-example of jazz was instrumental in instilling an ideal of *Werktreue* (fidelity to the score) in classical music. The problem is therefore not that these characterizations are incorrect, but that they are one-sided and that each music was constructed as the mirror image of the other. In the process, the tendencies that separated them – the *relative* importance of improvisation in jazz and composition in classical music – were regarded as absolute and as defining.

But more seems to be at stake, and this concerns what we mean by improvisation and how it manifests itself, and, more importantly, how it is enacted for an audience. Improvisation is a much broader term than common conceptions, including those, propagated, despite their best intentions, by Giddins and DeVeaux,<sup>46</sup> would admit, and its association with spontaneous expressivity in the moment according to the jazz myth is by no means unequivocal. Tirro has argued that players develop improvisations over time in repeated performances, which differ only little from one another.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Kernfeld has established a useful distinction between performers such as Charlie Parker, who “never repeated an entire solo, and [whose] successive performances based on the same tune are sometimes startlingly different,” and Louis Armstrong, who, “once having arrived at a successful approach, might repeat the contour and many details of a solo in different performances.”<sup>48</sup> In his authoritative study of improvisation, Paul Berliner discusses the different types of repetition employed by musicians and the roles they play in more detail.<sup>49</sup> All the examples discussed here could be the result of a process of developing a solo over many instances as described by Tirro, and the difference between Parker and Armstrong, which Kernfeld observes, might account for that between Gaskin and Carney and Procope respectively (note, too, that the latter are roughly of Armstrong’s generation). If we accept broad conceptions of improvisation, such as Tirro’s or Kernfeld’s account of Armstrong, improvisation’s much-vaunted connection with

---

<sup>43</sup> Cf. André Hodeir, *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence* (Grove Press, 1956), 235–36.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Giddins and DeVeaux, *Jazz*, 2.

<sup>45</sup> DeVeaux, ‘Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography’, 538.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Giddins and DeVeaux, *Jazz*, 25–41.

<sup>47</sup> Frank Tirro, ‘Constructive Elements in Jazz Improvisation’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 27, no. 2 (1 July 1974): 297.

<sup>48</sup> Bruno Nettl et al., ‘Improvisation’, *Grove Music Online* (n.d.).

<sup>49</sup> Paul F. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (*Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology Series*), 1st ed. (University Of Chicago Press, 1994), 537–542, <http://www.amazon.com/execute/redirect?tag=citeulike07-20&path=ASIN/0226043819>.

spontaneity and unrepeatability needs to be called into question, however: little really occurs 'in the moment' here.

There is no way of knowing for certain which parts were originally improvised and which ones were composed, but a more fundamental question would be why we place so much importance on how the music played by a performer came into being in the first place. Is it not enough to appreciate it on its merit? It would appear as if improvisation is usually described almost exclusively from the production, not the reception side. In other words, most accounts are concerned with how musicians improvise, how they learn the skill and how they apply it in the moment. But the question remains how audiences can tell whether music is improvised and what difference this makes. Is improvised music better and more enjoyable than pre-composed music? Do we appreciate it more if we know or assume that it is improvised because we know that it is a difficult skill?

In a recent, extremely thought-provoking paper, Auslander suggests that, in fact, audiences cannot distinguish between improvised and non-improvised music since there is no absolute difference between the two. Instead, "the perception of improvisation arises from the social relationship between performers and audience rather than the formal or ontological characteristics of the music."<sup>50</sup> In other words, the concept of improvisation is dependent on a 'social arrangement' between performers and audiences, whereby the latter accept as improvisation what is signaled to them as such, regardless of whether they believe it to be so. This Auslander likens to Goffman's theory of theatrical representation, which similarly relies on audiences' acceptance of the fictional world they are presented with.

