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Montreal Jazz Vocalists: The Relationship Between Their Status and Improvisation, and the Canons of Jazz

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with jazz singing as it is experienced in Montreal. It examines the interplay between social and musical aspects of vocal jazz.

The first chapter deals with the canons of jazz, that is, the established standards within or against which jazz singers construct their vision of vocal jazz. The second chapter examines the status of singers within the larger jazz community, and that of the voice within the jazz ensemble. The third chapter deals with the musical practices of vocalists and techniques in vocal improvisation.

This thesis shows how the status of jazz vocalists is inextricably tied to issues of gender and race, and is therefore embroiled in the politics of representation of the jazz world. In the process, the specificity of jazz singing is not documented. The cultural review of vocal jazz in Montreal serves to bring some changes in this regard. It also augments the appreciation of the complexities and subtleties of jazz singing.

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INTRODUCTION

In most publications, jazz is treated as an instrumental genre.[1] However, there is evidence of the vast contribution singers have made to the jazz idiom.[2] Unfortunately, there exists a long-standing myth, stemming from the Big Band era of the 1920s through the 1940s, that singers are a necessary evil in jazz (Brackett 1995; O'Brien 1996; Levey 1983). While they have been credited with boosting the popularity of the genre, they have been historically, as a rule, paid less than instrumentalists, and treated as little more than ornaments for the band, often refered to as, among others, 'chirpers,' 'warblers' or 'canaries' (Dahl 1989; Gossett 1980). As a jazz singer, it is my experience that this myth persists and can be felt in the jazz community today.[3]

This study, based on an in-depth ethnography, focusses on four of the top jazz vocalists in Montreal, as well as two instrumentalists who have worked extensively with singers. Jeri Brown, Ranee Lee and Karen Young are three of Canada's most widely recognized and accomplished jazz vocalists. Brown and Lee are natives of the

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[1] For more information, please see Hodeir (1975), Coker (1980), Gridley (1985), Dean (1992), and Gioia (1997).

[2] For more information, please see Harrison (1988), Dahl (1992 and 1996), Berliner (1994), Antelyes (1994), O'Brien (1996), and Lees (1998).

[3] By the jazz community, I mean anyone who is involved in jazz, from the musicians (including singers) to the critics, scholars, industry people, and audiences.

United States who immigrated to Canada in 1989 and 1970 respectively. Lee now makes her home in Brossard (a city near Montreal), while Brown maintains residences in Halifax, Montreal and Paris. Young is a native of Montreal and now lives in Hudson (also a city near Montreal), where she grew up. In his own right, Ernie Nelson is highly regarded by the Montreal jazz community for his long experience as a jazz singer and keyboard player in both his native United States and in Montreal, where he immigrated in 1968. He is best known for his work with guitarist Sonny Greenwich, and is esteemed for his dedication to jazz pedagogy. Guitarist Rod Ellias and pianist Lorraine Desmarais are two of Canada's top jazz musicians, both born in the province of Québec.

Apart from being considered an instrumental form since its beginnings, jazz music has generally been considered by the jazz community to be a masculine genre (Hodeir 1975; Gossett 1980; Placksin 1988; Miller 1991; Dahl 1996). The many histories of jazz that focus overwhelmingly on the contributions of male jazz musicians are testimony to that (for example: Tirro 1977; Collier 1978; Megill and Demory 1984; Gridley 1985; Gioia 1997).

However, from the time blues singers emerge on the American music scene in the 1920s, women have occupied a major role in vocal jazz. Although men such as Louis Armstrong, Joe Williams, Mel Torme and Frank Sinatra have had great commercial success with jazz vocals, there is little doubt that women, from Bessie Smith to Diana Krall, have dominated that particular segment of the jazz world. The *Mercury Records Songbook* (1995) compact disc collection, for instance, features seventeen vocalists. Fourteen of them are women, and they perform ninety-one of the one hundred-and-one songs included in the collection. In fact, most women in jazz have traditionally tended to be singers, although this does appear to be changing gradually.

To address the apparent division between male instrumentalists and female vocalists in the jazz scene, this study will explore the following questions: What are the forces determining the canons to which jazz vocalists must seemingly comply? What are the various definitions of a jazz singer? What role do they play in bands? How would they characterize their interactions with instrumentalists? How do their musical practices differ from those of instrumentalists? Why are most jazzwomen singers?

This study focuses on vocal jazz. The goal is to show how vocalists' status, self-definition, musical practices and learning strategies are shaped in relationship with the canons of jazz, whether in the form of compliance or outright rejection; to show how such canons discriminate in tandem with issues of gender and race; and to explain the lack of documentation.

In an attempt to fill this gap in the literature, I will examine the musical practices of jazz singers to introduce some of the musical values of vocal jazz, as articulated by the artists themselves, both singers and non-singers. I will then show how these values are being transmitted to up-and-coming jazz vocalists.

The Interpretive Framework

Gary Tomlinson, in his article "Cultural Dialogics and Jazz: A White Historian Signifies" (1991), argues that the jazz community has repeated the mistakes of European "art music" by attempting to draw a border between what is and is not "real" jazz, based on the German canon of Western classical music. While Tomlinson's arguments are made within the boundaries of instrumental jazz, I intend to extend them to include vocal jazz.

In the discussion of musical canons, I owe much to the work of Susan McClary (1991), Philip Brett (1994) and Susan Cook (1992). Each have, in the respective

domains of gender relations, sexuality and race relations, stated what is best articulated by Brett: "It is not the evidence, but the right to interpret it, to which we have to lay claim" (1994, 23). As I share the position of these and other authors on the topic of canons, I will attempt to promote the recognition of difference as an integral component of jazz.

Several authors have written about the ways in which jazz singers have chosen or felt obliged to "reinvent" themselves in reaction to the conventions that were being imposed on them (for example: Moore 1989; Antelyes 1994; Brackett 1995; O'Brien 1996). For instance, in the 1940s, Anita O'Day fought for the right to wear a band uniform instead of the customary formal gown. Her goal was to be treated as any other musician, but "for many years she was considered to be a 'mannish' lesbian, because she refused to be [a] mere bandstand decoration" (O'Brien 1996, 76).

In fact, self-reinvention was not exclusive to vocalists. Billy Tipton is an extreme example of a jazz instrumentalist (a pianist) who reinvented herself by living out her life as a man in order to practice her art without the restrictions imposed on her by gender norms (Sarandon, 1997).

Aside from newspaper clippings on various artists and important events, notably the Montreal International Jazz Festival, very little has been written on the Montreal jazz scene. One exception is John Gilmore's *Swinging in Paradise: The Story of Jazz in Montreal* (1988). By the author's own admission, however, this book excludes any mention of vocal jazz, stating that "few, if any, Montreal singers during the period under study [early 1900s to early 1970s] regarded themselves as jazz musicians, participated in jam sessions, or improvised at any length" (p.15).

