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Bertram D. Ashe

University of Richmond, bashe@richmond.edu

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On the Jazz Musician's Love/Hate Relationship with the Audience

(1998)

BERTRAM D. ASHE

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An assistant professor of English at the College of the Holy Cross, Bertram D. Ashe discusses how the intersection of an African American cool style with a black vernacular tradition and multi-racial audiences complicates audience-performer relations. In the vernacular tradition, performers play not "to" but "with" an audience, drawing on the call-response patterns that characterize the black aesthetic. Ashe notes that the vernacular tradition is not racial but cultural, and class can be as important a marker as race in determining audience expectations. Differing cultural backgrounds create, in Ashe's words, "competing realities," distinct sets of expectations that can shape a musical performance. Ashe presented this paper at a Cyrus Chestnut Trio concert in Worcester, Massachusetts, January 16, 1998.

One Sunday afternoon when [Charles] Mingus was leading a group at the Village Vanguard, the audience was particularly noisy and inattentive. A couple of tables of patrons right in front of the bandstand seemed completely oblivious to the music. Their animated conversation was distracting to the musicians and made it difficult for the patrons sitting farther back to hear. Indignantly, Mingus hauled his bass up to the microphone and made a few scathing remarks about the noise, but the offending patrons were so wrapped up in their conversation that they heard none of Mingus's diatribe.

"Okay," said Mingus, "We're not going to fight you any more. On this next number, we'll take turns. We'll play four bars, and then you-all talk four bars. Okay?"

He stomped off a tune, and after the opening chorus Mingus played a four-bar break and waved the band out. The loud conversation at the front tables continued. The musicians carefully counted out four measures during the hubbub and then the band took the next four, with the solo tenor

playing as loudly as possible. Another four for the oblivious talkers, another for the band. As the rest of the audience laughed, Mingus continued grimly with his announced format until the end of the number. The talkers never knew they had been featured, but they joined the applause at the end (Crow 1990, 316–17).

Involuntarily, those “front tables” were participating in what’s known as the African American “vernacular tradition.” Henry Louis Gates, Jr. defines the “vernacular” as “the church songs, blues, ballads, sermons, and stories . . . that are part of the oral, not primarily the literate (or written down) tradition of black expression” (Gates and McKay 1997, 1). What distinguishes this body of work is its in-group status: “it is not, generally speaking, produced for circulation beyond the black group itself” (ibid. 1). Listen to this description of the vernacular and see if it doesn’t sound familiar: “call/response patterns of many kinds; group creation; and a percussive, often dance-beat orientation not only in musical forms but in the rhythm of a tale or rhyme. . . . [I]mprovisation is a highly prized aspect of vernacular performance” (ibid. 4). This thumbnail sketch of the vernacular could serve as a rough description of jazz itself.

The “jazz itself” I’m concerned with here is the interplay between jazz musician and audience. Although the jazz-record-buying consumer is a vital part of the jazz public, I’m specifically concerned with jazz performance here and most interested in jazz-as-vernacular in terms of the way audiences are figured in the vernacular tradition. An examination of three distinctly different readings of the jazz performance of Charlie Parker and his contemporaries reveals competing realities between the expectations of performing jazz musicians and some of their audiences.

What’s important to realize is that, in a sense, there *is* no audience as such—at least in the Western conception of the term. When Gates describes “group creation” as an integral part of the vernacular, he’s talking about the way an audience’s spontaneous reaction to the performer makes the audience itself a part of the performance. The way a congregation or audience “responds” to the “call” of the preacher or performer—in an oral, demonstrative fashion—essentially breaks down the Western barrier between performer and audience, making the church service or the musical performance an inclusive, communal, communicative event.¹