I believe that Auslander's characterization of jazz improvisation as a social arrangement, rather than as something defined solely by the performer's practice, is correct, and it is fully congruent with the observations I have made when watching video footage of jazz performance. However, it again seems to describe small group and modern jazz better than big band swing, so we may have to adapt it a little. To be specific, I am not sure whether audiences regarded Cootie Williams's solo in "Take the A Train" as an improvisation, even if only by convention rather than conviction, or whether they even asked themselves this question. What characterizes his playing is its expressive intensity and presence, and it is this which I would argue audiences respond to. In jazz, these qualities are frequently linked to improvisation, to the extent that a causal connection is suggested ("jazz is intense and exciting *because* it is improvised"), but the link is by no means necessary or intrinsic. Among other things, improvisation may therefore be a means to an end, an end that could conceivably be achieved in other ways.

In this sense, what the Duke Ellington Orchestra does is dramatize ideas of spontaneity and expressive intensity, with or without improvisation. And in this regard, Williams's solo does not disappoint. What he plays has the hallmarks of the improvisatory in terms of phrasing and expressive gesture – and Nance may originally have improvised his solo, although that is hard to say – but what is at least equally important is Williams's enactment: standing as a soloist before the band, he sways in line with the contour and shape of the music and his facial expression likewise seems to reflect the emotional qualities of the music. Although the expressive content is different, a similar point can be made about Gonsalves in "Happy Reunion:" eyes closed in extreme concentration, he convulsively sways and twitches with his upper body, to the extent that his

---

<sup>50</sup> 'Jazz Improvisation as a Social Arrangement', in *Music as Performance: New Perspectives Across the Disciplines*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Richard Pettengill (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, forthcoming), n.p. I have only become aware of Auslander's piece, unpublished at the time of writing, in the advanced stages of the writing of this text.

balance seems precarious (his shoulder movements, in particular in his right shoulder, which holds the instrument, are especially expressive). It is the expressive intensity of these performances and their spontaneous qualities that matter more here than whether the music literally is improvised or not. And this expressive intensity is derived from many factors, such as the placing of the soloist in relation to the ensemble and their body language and facial expression, as much as from the music played.

In other words, I am far from suggesting that Williams or Gonsalves are ‘faking it.’ Theirs are convincing performances, and this is what matters. Although most audiences are probably cognizant of jazz as an art of improvisation, which arguably adds to its appeal, the latter’s (temporary) absence is not fatal. An informed audience member in an Ellington show attends the performance in the expectation of seeing a slick professional operation in which not much out of the ordinary is *likely* to but almost anything *can* happen.

### **The Giants of Swing and the Illusion of Spontaneity**

To illustrate what I have called the performance of spontaneity, let us turn to a style that is more inherently dependent on improvisation, namely hard-bop. While their style is ‘edgier’ and the on-stage behavior more informal, the Giants of Jazz use some of the same performance techniques that we have seen at work in shows by the Duke Ellington Orchestra. And here, too, the relation between improvisation and spontaneity is more complicated than would at first glance be expected, and many elements that appear spontaneous are technically not. Table 2 shows the programs of the two concerts under discussion here, in Prague and, again, Copenhagen.<sup>51</sup> The Prague concert features one more piece, “Woody’n You,” and this seems to have also led to a slight reordering of the numbers, but otherwise the programs are identical.<sup>52</sup> More fundamentally, the same is true of the succession of solos and, broadly, the overall length of items. The only exception to this seems to be “Around Midnight;” yet in actual fact, the DVD production of the Copenhagen set starts mid-piece, in Monk’s solo, presumably after Stitt and Winding’s solos, so the difference is only apparent. Even the announcements are essentially the same.