Mark Miller is incontestably the most prolific writer on Canadian jazz. In his book *Jazz in Canada: Fourteen Lives* (1982), Miller focusses on fourteen male instrumentalists. In *Boogie, Pete and the Senator: Canadian Musicians in Jazz: The*

Eighties (1987), he allocates only one chapter to a woman, namely, Karen Young. Otherwise, like most other writers on jazz, Miller focusses almost exclusively on male musicians (e.g. *Cool Blues: Charlie Parker in Canada, 1953* (1989), and *Such Melodious Racket: The Lost History of Jazz in Canada: 1914-1949* (1997). More specifically, on instrumental jazz to the quasi-total exclusion of vocals.

In short, there is little scholarly writing on jazz vocalists in Canada, let alone Montreal. It is one of the goals of this study to begin to fill this gap.

In the exploration of vocal jazz musical practices, I will rely heavily on Henry Louis Gates's theory of signifying, as outlined in his influential book *The Signifyin(g) Monkey* (1988). This theory provides a useful way of interpreting meaning, and, even though it was conceived primarily in relation to in African American literature, such a theory can fruitfully be applied to the study of jazz. I use it here to show some of the ways by and through which jazz singers make their musical statements.

The Methodological Framework

The foregoing discussion on the musical canons that govern the world of jazz is based mainly on an in-depth study of the current scholarly literature on jazz. To further inform this examination, I make use of some of the lessons learned in other domains, such as popular music studies, feminist musicology and gay and lesbian musicology, which deal with the issue of canons.

The status and self-definition of jazz vocalists are studied from two points of view: historical and current. The historical point of view is treated through a critical survey of existing documentation, both scholarly and popular. The point of view of present day artists are reviewed through a detailed ethnography, which is produced through a series of personal interviews with selected artists in Montreal. The two

different vantage points appear in alternation in order to show how they are interwoven.

To address the musical practices and learning strategies of vocal jazz artists I have relied on participant observation and interviews. To discuss the musical values embodied in vocal jazz in Montreal today, I have analysed in the course of my ethnographic research selected performances.

Interviews

This study heavily relies on information gathered in formal and informal interviews. Each formal interview lasted between one and four hours. The selected vocalists were interviewed formally one to three times, depending on the need, while each instrumentalist was visited once. All formal interviews were recorded on cassette, a procedure which was not only accepted, but encouraged by the informants. These were then transcribed and used as a means to providing *ad verbatim* responses of the informants where insight could be gained from the particular ways in which they verbalized their experiences.

Informal interviews were conducted on an as-needed basis, for clarifications or specifications. They were therefore shorter than the formal ones and, at times, conducted by telephone.

Participant observation

For the 1998-1999 academic year, I engaged myself as a student of vocal jazz improvisation with Jeri Brown, at Concordia University. Together with my short experience (five years) as a jazz vocalist, this sensitized me to both social and musical issues, and how they are intertwined.

In July of 1998, I spent two weeks at the Montreal International Jazz Festival to

get immersed in the culture of the event. This gave me the opportunity to hear many of the instrumentalists with whom my informants have performed, and to whom they referred during our interviews. It also allowed me to hear some other Montreal-based vocalists whom I did not interview.

I also attended several concerts given by my informants, either in the Ottawa region or in Montreal. One notable presentation was on July 10, 1999, when three of the four vocalists interviewed—Brown, Lee and Young—were featured on the same stage on the closing night of the jazz festival. This allowed me to observe how the information gleened from the interviews was put into practice.

A personal perspective

Besides being a jazz vocalist myself, I am a French-Canadian woman with "white" skin. As I reflect on all of these factors, it becomes clear that I am both an insider and an outsider to the group I have studied. While it is certain that I share with other jazz singers of any other language and race some aspects of the musical language used in vocal jazz, the extent to which such a language is enriched by all our various backgrounds becomes a complex issue. Do I have more in common with an African-American female jazz vocalist than I do with an English-Canadian male one with pale skin? Which element of my identity speaks most loudly about who I am? Which element of difference is most significant? How do the differences help or hinder my approach to the subject?

There are no simple answers. All I can say is that I have struggled with the questions, and I embark upon this study by acknowledging from the start the myriad experiences of those who have helped realize this study. I therefore set about my work with as much respect and intellectual honesty as I can.

Criteria for selecting informants

In order to choose the vocalists for the ethnographic portion of this study, I first went to the jazz festival organizer from Ottawa, Jacques Emond, who gave me the names of some of the most high-profile vocal jazz artists in the Montreal area and ways to contact them. I also sought the advice of Rod Ellias, one of Canada's top jazz guitarists who teaches at Concordia University in Montreal but resides in Ottawa. He in turn referred me to Charles Ellison, a prominent trumpet player in Montreal and also a teacher at Concordia University. Ellison gave me a list of names of people he thought I should interview. The names that matched with some of the ones given to me by Jacques Emond were Ranee Lee, Karen Young and Jeri Brown. I therefore set out to contact them individually.

Brown offered her own list of people to consult. Ranee Lee and Karen Young were at the top of her list, which further confirmed their importance to this study. I wanted to include the participations of a male singer in the study, in order to get as many different points of view as possible. Brown recommended Ernie Nelson, who had also been mentioned by Ellison. Both Brown and Ellison felt that Ernie Nelson, with his long experience as a jazz improviser, would contribute greatly to the project. The final list of vocalists selected for the study was therefore Jeri Brown, Ranee Lee, Ernie Nelson and Karen Young, who all graciously accepted my invitation to participate in the ethnography.

Also to ensure that the study was well informed, I wanted to interview two instrumentalists, one female and one male. This would provide a basis for comparison with the information offered by the vocalists, and allow me to respect a certain degree of gender representation. Ellison recommended I speak to instrumentalists who have worked extensively with singers. Rod Ellias and pianist Lorraine Desmarais both kindly indulged my request for an interview.

The seemingly arbitrary number of informants—four vocalists and two instrumentalists—was arrived at both to ensure the feasibility of the study and to provide an adequate balance of gender representation. While race emerged as a topic of discussion during interviews with informants, and as a prominent subject in jazz texts, it was not a criteria for the selection of informants. My aim was to contact the most prominent artists in the Montreal area who were performing improvisational jazz.

A Brief Summary of the Chapters

In the first chapter, I examine the notion of the canon as it applies to jazz. Just as the canons of Western classical music are based on a select few composers (Bach to Schoenberg), so are the canons of jazz based on only a few players (Armstrong to Coleman). It should be stressed that by "canon," I mean not only a set of norms represented by a few individuals but the norms themselves. Hence, I present some of the most powerful canons that are manifested in jazz. My goal here is to set the stage for the following chapters which look at the place (both social and musical) that jazz vocalists occupy within the jazz framework outlined in Chapter One.