Perhaps the best examples of the vernacular tradition might be the responses of “Yes, Lord,” or “Um-hmm” to the call of the pastor during sermons at certain African American church services. Or the way the audience on, say, “Showtime at the Apollo” appears to be as much a part of the show as whoever’s on stage. Or the way some audience members at a jazz or blues club will

often laugh out loud with pleasure at recognizing a surprise musical quotation from a standard, or shout phrases like, “Play that horn!” in response to a clever solo. These scenes are examples of the vernacular tradition at work, a survival of the ancient African oral tradition.²

What’s interesting about jazz, though, is that almost from its inception, it was confronted with a sizable white audience, an audience that didn’t grow up immersed in the vernacular tradition. Jazz musicians performed at two types of concerts: those that were in black clubs and those that were not in black clubs. I’m going to call the latter “non-vernacular” events.³ The reason I don’t refer to them as majority white concerts is that the vernacular tradition can be practiced by whites who’ve been acculturated into the black vernacular tradition, and, certainly, not all blacks have been acculturated into the vernacular tradition. The black vernacular is not a racial so much as a cultural phenomenon.

But the vernacular tradition is a reality, even if it’s only a strategy at jazz concerts played to non-vernacular audiences. Branford Marsalis, in this excerpt from an appearance in 1997 on a Boston-area radio show called “The Connection,” talks about an ingenious way he incorporated an audience member into his performance at Sculler’s, a Boston jazz club, on January 30 of that year:

In one of the songs last night there was a lady pulling out a mint from her bag. And I said, “You got one for me?”—in the middle of the song. She was taken aback by it because she thought I was teasing her. But what she really didn’t understand ([as] she was passing the mints off to her friends) [was that] as the song went along it actually became a part of the song for me. Almost like . . . the paper was crinkling with such consistency . . . like, those cellophane wrappers? like on cough drops? It was with such consistency that it had the effect of a percussionist playing *chimes*—that crinkle, crinkle, crinkle. So when she stopped I actually looked at her and said, you know, “You shouldn’t’ve stopped!”—which confused her even more. It had actually become a part of the song for me. And the fact that it had become a part of the song made me laugh about, like, the great realities of jazz. It was a very funny moment. And I think she may have thought we were laughing at her, because she doesn’t really understand we were laughing with her, that we were going along with her. (“The Connection” 1997)

An artist who saw himself or herself as separate and distinct—if not elevated—from an audience might have been offended or put off by such seeming rudeness. Marsalis, acting from a vernacular viewpoint, saw her as part of the show. Or as he stressed during the interview, “What makes jazz different from other

musics is that it is conceived in the present tense—and everything that occurs in the environment has a direct outcome in the song.”

Accordingly, my favorite live jazz recording is Miles Davis’s *Live at the Plugged Nickel 1965* boxed set, mostly for the way that a folksy black audience in attendance at the Plugged Nickel in December 1965 becomes a part of the performance in ways that are, by turns, touching, humorous, and exasperating (the vernacular tradition including the risk that any and all of the above are possible). A good example occurs during the second set on the first day of the club date.

We hear Davis begin “When I Fall in Love,” and, as usual, he leaves a whole lot of space in his phrasing. An audience member presently fills up that space with a “call” by suggesting some notes that Davis could play once he continues, and, incredibly, Davis’s “response” is to actually play the notes the patron suggests—instantly and expertly making him a momentary music director. We hear Davis repeat the man’s vocalizations, and then the music continues. But in the audience there is a moment of quiet, a pause during which, I imagine, the startled audience member, after realizing Davis has actually played his suggested phrase, probably makes some sort of self-congratulatory gesture, confirming his contribution; because after the pause you can hear the audience laugh at the gesture and at what has just happened. Now, this is Miles Davis, in 1965: supposedly, he’s the “Sorcerer,” the scowling, raspy Prince of Darkness, well known for his chilly on-stage demeanor. But here he good-naturedly nods to the “group creation” aspect of the vernacular tradition, easily and effortlessly expanding the stage to include the audience.