Of course, what jazz fans really care about is the music itself. But here too the similarities are striking. Many solos include large sections of material, over and above the occasional ‘lick,’ that is largely unchanged between the two dates. There are also a couple of conspicuous elements that occur at the same moments across the two concerts. For instance, in the closing flourishes to “Round Midnight,” Gillespie plays a cadenza which, rather incongruously and to evidently deliberately humorous effect, includes a military fanfare. Likewise, Winding’s solo in “Tour de Force,” after a more conventional melodic chorus, includes a section in which he rapidly arpeggiates between some of the upper partials on each slide position, moving from position 1 chromatically to position 3 and back up again (the camera image neatly clarifies the nature of the musical material here).<sup>53</sup> These are just some of the elements that can be readily identified across the different

---

<sup>51</sup> Dizzy Gillespie et al., *The Giants of Jazz* ([S.l.]: Impro-Jazz, 2006); Thelonious Monk et al., *Giants of Jazz Copenhagen 1971* (Europe: Standing Ovation, 2009).

<sup>52</sup> The concert given by the same musicians under the name Minton’s Playhouse All-Stars in Berlin on 4 November 1971 is again fundamentally the same, although it includes an additional item, ‘Blue ‘n’ Boogie’ – although this could have been performed on other dates too, but not included on DVD productions. See <http://www.monkbook.com/sessionography/sessionography-1970-1975/> (15 March 2012). Although the recording seems no longer to be commercially available, I have heard the concert by chance in a radio broadcast.

<sup>53</sup> Again, the Berlin concert completed the series in this regard.

recordings, and although there is also some variation, they appear typical of the musicians' practice, rather than exceptional. [\[present clips on accompanying website?\]](#)

Again, it is not my intention here to accuse the musicians of 'faking it.' There is no reason to doubt that what is being played is the result of improvisation in the sense described by Tirro, Berliner or Kernfeld (when referring to Armstrong), and the ability demonstrated to recall musical material and use it at the right moment in the 'musical flow' is impressive by any standard. Nor is this to deny that there are plenty of moments of inspired spontaneity. The latter are just as likely to concern the ensemble interplay between the musicians (a phenomenon superbly studied by Ingrid Monson)<sup>54</sup> rather than solo display. One of my favorite moments is an extended dialogue between Gillespie and Blakey's bass drum in the Copenhagen version of "Tour de Force" (not present in the same way in the earlier Prague concert). [\[Clip on accompanying website\]](#)

What I wish to emphasize, then, is that, although improvisation happens 'in the moment,' that moment may not be the one the audience are witnessing. This affects our understanding of improvisation's relation to spontaneity and the nature of the social arrangement Auslander describes.

An important case in point is how the musicians perform spontaneity for the audience. Two numbers are particularly noteworthy in this regard: "Tin Tin Deo" and the closing title "A Night in Tunisia." "Tin Tin Deo" is essentially an extended duet between Gillespie and McKibbon (although all musicians except Blakey join for the closing theme). The piece starts with a lengthy cadenza by Gillespie (which, for the record, uses some shared material in both instances, but is not identical), after which McKibbon enters with a riff or vamp, which provides the backbone of the piece. To this Gillespie plays the actual tune, followed by improvised variations (in Prague, Monk can be heard comping for a small number of bars here, whereas he only joins at the very end on the Copenhagen date). Gillespie then briefly drops out to walk over to the piano and, in turn, accompany McKibbon, primarily with rhythmic comping, before returning to his previous position at the front of the stage to lead on the closing theme. [\[clips would be useful here, but the piece is too long for this to work effectively\]](#)

"A Night in Tunisia" showcases Blakey. His solo comes last and is the most extended and expressive, after which the musicians play the closing theme, followed by the usual flourishes. Instead of leaving it at that, however, Blakey keeps soloing on an otherwise empty stage, as the other musicians leave. The implication is clear: Blakey is supposedly so caught up in the moment that he just can't stop playing – not unlike Ellington's tenorists in "Quadruped," clearly something of a trope.