In the second chapter, I discuss the status and self-definition of jazz singers. Because jazz singers define themselves partly in response to what is expected of them and the norms set by previous generations of jazz singers, one must first broach the question of "What is a jazz singer?" that has been discussed by many a jazz writer. We can then address how singers go about creating their own vision of what a jazz singer is in the present day. I then broach two themes that have a major impact on how singers are defined: the voice as an instrument, and the issue of representation in the jazz music scene.

The third chapter looks at the musical practices of jazz vocalists. Apart from

the physically possible melodic range and variety of the production of timbres, another major difference between instrumental and vocal improvisation is the use of words. Even the nonsense syllables used in scat singing have to be learned and used appropriately. This added dimension requires a distinct approach to the vocal improvisation process itself, to learning and teaching methods and analysis appropriate to it. This is what this study aims to examine.

The chapter is divided into two parts, with the first part focussing on the specificity of jazz singing, by highlighting the elements that the vocalist adds to the ensemble sound. The second gives an overview of some techniques for vocal improvisation.

On Recorded Musical Examples

Please note:

I have produced an accompanying cassette, that includes recordings of most of the musical examples in the order in which they appear in this study. The reader will be invited to listen to the excerpts every time the following symbol appears in the text: (). In order to respect copyright, the recording contains strictly those measures that are excerpts in this text.

Please also note that all musical examples are transcribed in 4/4 time (as opposed to 12/8), in accordance with the standard notation for jazz. Triplet feel is therefore implied. For instance, it is understood that sounds like .

Finally, where excerpts of original music are used in the text as a basis of comparison in Chapter Three, these have been transposed into the key chosen by the vocalist in question.

*This image is reproduced by kind permission of the artist, Jean Buzelin.[1]

CHAPTER ONE

Jazz and its Canons

In the opening of her book *Stormy Weather* Linda Dahl states the following:

> ... arguably, even more than other art forms, the music we call jazz depends on its community, for the young jazz musician is trained on the job, really; the apprentice learns from the leader, the members of the group, the gig itself (1996, ix).

Jazz music is governed by a set of canons which, for better of worse, are passed on from one generation to the next. Canons are the vehicle for the transmission of traditions that make up jazz music. Just as is the case with Western classical music, the jazz community relies heavily on its canons to give credence to its teachings and

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[1] First appeared in Arnaud Merlin, "L'école de musique à l'école du jazz," *Jazzman* 47 (May, 1999): 40-1.

to obtain a sense of continuity within the jazz tradition. As Phillip Brett writes: "The acquisition of skill is dependent on the tacit understanding of the superiority of this repertory..." (1994, 14). Although his comments refer specifically to the German canon of classical music (i.e. Bach to Schoenberg), they can be readily transferred to the canons of jazz (i.e. Louis Armstrong to Ornette Coleman).

The word "canon" can be used, as by Brett for instance, to refer to a group of composers who have become recognized as icons of a particular tradition. There is also a more general meaning given to the word in Webster's dictionary as "a body of rules, principles, criteria, etc." In its figurative manifestation, the composers, say, used to identify a given canon become representatives or "ideal types," to borrow Carl Dahlhaus's term, for the actual music they make.

Alternatively, the term "canon" can be applied to music in a more restricted sense, that is, as "an established or basic rule or principle; a standard to judge by, a criterion." In this sense, the canon of great jazz musicians (again, Armstrong to Coleman) can include many principles, standards and criteria which can themselves be seen as canons. They are the underlying norms that pervade, explicitly or implicitly, jazz texts and texts on jazz. By jazz texts, I mean those books that fall into the category of histories of jazz and the like[2], i.e. books that are seen as "definitive". Texts on jazz in turn include either articles about certain aspects of jazz or books that address problems or particular questions on jazz[3]. Some texts fit into both categories and this should be seen as but a loose-fitting categorization.

The canons that will be explored in this chapter are the following: jazz as an

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[2] Collier, 1978; Gridley, 1985; Megill, and Demory, 1984; Schuller, 1986; Schuller, 1989; Tirro, 1977, to name only a few.

[3] Among others, Antelyes, 1994; Brackett, 1995; Cook, 1992; Gossett and Johnson, 1980.

instrumental genre, jazz as a male idiom, jazz as "un-pop,"[4] jazz as improvised music, jazz as black music, jazz as American music and jazz as concert music (as opposed to dance music). Further analysis would surely reveal other canons of this type to add to the list. To be sure, this is but one set of interpretations, among many possible alternatives. I will begin by discussing further the idea of canons as they can apply to jazz.

In his article entitled "Cultural Dialogics and Jazz: A White Historian Signifies" (1991), Gary Tomlinson argues that jazz has fallen into some of the same traps as the Western Classical tradition. He says that many of the authors of key textbooks on jazz emphasize listening as the most important component of learning about jazz, as opposed to reading about it. While an emphasis on listening seems admirable on the surface, Tomlinson posits that it effectively creates a detachment between the music and its socio-historical context, as if the music contained some transcendental quality contained in the notes themselves (1991, 247). In contrast, Tomlinson proposes a model where the essence of jazz is to be found in the "makers of jazz ... saving the music... for last, construing it in light of them and resisting the aestheticizing tendency to exaggerate its differences from other manifestations of expressive culture"(ibid, 247).

Tomlinson also examines how jazz critics and historians produce and reproduce a jazz canon which has attempted to exclude, for instance, Miles Davis's fusion style from the category of 'real jazz.' He emphasizes the fact that canons are, in reality, a set of personal choices, and how those personal choices, when united to

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[4] This term was used by composer Harry Somers when I spoke to him about the performance of his Piano Concerto No. 3 at the National Arts Centre on January 4, 1997. He was referring to the fact that his music does not have wide commercial appeal. I use it here to refer to jazz as, arguably, a non-commercial music—a definition used by many musicians to distance themselves from commercialism in the same way as musicians of classical music do.

others of similar tastes, become institutionalized (ibid, 242). A case in point is that several key jazz historians have based their texts on Martin Williams's anthology, the *Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz* . According to Tomlinson, they have done so partly because they must base their texts on material that is readily available and accessible to students. As he states:

> ... the effect of this surrender to convenience is to monumentalize Williams's choices, to magnify into a statement of transcendent artistic worth the personal canon of one insightful (but conservative) critic, constructed itself in a given time and place according to particular formative rules and limiting contingencies (ibid, 246).

He argues that, while Miles Davis was chastised by many critics for developing the "anti-jazz" style of jazz-rock fusion, he was actually implementing an aesthetic principle which could be seen as definitive of jazz: that is, what Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s describes as 'signifyin(g)' in *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988). By blending elements from different worlds—jazz, rock, black, white, middle-class, lower-class—Davis was engaging in a dialogue between past and future styles, and finding new meanings in the jazz idiom. I will return to the topic of signifyin(g) in Chapter Three, where I will discuss at length some of the musical values of vocal jazz.