As we saw with the opening Mingus example, however, group creation extended to the audience is not always a shared experience. In an exchange later in the same song, Ron Carter’s bass solo is, well, “informed” by an overly enthusiastic listener. Traditionally, the bass is a valuable part of the quintet’s rhythm section, and also the softest of the five instruments. Playing an acoustic bass solo in a jazz club is risky, since there must be quiet in order to hear the notes. During “When I Fall in Love,” Carter gamely attempts to solo as a deep-voiced, possibly inebriated man claps intrusively and speaks loudly to Davis—as if to presume an intimate friendship as he congratulates him on his just-completed solo. The man then rambles on during Carter’s solo, briefly discussing, apparently with no one in particular, the bassist Ray Brown’s possible retirement before offering the name “Paul Chambers,” as if the notes that Carter is playing remind him of another popular bassist of the time. It is a pitifully short solo; Davis’s trumpet soon returns, seemingly ending Carter’s efforts mid-solo, and the song continues apace.

It is yet another instance of group creation, although it is of the sort that is probably not welcomed by jazz musicians, and the reality of the possibility of this sort of “exchange” adds another layer to the love/hate relationship the jazz musician has with the audience, this episode having taken place fully within the vernacular tradition. Bob Blumenthal of the *Boston Globe*, who wrote the liner notes for Davis’s boxed set, uses stronger language than mine in describing the patron: “Carter begins to solo as our ringside nuisance name-drops Ray Brown, Oscar Peterson and Paul Chambers. [Davis] quickly rescues his bassist from further indignity.”

So on some fundamental level, the jazz musician’s love/hate relationship with the audience isn’t only confined to the tension between musicians and non-vernacular audiences. The problem of pleasing a sometimes difficult and demanding vernacular audience is, as we see here, in many ways just as complex as playing to an audience that doesn’t possess the African American vernacular legacy. But even with those inherent difficulties, these Miles Davis examples are drawn from a cultural experience that is, to use Frederick Douglass’s term, “within the circle” (Douglass 1982, 57). Branford’s previous example, moreover, was taken from a contemporary, mixed-race club date, confirming that a jazz musician can take a conscious vernacular approach even in non-vernacular circumstances. Often, however, jazz musicians play to quiet houses for non-vernacular concerts or club dates, concerts where the largest concession to the vernacular tradition is applause after each solo (at some venues a hit-or-miss proposition) and after the song.

So the question is this: what happens when only the onstage half is actively participating in the supposed group creation of what is, in theory, a vernacular event? In a sense, when jazz as vernacular performance is played to a non-vernacular audience, a set of competing realities between musician and audience is likely to result. Ideally, the jazz musician inhabits the vernacular persona of the accessible musical storyteller for an eager, lively, participatory audience. But the American cultural reality that views blacks in a racialist way sometimes interferes with the jazz musician’s concept of himself as a vernacular performer. As a result, non-vernacular audiences can create a tension between the black performer’s self-conception as “entertainer” versus his or her self-conception as “artist.”

Around the time bebop became popular in the 1940s, some black jazz musicians began to de-emphasize some of the vernacular roots of the jazz performance aesthetic and began to pose solely as “artists.” Ralph Ellison, in a 1962 article on Charlie Parker called “On Bird, Birdwatching, and Jazz,” has this to say about jazz performance during Parker’s heyday:

The thrust toward respectability exhibited by the Negro jazzmen of Parker's generation drew much of its immediate fire from their understandable rejection of the traditional entertainer's role—a heritage from the minstrel tradition—exemplified by such an outstanding creative musician as Louis Armstrong. But when they fastened the epithet "Uncle Tom" upon Armstrong's music they confused artistic quality with questions of personal conduct, a confusion which would ultimately reduce their own music to the mere matter of race. By rejecting Armstrong they thought to rid themselves of the entertainer's role. And by way of getting rid of the role, they demanded, in the name of their racial identity, a purity of status which by definition is impossible for the performing artist.