In both cases, audiences are clearly led to believe that the musicians act spontaneously, that Gillespie feels a sudden urge to accompany McKibbon on the piano and that Blakey's innate musicality fires him up to continue playing. Both are, however, less 'authentic' musical expressions than calculated elements of showmanship that are precisely planned and executed (as the similarity in durations indicates). These examples underline the nature of Auslander's social arrangement (he cites a similar example of a country singer telling his audience "we're gonna be here all night," which he as well as his audience know full well isn't literally true). The question is not whether the audience truly believe that the musicians genuinely act at the spur of the moment; it is quite enough for that illusion to be created credibly, just like actors don't need to persuade us that they really are

---

<sup>54</sup> Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction (Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology)*, 1st ed. (University Of Chicago Press, 1997), <http://www.amazon.com/execute/redirect?tag=citeulike07-20&path=ASIN/0226534782>.

who they enact but only to perform that illusion convincingly. And for this to work requires genuine skill. After all, although these elements are not truly spontaneous, they do break the normal rules of stage performance in ways that less experienced or charismatic performers would be unwise to attempt. The leisurely unfolding of “Tin Tin Deo,” with its long stretches of sparse duetting and *a capella* playing, requires superior stage-presence and confidence in the integrity of the musical material. Likewise, not every drummer can afford continuing to perform on an empty stage, without this appearing anticlimactic. The relaxed and confident nature of the musicians is also apparent in what one might call unintended moments of spontaneity. For instance, during his opening cadenza in “Tin Tin Deo” in Copenhagen, we can see Gillespie’s facial muscles clenching in preparation for a high note. However, he proceeds to lower his trumpet, shakes his head mumbling something unintelligible, lackadaisically wipes his face and mouthpiece with his trademark handkerchief, before leisurely raising the horn to his lips again, blowing the high note and continuing playing. Again, not many performers possess the chutzpa of interrupting their solo in this way, even or in particular when playing unaccompanied.

### **Conclusion: Jazz, Sincerity, and Romanticism**

What ultimately interests me here, as in the performances of the Duke Ellington Orchestra, is how an illusion of spontaneity is created for an audience; improvisation, I would argue, is part and parcel of this type of performance. The phrase ‘illusion of spontaneity’ has a certain pedigree, of course. It is common in discussions of the theatre and acting, and this linkage with a different type of performance is certainly relevant here: note for instance, Auslander’s comparison of the social arrangement inherent in jazz performance with Goffman’s theory of theatrical illusion;<sup>55</sup> similarly, Marshall Soules has usefully compared improvisation in jazz and in the theatre.<sup>56</sup> In both cases, there is a dialogic interaction between performers and audience which is integral to the performance as such. This, it seems to me, is too often overlooked in discussions of jazz. As with any kind of performance, to understand jazz improvisation it is not enough to study what musicians are doing; the context in which they are acting, the audiences for which they perform and the expectations the latter hold are equally important. Audio-visual documents are particularly helpful in providing a more holistic perspective.

Another area in which the phrase ‘illusion of spontaneity’ is frequently invoked is Romantic poetry. For instance, drawing attention to the rhetoric underlying the illusion of spontaneity, Robert Langbaum argues that “[t]he point ... in understanding the form of romantic poetry is to understand how the sincere, unpremeditated effect is achieved,” emphasizing further how the Romantic ideals of “artlessness, spontaneity, and sincerity” are bound up with “the poetry of art, even of artifice and insincerity.”<sup>57</sup> Jerome McGann similarly emphasizes how Lord Byron drew attention to the rhetoric through which “the illusion in the Romantic Idea(l) of spontaneity and artlessness” is maintained, pointing out that “Romantic sincerity only presents itself as unpremeditated verse; in fact it involves

---

<sup>55</sup> Auslander, ‘Jazz Improvisation as a Social Arrangement’.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Improvising Character: Jazz, the Actor and Protocols of Improvisation’, in *The Other Side of Nowhere: Jazz, Improvisation, and Communities in Dialogue*, ed. Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 268–297.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Woodrow Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (Norton, 1963), 33-35.



a rhetoric, and contractual bonds with its audiences, which are just as determinate and artful as the verse of Donne, or Rochester, or Pope.”<sup>58</sup>

What is described here as “rhetoric” is not unlike what I earlier called “performance” or “construction,” and “the contractual bonds” with audiences are akin to the “social arrangement” that Auslander has analyzed. It seems to me that the lesson drawn by Langbaum and McGann for the study of romantic poetry, namely the need to differentiate between the effect created by the art and how it is achieved, has yet to be fully heeded by jazz studies. Despite the more critical turn of the ‘New Jazz Studies,’ the field seems reluctant to shed some of the cherished beliefs about sincerity, spontaneity and immediacy associated with the jazz myth.