In his article entitled "The Problem of Miles Davis," Robert Walser agrees with Tomlinson, that Miles Davis presents a challenge "because he cannot be denied a place in the canon of great jazz musicians, yet the accepted criteria for greatness do not fit him well" (1993, 345). He, too, ascribes Davis's greatness to his uncanny capacity to signify in the sense employed by Gates. Rather than focussing on Davis's style as a whole, Walser calls attention to the instrumental techniques used by Davis to signify against other versions of a given song in order to prove Davis's greatness. It could be argued that, by doing so, his comments seem to lobby for Davis's induction

into the existing canons, instead of challenging them. In my view, debunking the canon as a measure of success or greatness would be more effective than widening the scope of members who can qualify for it.

Interestingly, Walser criticizes some of the same jazz historians[5] as Tomlinson, but for different reasons. He accuses most of them of underemphasizing the different kinds of greatness, as manifested by a Miles Davis, in contrast to a Duke Ellington or a Charlie Parker (ibid, 344-45). I share Walser and Tomlinson's disappointment with the state of the histories written on jazz. The problem with the label "history" is that it tends to invoke a certain level of objectivity on the part of its creator. We must remember that every so-called history is in fact a story, one person's interpretation of data, rather than empirical truth. By attempting to reify their own version of the important events and people in jazz, most of the authors of such histories have served to perpetuate not only the global canon of great jazz musicians, but also other, more specific canons, to which I will now turn.

Jazz as an instrumental genre

More often than not, the term 'jazz' is presumed to mean instrumental jazz. As Joseph Levey states: "... jazz, unlike rock or pop or country music, places emphasis on instrumental performance, and singing is of secondary importance in the hierarchy of jazz" (1983, p. 2). Gary Giddins displays the same opinion.

> Never was America more vulnerable to the intoxicating qualities of cheap music. The divas of the era sang *I don't Want To Walk Without You, Accentuate the Positive, Mairzy Doats*... Yet Parker and his compatriots in jazz, not all of them members of the bop movement, cut through the sentimentality, the dreamy evasions, the paralysing fear (1990, p. 37).

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[5] Tirro (1977), Megill and Demory (1984), Gridley (1985), among others.

This particular quote betrays the close connection that is often made between vocal jazz and popular music. I will explore this point further in my discussion of jazz as "un-pop." Derek Bailey maintains the same position when he says: "... at its best, instrumental improvisation can achieve the highest levels of musical expression" (1980, p. 64). This brings to mind the age-old battle between "absolute" and program or vocal music, a debate which is based on the assumption that words somehow detract from the sound of instruments. As Brett points out: "From [E. T. A.] Hoffmann and his generation stems the notion of the superiority of instrumental music, which depends precisely on a lack of specificity..." (1994, 13). Hoffmann, the oft-quoted late-18th, early-19th century music critic, could easily be reincarnated as a jazz critic of the 20th century.

There are other jazz writers whose choices implicitly reveal their stance. For example, in Chapter Two of *The Swing Era* (1989), Gunther Schuller analyses saxophone, trombone, bass lines, etc., but treats the vocal parts solely on the basis of their lyrical content. Out of 62 musical examples and 12 figures on formal structure, none of them focus on vocal lines. One unnumbered example appears to highlight a difficult vocal line from the song. While most of the other examples used in that chapter of the book serve to illustrate the skill of the performer, the one example focussing on the vocal line aims to highlight Duke Ellington's compositional prowess. The vocal skill required to produce it is obscured, with no particular performer singled out as having done so. This is significant because in his analyses of the instrumental solos or lines, Schuller never fails to mention the musician's name.

André Hodeir speaks of jazz, throughout both *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence* (1975) and *Toward Jazz* (1986), as though it is exclusively instrumental genre. All the names mentioned in *Toward Jazz*, for instance, from Jelly Roll Morton to Ornette Coleman, are those of instrumentalists. Paradoxically, in the appendices of *Toward*

Jazz, he includes five focussed analyses of improvised solos, two of which are vocal. In those two, he considers melodic contour and rhythmic feel. It could be argued that he is only exploring the aspects of these vocal solos that are instrumental. He does not, for instance, talk about vocal timbre, inflection, or lyrical expression. However, he did choose Sarah Vaughan in one case, and Billie Holiday and Lester Young in another, suggesting that Vaughan and Holiday have a place in his view of the canon of great jazz musicians. Hodeir links Billie Holiday's solo style to that of Lester Young. He portrays the musical relationship between the two artists as mutually influential. Given the fact that the main body of the work deals exclusively with instrumentalists, the inclusion of the two vocalists—Vaughan and Holiday—in appendix has the effect of "elevating" their status to that of the instrumentalists, while at the same time marginalising their contributions to the genre.

Although many writers on jazz have done so, there is a danger in treating instrumental and vocal jazz as mutually exclusive. Speaking of instrumental jazz as though it is completely independent of—or worse, superior to—vocal jazz does violence to the contributions of the many vocalists who have propelled jazz music, either by making it more popular, or by developing the music itself. Vocal and instrumental jazz have developed, and continue to develop to this day, not only simultaneously but in intimately related ways. Acknowledging the difference between the vocal and instrumental forms of the idiom does not preclude the appreciation of their many shared characteristics. Unfortunately, many authors have a tendency to downplay the role of the vocalist *vis-à-vis* jazz in general. For example, Levey states:

> In scat song the singer uses nonsense syllables and vocal sounds, often in imitation of instrumental jazz lines. The effect is that of instrumental statements being sung, with the voice imitating the saxophone or trumpet (1983, 7).

Many musicians I have interviewed would agree with Levey. In fact, many singers

strive to achieve an "instrumental sound," going so far as to listen exclusively to instrumentalists to avoid being influenced by another singer. What this position often ignores, however, is the invaluable influence vocals have had on instrumental playing. Berliner expresses, in my opinion, a more balanced view when he states:

> Within the jazz tradition, instrumentalists and vocalists continue to influence one another. A reflection of this is instrumentalists' predilection for copying the pitch colorations and inflections of blues and jazz singers and their phrasing of song texts (1994, 69).

By acknowledging, in this way, the profound impact the voice has had on the jazz idiom as a whole, Berliner has begun to break down the traditional assumption of jazz as an instrumental music.

Jazz as a male idiom

Jelly Roll Morton, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, Count Bassie, Billie Holiday, Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, Ornette Coleman. This is a partial, yet typical list of names that come up in jazz texts and in texts on jazz. It demonstrates the dominant role male instrumentalists have played in jazz histories. This has meant a marginalization of female instrumentalists as well as female vocalists. In such jazz histories as have been written by Tirro (1977), Megill and Demory (1984), Gridley (1985), and others, the women who are covered are in large majority singers. And of those, even famous singers like Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald receive, if they are lucky, half the coverage that is accorded to their male instrumentalist counterparts. For example, Mary Lou Williams, an influential female jazz pianist, composer and arranger who became prominent in the 1930s, is mentioned not in the body of the text but only in two lists that are inserted in Gridley's textbook *Jazz Styles* (1985). These lists include the names of prominent jazz artists. Just as Hodeir did,

Gridley marginalizes some of the most important female jazz musicians[6] while seemingly giving them a token of recognition by placing some of them on the prestigious lists, alongside their male counterparts.

