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Sacred Swing: The Sacralization of Jazz in the American Bahá'í Community

Before I became a Bahá'í, I was convinced that the only people I knew who seemed to understand God as I understood Him were jazz musicians.

—Marvin “Doc” Holladay

[M]usic and musicians must help to set things right.

—Dizzy Gillespie

Once condemned as “the devil’s music,” jazz music has assumed a sacred aura. Since the mid-twentieth century, many prominent jazz artists have infused their music with an overt spirituality, and have been met by listeners turning to jazz for a sacred experience. The release of John Coltrane’s majestic *A Love Supreme* (1965), which paid unabashed tribute to God, “To Whom All Praise Is Due,” was but the culmination of a broader trend.¹ Compositions by Charles Mingus, Duke Ellington, Horace Silver, Mary Lou Williams, and Jimmy Smith paid musical homage to the African American church, while other musicians, such as Art Blakey (Abdullah Ibn Buhaina), Idrees Sulieman, Sahib Shihab, Yusef Lateef, and Kenny Clarke (Liaqat Alí Salaam)—converted to Islam. Pharoah Sanders, Tony Scott, and Alice Coltrane explicitly evoked Asian mysticism and spiritual practice in their music. Inspired to (re)situate mystical experience and spiritual transcendence within the theory and practice of improvised music, consciously rejecting secular commercialism and modern-

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ist aestheticism, these artists created jazz-informed Buddhist or Hindu meditation aids in addition to renditions of African American spirituals and gospel, Jewish *klezmer*, and Afro-Caribbean *santería* ritual music.² A recent National Public Radio commentary defined jazz as “the sound of God laughing.”³ “The devil’s music” has clearly changed hands.

Explaining the enduring relevance and appeal of Coltrane’s “theophanic” aspirations, Michael Bruce McDonald contends that “our age is fraught with longing for something akin to sacred experience,” and that this “longing for numinous experience remains an important basis for resistance to a culture industry whose hegemony might otherwise seem so unflappable, so utterly secure.”⁴ At a time when so much popular entertainment draws attention to the body and sensual experience, jazz has become for many an alternative cultural form that promises spiritual ecstasy and transcendence, the creator-musician’s improvised flights perceived as evidence of a mystical link to the capital “C” Creator.⁵

One of the most fully articulated expressions of a connection between jazz and spirituality comes from members of the Bahá’í Faith. The Bahá’í sacralization of jazz reflects the specific characteristics of Bahá’í theology and social teachings, particularly regarding the nature of religious revelation and the principle of “unity-in-diversity.” This essay examines the dialectic between jazz and Bahá’í spiritual teachings and praxis, exploring the impact of the Faith’s theological and social doctrines on the creation of jazz music by adherents, and conversely the effects of jazz on spiritual practices and religious identity in the American Bahá’í community. The ambiguous aesthetic stature of jazz challenged individual believers and Bahá’í institutions to reconsider and expand their notions of what types of music are suitable for worship, thus contributing to the maturation of this spiritual community’s inclusive ethos.

My approach here is inspired by Jon Michael Spencer’s “theomusicology,” a “theologically informed” perspective that makes it possible to “discern how particular peoples perceive the universal mysteries that circumscribe their mortal existence and how the ethics, theologies, and mythologies to which they subscribe shape their worlds and *the world*” through music.⁶ However, unlike most theomusicological scholarship, the theology that informs this study is Bahá’í rather than Christian. This essay explores the intersections between aesthetics and spirituality within a Bahá’í-inspired framework and addresses the following questions: How and why have Bahá’í aesthetic and social attitudes toward jazz evolved over the last few decades? Why has jazz now assumed such prominence in Bahá’í public culture? What has drawn jazz artists to this particular religion and how has the Bahá’í Faith affected their music? How does jazz figure within the broader project of crafting a distinctive Bahá’í culture, as mandated by the leadership of the Faith? Through textual analysis and oral histories of Bahá’í jazz musicians, I examine the process by which

jazz music is sacralized as a vehicle for worship and the consequences of that process for both the music and Bahá'í beliefs.⁷

By "sacralization" I mean the attribution of religious significance to jazz; the detection of the Creator's purpose and spiritual revelation in the evolution and performance of the music; the reverential, prayerful attitude with which one performs or listens to jazz; and the phenomenological experience of what Deanne Bogdan has called "musical spirituality"—that is, the likening of "aesthetic experience" to "mystical/religious experience," leading to "the collapse of ego boundaries, a sense of oneness with 'what is,'" and "that feeling of coming to know the truth about oneself and the world."⁸ This "sense of oneness" would not be alien to the seasoned jazz performer: the seemingly "telepathic" interactions between improvising musicians, Paul Berliner remarks, "dissolve the boundaries that normally separate musical imaginations, . . . thereby creating a deeply satisfying sense of unity within the group."⁹ The parallels to the Bahá'í emphasis on unity are obvious, yet Bahá'í musicians go well beyond this, identifying further convergences with Bahá'í scriptural injunctions, theology, social teachings, and aesthetics that may well be exceptional in the clarity with which they posit sacred meaning in jazz music. The Bahá'í case thus provides an opportunity to explore a particularly well-developed conception of jazz as sacred music.