The result was a grim comedy of racial manners, with the musicians employing a calculated surliness and rudeness . . . and the white audiences were shocked at first but learned quickly to accept such treatment as evidence of "artistic" temperament. Then comes a comic reversal. Today the white audience expects the rudeness as part of the entertainment. If it fails to appear, the audience is disappointed. For the jazzmen it has become a proposition of the more you win, the more you lose. (Ellison 1995b, 259–60)

Ellison speaks to the political nature of jazz performance, the jazz musician's urge to define a stage presence while playing *to* (rather than with) a non-vernacular audience. Contrasting with Ellison's account of jazz performance in Parker's day is that of Amiri Baraka, at the time a black nationalist poet and playwright, who described Parker's own performance motive and aesthetic through a character in his 1964 play *Dutchman*:

Charlie Parker? Charlie Parker. All the hip white boys scream for Bird. And Bird saying, "Up your ass, feeble-minded ofay! Up your ass." And they sit there talking about the tortured genius of Charlie Parker. Bird would've played not a note of music if he just walked up to East Sixty-seventh and killed the first ten white people he saw. Not a note! (Baraka 1997, 1897)⁴

The problem here is that Baraka (then LeRoi Jones) has his character see the motive for black cultural expression as beginning and ending with white folk. The black-performer-to-black-audience vernacular performance ideal is, seemingly, thrown out the window in a concession to black rage. You just can't have a valid vernacular performance on the one hand and then on the other say that the *only* reason Parker is playing music is to metaphorically murder white people.

And yet, as Ellison's earlier commentary makes clear, some white jazz listeners of the era expected and enjoyed studied alienation from black jazz

musicians (Miles Davis, especially, was legendary for giving audiences what Ellison says they wanted). If nothing else, this stage presence, read by many white patrons as barely controlled hostility, was, for them, a validation of the jazz musician's status as alienated "artists" in the Western tradition. We can see the same sort of identity politics being played out in the nineties, in a far less hostile manner, as audiences revel in the serious, studious demeanor and dapper Armani suits of the current jazz generation. The stage presence and attire of these "young lions" validates them as "artists" the same way studied indifference did a generation ago.

Indeed, as a result of the lack of obvious tension between contemporary jazz musicians and their audiences, it may appear that since the sixties musicians such as Branford Marsalis have negotiated that dangerous American cultural terrain between "entertainer" and "artist" and emerged whole. Marsalis, in the "Connection" interview, talked about how when his group came on the scene they were less "deferential" and "studious" than their peers. They started "telling jokes to each other and laughing" when they came on stage, and then they'd start playing. This approach to the jazz performance aesthetic, as Marsalis says, threw "a wrench in the mortar . . . because the visual idea that a lot of people have about what it is that we do and the actual application were completely different. Some of the . . . reviews early in my career would say that our show was 'silly,' because they couldn't really hear the content of what we were playing so they needed the visual assistance." Ultimately, Marsalis concludes, "I just believed in it enough to continue to do what I was doing and I believed that in the long run a couple of the writers would catch on to what we were doing musically, a couple of the musicians would catch on and then the people would just follow along. And that's pretty much the way it's gone" ("The Connection" 1997).

I certainly believe Marsalis is being sincere here, but as cultural commentary his conclusion is a little too easy, a little too neat. To complicate things a bit, here is what Marsalis said just five years earlier, in 1992, from his video called "The Music Tells You":

I think a lot of the older guys—like Charlie Parker and those cats—thought that for all of the racist, social injustice that was going on at the time, I think they really, really truly thought that if they could come up with this great music, come up with this bad shit, that it would tip the scales in their favor and white America would embrace them as true intellectuals and say, "Yeah, you guys aren't all, you know, apes and incapable of thought and all that shit." When it didn't happen, I think it just took them—out. I think the difference between them and us is that we know that that shit's not

gonna happen. And I accept that, you know? I'm not playing this music for social justice, I'm not playing this music for equality, or none of that shit. The reason I play music is because I love this music. I mean, all the social ramifications. . . . ("The Music Tells You" 1992)

At this point, Marsalis is, indeed, validating the difference between bebop artists of the post-war era and his own, post-Civil Rights Movement era. But he widens and alters his commentary in his next breath:

You go to Europe—I remember a French dude told me once, "Doesn't it make you feel good to play jazz because you can vent out all of your hatred for the white man." I said, "Man, how European of you to feel that anything that a Negro contributes would have some direct correlation to *you*." And that took him aback a little bit. The nerve—the *nerve* of him to think for a second that when I'm creating the most . . . unbelievably complicated music in the history of the world I'm thinking about *his* trite ass—you know what I mean?