Furthermore, the pervasive use of the terms like "jazzmen" and "sidemen," gives an indication of how jazz is conceived. That is, as a male-dominated musical practice. Such terms become the vehicles by and through which the male canon of jazz is produced and reproduced in texts.

More recently, Ted Gioia's *The History of Jazz* (1997) gives slightly more coverage to female artists and their contributions to the development of jazz. But still, a quick glance at the index reveals a wide gap between the attention paid to male players and that accorded to female musicians. Sadly, it may be that this is in large part due to the lack of recorded information about the artists in question, which is itself a symptom of long-standing phallocentrism[7], not only in jazz but in music in general. This is an otherwise very insightful history of jazz, giving much more information about the socio-political context of the music than any of its predecessors. However, it does fall short of dispelling the male canon of jazz.

It could be argued that these and other books simply reflect the chauvinism that prevails in the jazz community itself. I would posit that they are part and parcel of that community whose writings perpetuate inequalities. As Dahl explains: "The assumption about women in jazz was that there weren't any, because jazz was by definition a male music" (1996, xi). Dahl discusses several social factors—similar to

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[6] I include both instrumentalists and vocalists in my use of the term "musician."

[7] A term used by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in his discussion of African American literature, which I find very eloquent and useful.

those raised in Tricia Rose's account of the same phenomenon in rap music[8]—which discouraged women from participating as jazz musicians, and thereby kept the male canon of jazz alive.

> Clearly, the qualities needed to get ahead in the jazz world were held to be "masculine" prerogatives: aggressive self-confidence on the bandstand, displaying one's "chops," or sheer blowing power; a single-minded attention to career moves, including frequent absences from home and family (ibid, x).
>
> A woman musician... often paid penalties designed to put her in her place—the loss of their respectability being high on the list, as well as disapproval, ridicule and sometimes ostracism (ibid, x).

Jazz as "un-pop"

Jazz, particularly vocal jazz, has had a strong connection with popular music since its beginnings. However, in the Swing era, this connection was accentuated, as "jazz was synonymous with America's popular music, its social dances and its musical entertainment" (Schuller 1989, 4). This coincides with a time when singers were the frontispiece of the big band. So-called "canaries," "warblers" and "girl singers" converted Tin Pan Alley songs into jazz. This is seen by some to be a cheapening of jazz. As Joseph Levey states:

> What is it that jazz singers do? They present American pop songs in a jazzy (jazz-like) manner, meaning that they sing the song with a syncopated, swinging style (1983, 6).

Levey's gross oversimplification of the vocalist's musical role in jazz reflects an prevalent ideology that pits jazz against popular music. Many authors manifest this

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8 Tricia Rose. "'All Aboard the Night Train:' Flow, Layering, and Rupture in Postindustrial New York," in *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 21-61. In this chapter, Rose discusses the pejorative stereotypes that confront female rap artists, such as their perceived inability to deal with technology, sexual promiscuity and generally "unfeminine" image.

ideology in their attempt to bring jazz closer to the European tradition of art music. Gary Giddins juxtaposes jazz against "blues, rags, dixie, swing, bop, the new thing, rhythm and blues, rock and roll, disco, and rap," stating:

> But unlike most of those terms, which often signify musical fashions dependent on the marketplace, jazz... has behaved like a classical music, even though it briefly enjoyed—as European classical music briefly enjoyed—the advantages of popular acclamation (1990, 35).

André Hodeir, although advocating the study of jazz on its own terms rather than applying to it aesthetics borrowed from the European art music tradition, nevertheless betrays a common assumption that popularity brings a decline in artistic value.

> This does not necessarily force us to judge jazz in the perspective of European art; instead, it invites us to broaden our view in order to make room for the *only popularly inspired music of our time which is universal and has not become lost in vulgarity* (1975, 11, emphasis mine).

Like Hodeir, Ted Gioia tries to distance jazz from popular song: "... jazz, like the mythological pheonix, died as popular entertainment only to be reborn as serious art" (1988, 18).

As Walser aptly points out, the attempt to elevate jazz to the level of classical music may lend it some respectability,

> But the price of classicism is always loss of specificity, just as it has been the price of the canonic coherence of European concert music (the disparate sounds of many centuries, many peoples, many functions, many meanings all homogenized and made interchangeably "great") (1993, 347).

I would add to that price the fact that the connection between the music and the "ritual of performance," to borrow Paul Gilroy's expression (1993, 101), becomes obscured, since in the realm of classical music, the composer is valued as distinct from and more important than the performer.

Jazz as improvised music

Improvisation is a canon, insofar as it answers the second definition of canons provided at the beginning of this chapter; that is, a criterion or standard by which to judge, a norm. Improvisation in jazz not only answers to this definition of canon, it goes one step further to actually qualify what jazz is. For many, if a music does not contain some form of improvisation it simply does not qualify as jazz. As Levey states: "Improvisation is the paramount factor that separates jazz from other musical activities" (1983, 101). This view is echoed by Roddy Ellias, a prominent Canadian guitarist, who states: "I think when that [improvisation] goes [meaning, is not included], it becomes more like classical music" (personal interview, June 19, 1998).

The view that jazz and improvisation are inseparable is commonly expressed by equating jazz performance with composition. Mark Gridley's first answer to the question "What is jazz?" is "Improvisation." He goes on to explain: "To improvise is to compose and perform simultaneously" (1985, 4). Gioia speaks of jazz's "defiance of Western music's traditional distinction between composition and performance, in fact, its persistent disdain for any musical division of labor, the jazz musician being both creator and interpreter..." (1988, 15-16). The very title of Paul Berliner's landmark book *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (1994) gives an indication of the importance of improvisation in jazz.

There are, of course, other key defining elements in jazz. For instance, a characteristic rhythmic "feel" distinguishes jazz from other musics. There is no real consensus on what this "feel" can be called. Hodeir calls this rhythmic freedom "vital drive" (1975, 208). Others describe it as "groove" or "swing." Although it can easily be confused with a particular style period in jazz history—the 1930s and 1940s—by the same name, "swing" is the term I have adopted because it seems to be the only such term which is unmistakeably connected to jazz. To distinguish it from

the Swing era, I will always refer to the later with a capital 'S' or as "swing feel."

Charles Keil's designation of "participatory discrepancies" (1987) is one of the best explanation of this phenomenon that I have encountered so far. To paraphrase Keil, it is the slight variation applied by each individual musician to the work being performed. It can apply to intonation as well as rhythm or timbre or any other element of any type of music. For our purposes, I draw on this concept to help describe one of the elements that makes the style recognizable as jazz, although not exclusive to it. I refer here to the striking of notes either slightly before or slightly after the beat. How long before or after is precisely that which makes each musician's swing distinctive. As Berliner elucidates:

> The achievement of swing ultimately depends on the interplay of numerous factors... ranging from the sheer variety of the artists' rhythmic conceptions to the stylistic manner in which they articulate and phrase them, imbuing them with qualities of syncopation and forward motion (1994, 244).