Since Dizzy Gillespie's conversion to the Faith in 1968, jazz music has played an increasingly prominent role in the cultural life of the American Bahá'í community, in part because Gillespie and other jazz musicians have actively promoted the music within their faith community and performed jazz in service to its wider propagation. Consequently, the American Bahá'í community has accepted the music as a vehicle for attracting public attention and promoting its doctrines of world unity and racial equality. Embracing an art form of African American origin is a gesture toward racial reconciliation and amity, as well as a strategy to de-exoticize an unfamiliar faith through the appropriation of a nationally *indigenous* art. While emphasizing the Americanness of jazz, Bahá'ís also seek a more unified world community by espousing a musical form that has risen to global prominence.¹⁰

Bahá'ís have not always been so favorably disposed toward jazz, nor have differences in musical taste within the community been completely resolved. The growing prominence of jazz in the American community's worship activities and "proclamation events" is undeniable.¹¹ Doubts about the suitability of jazz for reverent worship linger, however, in part because of the community's ethnic and social diversity and concomitant multiplicity of musical tastes, but also because of persistent aesthetic ambivalence toward jazz. Bahá'í jazz musicians thus feel compelled to proselytize on two fronts: in service to the Faith among the general pub-

lic; and on behalf of jazz within the Bahá'í community, to rectify what some of the musicians interviewed for this project consider to be the mediocrity of the community's musical life. The testimonies of Bahá'í musicians suggest that they take quite seriously both the notion of jazz as a "universal language," and the admonition of the Bahá'í leadership to deploy the arts in propagating the Faith and its teachings. But they also express dissatisfaction with the general quality of music within the community and feel some responsibility for elevating it, since according to the Bahá'í writings aesthetic excellence facilitates spiritual attainment.

"A Ladder for Your Souls"—Bahá'í Musical Aesthetics

The Bahá'í Faith emerged in mid-nineteenth-century Iran with the declaration of prophethood by Mírzá Husayn-'Alí (1817–92), or Bahá'u'lláh ("Glory of God").¹² Bahá'u'lláh claimed to fulfill the prophecies of all the major world religions and to inaugurate a new prophetic cycle appropriate to the modern age. Advocating the unity of humankind, the equality of men and women, the necessity for education and "independent investigation of truth," the essential oneness of all religions, and the harmony between religion and science, Bahá'u'lláh was repeatedly exiled as a heretic by the Qájár and Ottoman regimes. His son 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921) succeeded to leadership of the movement and facilitated its spread with journeys to Europe and North America in the 1910s. Leadership subsequently passed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's grandson, Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957), and in 1963 to the elected Universal House of Justice, as the Faith expanded throughout much of the rest of the world. Today the Bahá'í International Community claims some five million adherents worldwide and has a reputation for promoting human rights, religious tolerance, sustainable development, and economic justice initiatives.

As the latest "Manifestation" in the "progressive revelation" of knowledge of the Creator, Bahá'u'lláh claimed the authority to establish new religious laws superseding Islamic and other previous ordinances, including Muslim injunctions against music (which was legally distinct from Qur'anic chanting and the *adhkán*, or call to prayer). Bahá'u'lláh and his successors unequivocally endorsed the use of music in worship. "Among certain nations of the East," 'Abdu'l-Bahá declared, "music was considered reprehensible, but in this new age the Manifest Light [Bahá'u'lláh] hath, in His holy Tablets, specifically proclaimed that music, sung or played, is spiritual food for soul and heart. . . . The musician's art is among those arts worthy of the highest praise, and it moveth the hearts of all who grieve."¹³

Bahá'u'lláh's book of laws (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, ca. 1873) makes prominent mention of music's spiritual benefits, but also alludes to the possible

perversion of music and to unstated aesthetic criteria that determine whether or not music is appropriate: "We have made it lawful for you to listen to music and singing. Take heed, however, lest listening thereto should cause you to overstep the bounds of propriety and dignity. . . . We, verily, have made music a ladder for your souls, a means whereby they may be lifted up unto the realm on high; make it not, therefore, as wings to self and passion."¹⁴

In his own comments on music, 'Abdu'l-Bahá frequently mentioned "purity," "symmetry," "perfection," "dignity," and "harmony" as desirable aesthetic criteria, and furthermore implied that music's value was contingent on spiritual intent. He asserted that "melody causes whatever feeling is in the heart to increase," and warned that "a musical and melodious voice imparteth life to an attracted heart, but lureth toward lust those souls who are engulfed in passion and desire."¹⁵ Shoghi Effendi reiterated these points in his correspondence to believers. He encouraged the use of both instrumental and vocal music in devotional activities, especially "hymns composed by the Bahá'ís themselves," but advised that Bahá'ís "not pass beyond the limits of moderation, and should take great care to maintain the strict spiritual character of all their gatherings. Music should lead to spirituality."¹⁶