And that's the kind of stuff that Charlie Parker and them had to face every day. I mean, when they were calling jazz "fake" music, calling it "vacant." They invented the music and they paid the price with their lives, they paid the price with their lives. ("The Music Tells You" 1992)

Here Marsalis implicitly opposes Baraka's interpretation as Eurocentric. Baraka sees Parker as a black nationalist who, far from seeking white empathy, actually despises his white clientele. But if Baraka views him as metaphorically murdering white people, Marsalis sees Parker's performance and that of his contemporaries as a plea for inclusion in American society—as a means to integration. Yet Marsalis then stresses that he will have no part of such a purpose, that he is merely playing his own music and nothing more. But if nothing else, his illustrating example—and the way he sees the French journalist's question as being exactly "the kind of stuff that Charlie Parker and them had to face every day"—suggests that the matter is not nearly as settled for Marsalis as he would have us believe in his previous interview quotation; that, in fact, competing realities remain when it comes to the way jazz is performed and the way it is perceived today.

Charlie Parker is, then, in an Ellisonian sense, "invisible."⁵ This invisibility—a by-product of the competing realities inherent in jazz performance for non-vernacular audiences—is at the core of what I call the jazz musician's love/hate relationship with audience. In a sense, there's a "game within a game" being played here, a struggle for autonomy and agency (if not, literally, "visibility") when the jazz musician is onstage, even during a seemingly benign

performance. Ultimately, the performing jazz musician hopes for and expects an appreciative, enthusiastic audience, one that will “respond” to his “call” in a way that enacts the vernacular tradition; the audience, on the other hand, has certain expectations that will validate their own point of view as to proper jazz performance decorum. Somewhere in between we find the performance itself.

The question, then, for both the jazz musician and the jazz audience member, is this: *what do we see* when we’re watching a jazz performance? There is a distinct difference between going to see a jazz concert and listening to a jazz recording made in the studio, and the difference goes beyond jazz as music “conceived in the present tense”—although that is a crucial component as well. The fact is, an onstage jazz musician not only performs the music but also “performs” the role of “jazz musician.” In a sense, it’s theater, although that theatrical aspect is, certainly, subordinate to the music. The jazz musician’s performance of the role of jazz musician informs the way we hear the music—as Marsalis points out above, the performance aesthetic inevitably acts as visual context for the music.

Here’s an illustration: After a public presentation of a previous version of this article, I chatted briefly with a white woman who told me that she had seen a Miles Davis performance at Great Woods in Massachusetts during the seventies, when he played with his back to the audience. According to this woman, much of the audience, also white, left the concert “in outrage” as a result of Miles’s onstage antics. But the woman happened to attend the concert with a blind man—and she said he had loved the show. He literally couldn’t see what much of the audience was so upset about; he couldn’t contextualize Davis’s music the way his sighted fellow concertgoers could. Such anecdotal evidence suggests that Marsalis is correct when he talks about jazz audiences needing visual assistance in order to hear the music.⁶

Of course, the public performance of all musics includes extramusical, political considerations. Rock music is about rebellion, about the angry young man (and, increasingly, the angry young woman), and the stage demeanor of the musicians reflects this preoccupation. Similarly, rap is angry urban music, and rappers grimly prowl the stage, holding the microphone “like a grudge,” as Rakim puts it. Classical musicians, on the other hand, have a performance aesthetic that reflects the history of the music, its relation to Western culture, and its self-perceived status as established, if not Establishment music. So where does jazz fit in? Historically it has claims on the same rebellious stance as rock and rap, and yet it has also grown into being called America’s classical music as well. So just what constitutes an “authentic” jazz performance?