According to Keil, swing feel is not written down before the fact, nor is it planned in any way. It just "happens." Within this perspective, swing can be seen as a form of improvisation, albeit subtle.

As Berliner shows, "Typically, they [artists who use improvisation as a verb] reserve the term for real-time composing—instantaneous decision making in applying and altering musical materials and conceiving new ideas" (1994, 222). This would seem to exclude other elements of jazz, such as solos that are "worked out" in rehearsal. While they are improvised, performed, created in rehearsal, by the time the performer actually displays his or her work to an audience, it has been perfected and memorized to a point where it is no longer improvised. Berliner calls this process "precomposition" (1994, 221). Many famous jazz musicians have been known to engage in it, renouned Canadian jazz pianist Oscar Peterson among them. The

degree to which this practice is implemented varies from one performer to another and from one performance to another.

There is also *a cappella* jazz, which may or may not include improvised solos. Groups such as New York Voices and Manhattan Transfer may not be considered jazz groups by some purists, but the fact remains that they perform jazz standards with a swing feel and cannot be completely excluded from the jazz tradition. Their existence would seem to contradict the essence of jazz as a form based on improvisation. However, like Tricia Rose's and Christopher Waterman's embracing of the contradictions inherent in rap and jùjú musics respectively, I would accept this inconsistency as an integral part of the jazz tradition.

Given the infinite number of ways one can improvise in jazz, from a complete rhythmic and melodic reworking of a song—à la Sarah Vaughan—to subtle shadings and phrasing modifications—as in Nat "King" Cole—I believe that a narrow definition of improvisation is misleading. We must recognize that a jazz piece can contain a very small percentage of improvised material or be completely improvised—as in free jazz—plus every possible variation between these two extremes.

Jazz as black music

Derek Bailey writes: "... all the really significant figures in jazz are black" (1980, 66). Further on he writes: "In recent years there has been a movement towards a new conception of jazz as 'black classical music'" (ibid, 74). Joseph Levey agrees: "In the jazz idiom the majority of inventors and innovators have historically been and continue to be black American musicians. ... It is difficult to say, however, that jazz is exclusively black music" (1983, 5). He also adds: "... many elements of jazz structure are drawn from the black American experience. Some of these elements are the blues form, the blues scale, call and response, [etc.]" (ibid, 13). Berliner

describes the participants of his lengthy study *Thinking in Jazz*: "Although most of the participants are African American, members of other ethnic groups are included as well..." (1994, 7). Even when other racial or ethnic groups are included in the jazz practice, as Berliner has done, it seems that the main elements that define jazz, namely improvisation and swing feel—among others—are associated with black people.

> Even though Red Rodney and his white peers played in swing bands in high school, they thought that improvising was something special that only the "black guys" did well. In contrast the white players were the good readers, the good section players (Berliner 1994, 31).

None of these authors are suggesting that only black people can play jazz, but they do seem to support a view that jazz is a music essentially emblematic of African Americans.

Other authors, such as Gunther Schuller, describe jazz as a mixture of African American and European elements.

> This new music developed from a multi-colored variety of musical traditions brought to the new world in part from Africa, in part from Europe. It seems in retrospect almost inevitable that America, the great ethnic melting pot, would procreate a music compounded of African rhythmic, formal, sonoric, and expressive elements and European rhythmic and harmonic practices (1986, 3).

We must bear in mind that Gunther Schuller is a composer in the European classical tradition who frequently incorporates jazz elements into his works. He is one writer who could be said to have contributed to the attempt to "classicize" jazz, thereby "elevating" it to the level of artistry of European art music.

Seen from another perspective, Schuller's emphasis on the European elements involved in the genesis of jazz could be seen as yet another attempt by whites to appropriate and control black musical contributions. The hegemonic power of white mainstream Western society is such that many musics associated with African

Americans have undergone this process of reappropriation by whites—rock and roll being but one example.

It must be recognized that there have been many talented white—not to mention some "yellow" or "red"—jazz artists. Linda Dahl specifically mentions:

> Helen Forrest, Helen O'Connell, Mildred Bailey, Peggy Lee, Anita O'Day—talented white band singers who became stars in their own right. And many, many more. Brazilian, Swedish, British, Japanese (1996, xi).

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to subsume the black artists who created the jazz idiom in a utopian view of a global music. The fact is, from its beginnings with Bessie Smith, Jelly Roll Morton, Lil Hardin Armstrong, Louis Armstrong—to name only a few—jazz has been undeniably entrenched in the African-American experience.

Equally misleading are those who would judge jazz without an understanding of African-American aesthetics. Take for instance André Hodeir's statement:

> As we know, these blue notes resulted from the difficulty experienced by the Negro when the hymns taught him by the missionaries made him sing the third and seventh degrees of the scale used in European music, since these degrees do not occur in the primitive five-tone scale (1975, 42).

He describes African music in terms of what it lacks in comparison to European music, a common pitfall for someone critiquing a music belonging to a tradition not their own.

> In authentic Negro music, there are no cadences or chords or tonal functions. The spirit and rules of its polyphony are very different from those governing New Orleans music. Its melodic turns are infinitely simpler. The same intervals are repeated untiringly, without any attempt to look for new effects. Even when based on the blue note, a seventh is a horrible modernism in the perspective of African music (ibid., 42).

Hodeir does not offer any explanation of how he came to understand this "perspective

of African music." Unfortunately, it is not unusual for musics associated with African Americans to be misrepresented in this way.

The flip side of this misconception is a tendency to romanticize the image of the "primitive black musician" who achieves a trance-like state in performance, but who does not truly understand what she or he is doing. Ted Gioia calls this the "Primitivist Myth" (1988, 31). As Robert Walser demonstrates in his article "Out of Notes: Signification, Interpretation, and the Problem of Miles Davis," (1993) an appreciation of black aesthetics—such as signifying in the senses coined by Gates—is crucial to understanding jazz.

Jazz as American music

Derek Bailey writes: "... from a playing point of view jazz has been unshakeably American. Europe ... could produce only Django Reinhardt as a possible exception to the rule that *all great jazz musicians are American*" (1980, 66, emphasis mine). Perhaps Bailey, being from Britain, had never heard of Canadians Oscar Peterson, Moe Koffman or Rob McConnell and the Boss Brass at the time he wrote this. Or, perhaps he uses the term American to mean North American. Either way, the statement could be said to be under considerable pressure.