Yet, just like Romantic poetry is more than an immediate gushing forth of feeling, jazz is more than direct spontaneous self-expression. A deeper understanding of both art forms requires us to study how the effect of spontaneity is achieved, and this may involve questioning whether what appears spontaneous really happens at the spur of the moment – the moment we are witnessing, to be more accurate. It is time, therefore, to take a broader look at jazz as a culture and jazz performance as a communicative process in which audiences are equal partners and in which the media of recording and transmission are not transparent but shape the overall process.

## Bibliography

- Attali, Jacques, ed. *Noise: Political Economy of Music*. University of Minnesota Press, 1985.
- Auslander, Philip. ‘Jazz Improvisation as a Social Arrangement’. In *Music as Performance: New Perspectives Across the Disciplines*, edited by Nicholas Cook and Richard Pettengill, n.p. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, forthcoming.
- . *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2008.  
<http://www.amazon.com/execute%bidos/redirect?tag=citeulike07-20&path=ASIN/0415773539>.
- Benjamin, Walter. ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’. In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, 217–252. London: Pimlico, 1999.
- Bennett, Bryan Wendell. ‘Cootie Williams Rex Stewart and Ray Nance: Duke Ellington’s Trumpet Soloists 1940-1942’, 2009.
- Berger, David. ‘Braggin’ in Brass’. *Brass Player* (1994). <http://www.charlescolin.com/nybc/brag.htm>. *Berlin Concert 1969 [DVD]*. Improv-Jazz, 2006.
- Berliner, Paul F. *Thinking in Jazz : The Infinite Art of Improvisation (Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology Series)*. 1st ed. University Of Chicago Press, 1994.  
<http://www.amazon.com/execute%bidos/redirect?tag=citeulike07-20&path=ASIN/0226043819>.
- Brown, Lee, Brown, and Lee. ‘Phonography, Repetition and Spontaneity’. *Philosophy and Literature* 24, no. 1 (2000): 111–125.
- Chan, Michael. *Repeated Takes: A Short History of Recording and Its Effect on Music*. London: Verso, 1995.
- Crow, Bill. *Jazz Anecdotes: Second Time Around*. 2nd ed. OUP USA, 2005.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. JHU Press, 1998.
- DeVeaux, Scott. ‘Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography’. *Black American Literature Forum* 25, no. 3 (1991): 525–560. doi:10.2307/3041812.
- Ellington, Duke. *Ellington at Newport 1956*. Sonybmg, 1999.
- Garber, Frederick. ‘Fabulating Jazz’. In *Representing Jazz*, edited by Krin Gabbard, 70–103. Duke University Press Books, 1995.

---

<sup>58</sup> Jerome McGann and James Soderholm, ‘Private Poetry, Public Deception’, in *Byron and Romanticism*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 114 and 117 respectively.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511484384>.