This question is so vexing that even the musicians themselves don’t agree on the answer. Branford Marsalis has said he would never stoop to pop-music

crowd-pleasers like saying “Clap your hands everybody” while he was playing jazz. But at the same time, the *New York Times Magazine* describes the end of a 1994 Christian McBride performance at the Village Vanguard this way:

The set closes with . . . “Gettin’ to It” . . . McBride’s funk-jazz tribute to James Brown. In [an earlier,] Carrboro, [North Carolina concert,] McBride actually did [a] microphone-stand twirling routine, just like Brown, which he’s practiced since he was a kid. Tonight, he has the audience clapping in time, exhorting them with “Help me out now!” but, this being the Vanguard, the temple of jazz, the mike stand stays put. (Hooper 1995, 37)

The implication here is that McBride is showing admirable restraint in not twirling the mike-stand; and yet in Marsalis’s view, merely having the “audience clapping in time”—let alone yelling, “Help me out now!”—is violating the dictates of traditional jazz performance.⁷ To complicate matters even more, McBride said in passing in that same *New York Times Magazine* article, “Someone got on me for smiling too much on stage. I say get out of my face, I’m having fun. I’m not going to frown because it looks hipper in your eyes” (ibid.).

It seems to me the questions about the jazz performance aesthetic, as well as the numerous and competing ways Charlie Parker and his contemporaries were “read,” speak to jazz performance as a viable cultural site for exploration. After all, the jazz performer is a political text in that he or she serves as a contribution to African-American culture, as well as a representation of African-American culture to whites, and to other blacks (particularly in terms of class differences among African Americans). When a jazz musician performs, he or she is making a cultural statement that links him or her to a long-standing tradition; and yet also commenting on and widening the parameters of that tradition as he or she balances between the tradition of performers like Duke Ellington and Count Basie and the stage persona of someone like James Brown.

Perhaps Baraka described the sociocultural realities of jazz best in his poem “In Walked Bud”: “The African in the West / with European harmonies” (Baraka 1991). What Baraka’s line implies is that, in a sense, the competing realities laid out here (vernacular performance vs. non-vernacular audience; nationalist statement vs. integrationist statement; status as entertainer vs. status as artist; playing an African-based art form vs. the Western musical and performance aesthetic) create the tension that makes jazz what it is. The inherent tension between these realities aids and abuts the creation of the music itself; the constant need to define and redefine, to engage in vernacular play as a means to communicate with audiences, whether they’re vernacular audiences or not, is all part of the way, as Marsalis puts it, “everything that occurs in

the environment has a direct outcome in the song.” If we expand the term “environment” beyond Marsalis’s original intention to include the entire experience of the “African in the West,” these competing realities form the basis for the combustible nature of jazz music itself. In a sense, then, the tension of that love/hate relationship the jazz musician has with the audience is a vital part of the very tradition of jazz itself.

This is why jazz is, essentially, a “blues” music. As Ellison insists, the blues is “a major expression of an attitude toward life . . . and man’s ability to deal with chaos” (Ellison 1995b, 287). In this case, the “chaos” is the sociocultural, perceptual whirlwind in which performing jazz musicians find themselves. It was not only the case with those of Parker’s era; on some level, with varying degrees of awareness, all jazz musicians playing onstage publicly play out the attempt to free themselves from the constrictions of the repeated interpretations (including, to be fair, the one you’re reading) of what they’re doing. It is in part this very struggle for freedom that provides the music with the crackling intensity it needs to sustain itself. The onstage performance of jazz is the exhibition of this struggle in its purest form.