Joseph Levey opens the first chapter of his book *The Jazz Experience* with the statement : "Jazz is a uniquely American music..." (1983, 1). He later explains: "Jazz is a musical reflection of twentieth-century American attitudes..." He qualifies these attitudes as the "melting-pot" mentality, innovation, trendiness, competitiveness, aggressiveness, confidence, lack of sentimentality and marketplace driven (ibid., 12-13). Many of these values may be manifested in American society, but equating them with the musical values of jazz becomes problematic. Here I would like to apply

Jocelyne Guilbault's analysis of structural homology[9] to the study of jazz. For one, the American attitudes described by Levey could easily be perceived in many other musics, not all of which would be created in the United States. Secondly, the relationship between music and the society in which it is conceived flows in more than one direction. In other words, the music not only reflects, but contributes to societal values. And finally, the values that are contained in jazz—or any other music—are not fixed, as Levey's description would suggest, but rather alter depending on the time, space, and most of all human factor—in other words who is playing or listening.

Gary Giddins, in his turn, reflects:

> How astonishing that the art most neglected by our unofficial ministries of culture, not to mention private enterprise, is one in which *American dominance is absolute and unrivalled*" (1990, 41, emphasis mine).

Robert Walser comments on this type of prevailing popular wisdom by saying:

> But characterizing jazz in this way [jazz as an all-American art form, embodying the value of individual freedom, among others] effaces both its complex cultural history, including the myriad effects of racism and elitism on the music and the people who have made it, and the dialogue that is at the very heart of the music (1993, 348).

There is no doubt that jazz originated in the United States and this fact must be recognized. What must also be recognized, however, is the strategic purposes behind using nationalistic arguments in connection with jazz. Giddins, for instance, is using jazz as an all-American form to shore up more financial support for this music from the American government. He is appealing to nationalistic sentiment as a means to

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[9] Jocelyne Guilbault, "Interpreting World Music: A Challenge in Theory and Practice," *Popular Music* 16, no. 1 (1997): 31-44. Structural homology refers to the unidirectional relationship between a musical structure and an extra-musical value. It implies fixity across time and space, and it obscures the specificity of the musical practice in question as well as its potential agency.

further this cause—a strategy that he hopes may benefit, or arguably has benefitted American jazz musicians.

It would seem, however, that speaking about jazz as a thoroughly American music has the effect of obscuring the African-American elements in this music by subsuming it into the white American mainstream. As Amiri Baraka forcefully explains:

> ... the first serious white jazz musicians (Original Dixieland Jazz Band, Bix [Beiderbecke], etc.) sought not only to understand the phenomenon of Negro music but to appropriate it as a means of expression which they themselves might utilize. *The success of this "appropriation" signalled the existence of an American music, where before there was a Negro music*" (1998, 13, emphasis mine).

Rose echoes this opinion: "... many black musics before rap (e.g., the blues, jazz, early rock'n'roll) have also become American popular musics precisely because of extensive white participation; white America has always had an intense interest in black culture" (1994, 5).

Perhaps critics who write about jazz as American music view themselves as "colour-blind" and, by doing so, aim to be more inclusive in their writing. The problem is that this ignores the history of power relations in the making of jazz and other African-American musics.

Jazz as concert music

Despite the current trend for Swing nights at dance bars and clubs, jazz remains primarily a music intended for listeners, rather than dancers. During the Swing era—coincidentally the time in which jazz was at the zenith of its popularity—jazz music and dancing went hand in hand, so to speak. The famous Savoy ballroom, which opened in 1926, had a huge dance floor and two band stands (Gioia

1997, 124). "The linkages between black dance, jazz music, and popular culture were furthered in the 1920s with the popularity of the Charleston, the shimmy, and the Black Bottom" (ibid., 124). Gioia describes a double-binding situation where black musicians would perform for all-white audiences and dancers in Harlem (ibid., 125). It may have provided welcome work opportunities for black musicians but, it could be suggested, it subjugated them in the process.

According to Linda Dahl, the craze "peaked during the Second World War, spawning ever more athletic routines like the jitterbug" (1996, 121). Gioia attributes the decline in the connection between jazz and dance—and by extension between jazz and popular music—to the rising costs of maintaining big bands, and in particular to a tax on dance halls instituted in 1944 which raised the entrance price by 30 percent. Patrons then became more interested in small combos (1997, 258). It would appear that smaller combos achieved a certain rhythmic freedom which had been impossible in a big band situation. In small combos, the leader can choose to change the tempo of the song at will—a move which would confound and frustrate even the most adept dancers. For instance, Kenny Washington explains:

> Betty Carter had different ways she'd want you to play in terms of the tempo.... You had to watch her on the bandstand, her hands and her movements. She would bring her arm down a certain way to establish the beat. There would be no counting off, like 'one, two, three, four.' The secret was being able to figure out the tempo from the way she brought her hand down (cited in Berliner 1994, 311).

Another reason why small combos may have coincided with the decline in dancing to jazz is the emphasis on solos which encourages a more attentive kind of listening than is possible while dancing. Also, the length of solos being in large part up to the improvisor means that songs can last much longer than danceable songs which generally last under five minutes. Jazz tunes commonly last ten or fifteen minutes, or longer.

In *The Imperfect Art*, Gioia describes how, in his view, this shift away from dance music was good for jazz.

> ... such music [popular music], if it is to remain popular, must stay true to dance rhythms. With jazz, an opposed sensibility prevailed: far from atrophying, the music was liberated in an important way by the gradual elimination of dance rhythms from its vocabulary (1988, 7).

Joseph Levey would agree, although he refers here to a style of dance typified by Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers:

> Both the jazz singer and the jazz dancer are dependent to some extent on instrumental music for support and inspiration. This does not diminish their accomplishments, but it does indicate that neither is an essential, indispensable ingredient of jazz (1983, 7).

For better or worse, this divergence of jazz away from dance could be seen as a move away from its black roots, since African cultures connect music and dance very strongly. According to Paul Gilroy, music and gesture are inseparable; so much so that he calls for the application of kinesics—the study of bodily movements as communication—to musics of black diaspora (1993, 75).

Conclusion

"Like the canon of European music, the jazz canon is a strategy for exclusion, a closed and elite collection of "classic" works that together define what is and isn't jazz" (Tomlinson 1991, 245). While Tomlinson refers to the jazz canon in the singular—meaning the body of works against which all others are measured—his statement can be applied to the canons—in the plural—that have been discussed in this chapter. The key to the canons can be found in what and whom they exclude as much as in what and whom they include.

Far from being fixed, though, canons are regularly challenged and redefined. Jazz, which was, in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, essentially dance music, is now

primarily concert music. What was once a popular music is now in far less commercial demand than it was 30 or 40 years ago. The roots of jazz as a black music are often diluted in accounts by white jazz writers. And more and more, women are making their musical mark in the male dominated field of jazz, both as instrumentalists and as vocalists (gleaned from personal interviews with Ernie Nelson, July 7, 1998 and Lorraine Desmarais, August 16, 1998).