- Giddins, Gary, and Scott DeVeaux. *Jazz*. W. W. Norton & Co., 2009.
- Gillespie, Dizzy, Thelonious Monk, Kai Winding, Sonny Stitt, Al McKibbin, Art Blakey, and Giants of Jazz (Musical group). *The Giants of Jazz*. [S.l.]: Impro-Jazz, 2006.
- Gioia, Ted. *The Imperfect Art: Reflections on Jazz and Modern Culture*. Reprint. Oxford Paperbacks, 1991.
- Hodeir, André. *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence*. Grove Press, 1956.
- Horn, David. 'The Identity of Jazz'. In *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, edited by Mervyn Cooke and David Horn, 9–32. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Hudson, Theodore R. 'Duke Ellington's Literary Sources'. *American Music* 9, no. 1 (1 April 1991): 20–42. doi:10.2307/3051533.
- Katz, Mark. *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*. Rev. ed. Berkeley, Calif. ; London: University of California Press, 2010.
- Langbaum, Robert Woodrow. *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition*. Norton, 1963.
- McGann, Jerome, and James Soderholm. 'Private Poetry, Public Deception'. In *Byron and Romanticism*. Cambridge Studies in Romanticism. Cambridge University Press, 2002. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511484384>.
- Monk, Thelonious, Dizzy Gillespie, Sonny Stitt, Kai Winding, Al McKibbin, and Art Blakey. *Giants of Jazz Copenhagen 1971*. Europe: Standing Ovation, 2009.
- Monson, Ingrid. *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction (Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology)*. 1st ed. University Of Chicago Press, 1997. <http://www.amazon.com/execute%bidirectional?tag=citeulike07-20&path=ASIN/0226534782>.
- Morton, John Fass. *Backstory in Blue: Ellington at Newport '56*. Rutgers University Press, 2008.
- Nettl, Bruno, Rob C. Wegman, Imogene Horsley, Michael Collins, Stewart A. Carter, Greer Garden, Robert E. Seletsky, et al. 'Improvisation'. *Grove Music Online* (n.d.).
- Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. Routledge, 1993. <http://www.amazon.com/execute%bidirectional?tag=citeulike07-20&path=ASIN/0415068223>.
- Rasula, Jed. 'The Media of Memory: The Seductive Menace of Records in Jazz History'. In *Jazz Among the Discourses*, edited by Krin Gabbard, 134–162. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.
- Soules, Marshall. 'Improvising Character: Jazz, the Actor and Protocols of Improvisation'. In *The Other Side of Nowhere: Jazz, Improvisation, and Communities in Dialogue*, edited by Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble, 268–297. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004.
- The Duke Ellington Masters, 1969 - The First And Second Sets [DVD]*. Quantum Leap, 2001.
- Timner, W. E. *Ellingtonia the Recorded Music of Duke Ellington and His Sidemen*. 3rd ed. Metuchen (N.J.) ; Institute of Jazz Studies and Scarecrow Press,, 1988.
- Tirro, Frank. 'Constructive Elements in Jazz Improvisation'. *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 27, no. 2 (1 July 1974): 285–305.
- Townsend, Irving. 'When Duke Records'. In *The Duke Ellington Reader*, edited by Mark Tucker, 319–324. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Welding, Pete. 'On the Road with the Duke Ellington Orchestra'. In *The Duke Ellington Reader*, edited by Mark Tucker, 326–332. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Whyton, Tony. *Jazz Icons: Heroes, Myths and the Jazz Tradition*. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press, 2010. <http://www.amazon.com/execute%bidirectional?tag=citeulike07-20&path=ASIN/0521896452>.

## Discography, Filmography

- Ellington, Duke. 1999. *Ellington at Newport 1956* [CD]. Sonybmg. 88697492052
- . 2001a. *The Duke Ellington Masters, 1967. The First and Second Sets from DR TV Centre Copenhagen* [DVD]. Quantum Leap. QLDVD 0249
- . 2001b. *The Duke Ellington Masters, 1971: The First and Second Sets from Tivoli's Concert Hall Copenhagen* [DVD]. Quantum Leap. QLDVD 0253

- . 2009. *The Duke Ellington Masters, 1969: In Concert at the Tivoli Gardens Concert Hall Copenhagen* [DVD]. Quantum Leap. QLDVD 0252
- . 2006. *Berlin Concert 1969* [DVD]. Impro-Jazz. IJ 509
- The Giants of Jazz. 2009. *Giants of Jazz: Copenhagen 1971* [DVD]. Standing Ovation. Oh! 44649
- . 2006. *The Giants of Jazz: Live in Prague 1971* [DVD]. Impro-Jazz. IJ 512