The jazz musician’s struggle for autonomy, as difficult as it might be for him or her to perform a role as “jazz musician,” may be a necessary aspect for the viable performance of the music itself. Indeed, the next time you’re watching some live jazz, I invite you to examine yourselves in terms of what your expectations are as you sit and watch and/or actively listen and participate. Examine the criteria that you (perhaps unconsciously) use to evaluate a jazz musician’s extramusical performance. The next time you see a jazz performance, pay attention not only to the music, but to the issues and expectations surrounding the way the musicians perform the music. It will reveal an additional dimension to what will, hopefully, be a wonderful “performance.”

NOTES

The author would like to thank Eve Shelnett as well as the wonderful students at the ALL School in Worcester, Massachusetts. Their curiosity and provocative questions greatly informed a revision of this article.

1. Undoubtedly, jazz is a Western creation. It is a mix of African polyrhythms and European melodic structure, with a vernacular improvisational tradition at its core. And by all means, I acknowledge the African American foundation to American culture. As a friend of mine so aptly put it, “We can’t cede Western culture to white folk.” But while musically jazz is a blend of influences developed in the West, I believe the public performance of jazz owes far more to the African-inspired vernacular tradition than to the Western performance aesthetic.

2. A character in David Bradley’s novel *The Chaneyville Incident* talks about the lived experience of the vernacular tradition: “The Africanisms—the anthropologists aptly call

them 'survivals'—exist in all of us, independent of our knowledge or our volition. Those of us who have learned about them can recognize them in our own behavior; those of us who were raised in certain conditions that reinforce the behavior can see it in everything we do. Those of us who know less about Africa than did the European slavers nevertheless tell tales that echo African tales, sing songs that call on African patterns; nobody may know that the form is called 'call and response,' but that's the way you sing a song" (Bradley 1981, 213).

3. It is important to note that the music itself is a form of vernacular performance—call-and-response patterns constantly occur in the music, as well as (and in the form of) the ongoing vernacular communication of the music's call. When I use the term "non-vernacular event," I'm referring to the lack of response from some majority white audiences—not to the lack of vernacular aspects of the music itself.

4. I am mixing genres here, to make my point. For as David Lionel Smith writes in "What Is Black Culture?" "Obviously, Clay's speech is a dramatic moment in a play, not an essay in cultural criticism. On the other hand, there is no dramatic necessity that his tirade be expressed as a sweeping claim about black cultural history, complete with biographical illustrations. In effect, Baraka uses the dramatic moment as a platform on which cultural criticism struts about in the guise of spontaneous emotion" (Smith 1997, 184).

5. Early in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the title character says:

I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless head you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me. (Ellison 1989, 3)

6. For the record, Davis, in *Miles: The Autobiography*, says this about the matter:

I could communicate with the band just by giving them a certain look. . . . I listen constantly and if anything is just a little off, I hear it right away and try to correct it on the spot while the music is happening. That's what I'm doing when I have my back turned to the audience—I can't be concerned with talking and bullshitting with the audience while I'm playing because the music is talking to them when everything's right. If the audience is hip and alert, they know when the music is right and happening. When that's the case, you just let things groove and enjoy what's going on. (Davis 1989, 356)

Not only do his comments allude to competing realities, but he also implicitly agrees with Marsalis's "the music tells you" position when he insists that "the music is talking to them"—not his visual presentation. Miles's preference for a "hip and alert" audience suggests he is aware of audience variation.

7. Indeed, at the close of *Bloomington*, Branford Marsalis's live 1991 album, he cheerfully bids the audience goodnight by saying, "Hope we didn't confuse you too much!"—as if it were a given that his audience was confused, and he just hoped they weren't *too* confused. Although he was likely referring specifically to the music the band had just played, his post-concert announcement suggests that he, like Davis, is all too aware of the chasm between artistic possibilities and audience expectations. It also suggests that Marsalis embraces the competing realities as a way to enhance his performance, unlike jazz musicians such as McBride and Joshua Redman, who try to bridge that gap by borrowing music and performance aspects from different (albeit sometimes black) musical genres.

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