Miles Davis's innovations in jazz fusion, as Tomlinson tells us, were once perceived to be something less than jazz (1991, 249-51); his mixing of black and white musicians raised quite a few eyebrows in the black jazz community (ibid, 253-255). Nevertheless, Miles Davis has been firmly inducted into the canon of great jazz musicians. As Walser states unequivocally, "... he [Davis] cannot be denied a place in the canon of great jazz musicians..." (1993, 345). There is ample evidence to support the fact that canons change over time and space. The question is: what are the forces that effect or prevent this change?

Tomlinson addresses the question: "... who are the self-appointed guardians of the borderlines setting off jazz from such musics [referring to popular balladry, crooners' song styles, rhythm and blues styles, motown, funk, etc.] ?" (ibid, 246). Part of his answer reads as follows: "Certainly not most jazz musicians themselves, who from Louis Armstrong on have more often than not been remarkably open to interaction with the varied musical environment around them" (ibid, 246). I find this response very telling about the effectiveness of the canons. Here is an author who is attempting to challenge the notion of traditional canons, yet in his arguments, he has recourse to the very names that form the jazz canon of great musicians. In other words, he appears to be caught in a double-bind himself, because his statement would have less weight if he chose lesser-known artists to back up his claim.

According to Tomlinson (1991, 246), the canon of great jazz musicians is created and promulgated by the writers of jazz histories, such as Tirro (1977), Gridley (1985), Megill and Demory (1989), among others. To be sure, the literature plays a major role in the maintenance of this and other canons. However, I believe that other forces also contribute, including the musicians themselves. They are part and parcel of a whole community that, as described at the opening of this chapter, passes on the tradition through mentoring, from one generation to the next. In fact, Louis Armstrong is reported as one of those who vehemently resisted the innovations of the bebop generation: "... all them weird chords which don't mean nothing... you got no melody to remember and no beat to dance to" (quoted in Gioia 1997, 217).

As will be examined in Chapter Two, vocalists routinely have to overcome the canon of jazz as instrumental music that is enforced by many instrumentalists. Gender stereotypes, racism and the issue of commercialism, to name only a few, are all factors that contribute to the formation and upholding of canons by musicians, writers, music industry people and audiences alike. It is important to remember that canons do not have a life of their own. People create them, perpetuate them, even protect them, but they can also defy and reverse them.

There are very close connections between the various canons of jazz discussed here. It is difficult to separate instrumental jazz from jazz as a male genre, for instance, since they refer in great majority to the same artists. For that matter, by excluding vocal jazz, the guardians of the canon of jazz as instrumental music also exclude women to a large degree. And given the strong correlation between vocal jazz and popular music, they also distance themselves from jazz as a popular music. This, in turn, implies a relationship between jazzmen and the "classicization" of jazz.

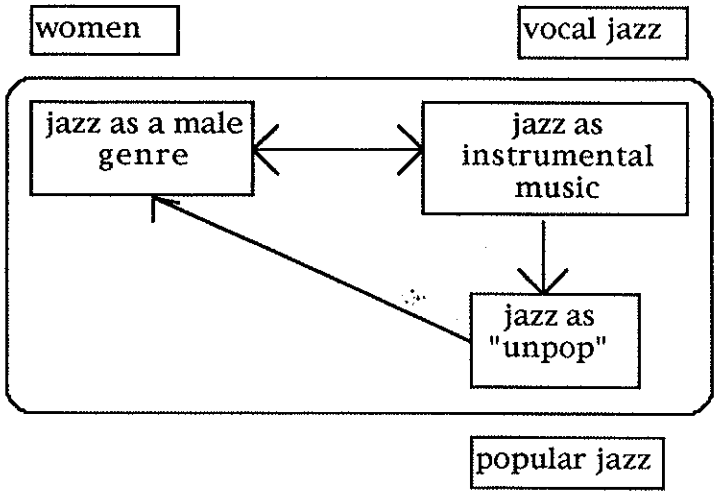

Figure 1.1. Canons as they relate to each other and elements they exclude

Similarly, jazz as black music can be linked to jazz as improvised music, as well as dance music, implying that jazz as concert music can be attributed to mainstream white American cultural elements.

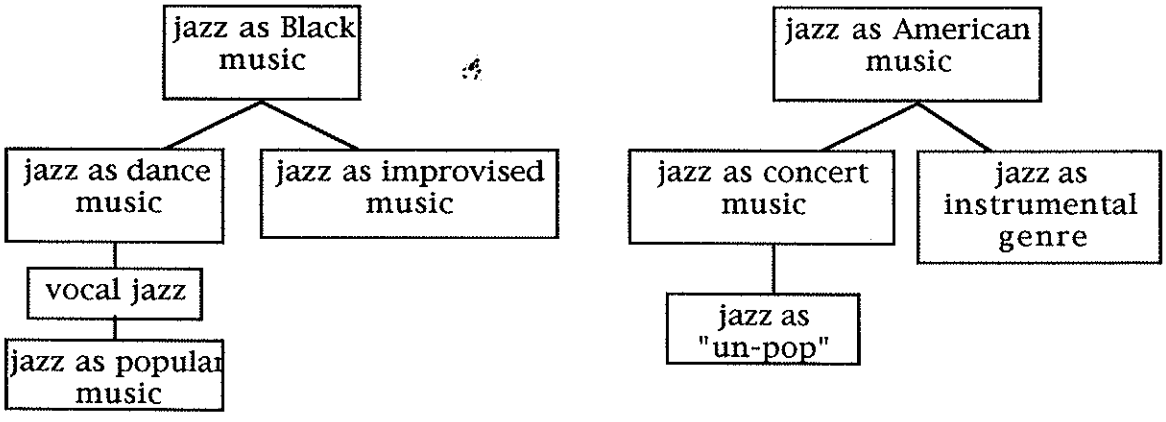

Figure 1.2. Canons that engender other canons

As we can see, some of the canons discussed here have a tendency to engender others. By doing so, they build in strength and tenacity, with the effect of institutionalizing what are, in reality, personal versions of how the jazz world is and should be.

What also becomes clear in looking at the canons in this way is that power relations play a paramount role in their production and reproduction. As stated earlier, black musics such as jazz often get subsumed by the dominant white American mainstream. In the same way, male musicians often relegate female musicians to an inferior status in order to maintain their dominance in the field.

Ambiguities begin to surface, however, when elements associated with African-American musical values, such as improvisation, meet concert music, or when vocal improvisation becomes less danceable or popular. While the purpose of canons is to exclude, they cannot do so absolutely. This has the effect of putting into question the canons' supposed verity and validity.

What is needed is wider acceptance and recognition of musicians who do not conform to the traditional canons of jazz, as well as those who do. We should accord less credence to set criteria and more attention to the politics that allow certain artists to be highlighted to the exclusion of others, and some music to be heard, and some not. To do so, we must first recognize that the canons' very existence depends on a particular group's ability to claim authority over a certain genre and over what is and is not "real jazz."

The following chapter will focus on jazz vocalists and their status and self-definition in light of the discussion on canons in this chapter. I will show how selected vocalists in the Montreal area have manifested or reacted to these canons.