Each of the Bahá'í leaders presented aesthetic merit and spiritual intent as mutually contingent, and as more or less self-evident, objective qualities, but they were apparently open to stylistic differences in musical expression. Qur'anic cantillation and Sufi songs in Persian and Arabic provided the basis for the earliest Bahá'í devotional music, yet the Oxford-educated Shoghi Effendi urged European and North American Bahá'ís not to "pattern their [devotional] music after the beautiful Eastern way of chanting," but rather to cultivate their "own natural gifts of expression," since "imitations were never spontaneous and therefore not acceptable."¹⁷ He affirmed the acceptability of stylistic diversity in devotional music: "The believers are free to paint, write or compose as their talents guide them. . . . The further away the friends keep from any set forms, the better, for they must realize that the Cause is absolutely universal, and what might seem a beautiful addition to their mode of celebrating a Feast, etc., would perhaps fall on the ears of people of another country as unpleasant sounds—and vice versa."¹⁸

Still, while none of the Bahá'í leaders expressed an aversion to any particular style of music, they all shared a conviction that some music is aesthetically better and more spiritually beneficial than other music. More important, they implied an essential connection between aesthetic quality and spiritual efficacy.¹⁹ In Bahá'í aesthetics, artistic merit facilitates the desired communion with the divine. This belief is important for the ensuing discussion because *aesthetic* distaste for particular musical styles could thus be expressed in *spiritual* terms.

Bahá'ís and Jazz B.D. (Before Dizzy)

The only resources we have for assessing initial American Bahá'í responses to jazz are publications such as *Star of the West* (1910–35) and *World Order* (1935–49).²⁰ Opinions on jazz expressed therein were by no means favorable, describing jazz as “noisy,” “discordant,” and “confusing.” But there is little reason to assume that they would have been otherwise. Although by the Jazz Age, people from diverse religious, class, and ethnic backgrounds were represented among the North American Bahá'ís, the power structure was dominated by middle- and upper-middle-class people with “high church” Protestant backgrounds. They tended to share an ideological framework with other Americans of their socioeconomic class, including residual Victorian notions of “culture” as a means to self-improvement and ennoblement, which they no doubt found consonant with Bahá'í teachings.²¹ Lawrence Levine, who has written extensively on cultural hierarchy in America, observes, “When jazz became an identifiable form of music to the larger society, it was held to be something quite distinct from *Culture* as that term was then understood. . . . One could understand what Culture was by looking at the characteristics of jazz and reversing them.”²²

Decades before a note of rock 'n' roll or gangsta rap had ever been played, many Americans maligned jazz as both symptom and cause of the decline of moral order in the modern world.²³ Its origins among African Americans (whom 'Abdu'l-Bahá extolled as the “pupil of the eye, the very wellspring of the light”) did not redeem it in Bahá'í eyes; indeed, some of jazz's harshest critics came from the black middle class, who feared it would set back decades of effort toward “racial improvement.”²⁴ At this time, the North American Bahá'í community was struggling fitfully to implement the teachings on racial equality within its own ranks,²⁵ though Bahá'ís avoided the racist language that infected so much jazz commentary in the first half of the century.

Nowadays, when jazz receives attention from Ken Burns on PBS and regularly reverberates in hallowed institutions such as Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall, it is easy to forget that late-twentieth-century ears heard a dignity in jazz that eluded most people only a generation or two earlier. “Dignity” is a key word here, as it constitutes a fundamental principle of Bahá'í aesthetics. Early jazz—sometimes punctuated with barnyard noises, scatology, and sexual references, as in Louis Armstrong's “Tight Like This”—hardly seemed dignified and refined. Early jazz repertoire did include Christian hymns and dirges, and the later innovations of Thomas Dorsey, Mahalia Jackson, and Ray Charles are proof that the sacred and secular streams in African American music frequently converged.²⁶ Nonetheless, the fact that early jazz was often

performed in vice districts, speakeasies, and dance halls, and accompanied some of the most sexually suggestive dances yet invented, made it a hard sell to individuals and communities promoting moral propriety and piety.

Music was, in fact, one of the most contentious issues within the North American Bahá'í community. But in the first half of the twentieth century, a small but powerful faction of Bahá'ís effectively extinguished a burgeoning tradition of Bahá'í hymnody (much of it adapted from Christian hymns) of which 'Abdu'l-Bahá had explicitly approved. Neither was the community able to sustain a choir to sing classical oratorios. Despite Shoghi Effendi's consistent encouragement of devotional music, the American Bahá'í community seemed paralyzed when it came to determining what kind of music was appropriate and even how to use it in worship. The result of such vacillation, according to Robert Jackson Armstrong-Ingram, was that by the mid-twentieth century, "Bahá'ís had been socialized to expect and accept a devotional life largely devoid of musical content."²⁷



Figure 1. A Bahá'í choir of Chicago-area believers congregating on the grounds of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois, ca. 1910s. Courtesy of the National Bahá'í Archives, United States.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Bahá'í artists perform music in an astonishing variety of musical styles—from New Age to cumbia, reggae to folk, gospel to hip-hop—but this by no means implies that issues of suitability and differences in aesthetic taste have been resolved within the community.²⁸ Bahá'í reactions to jazz must be understood within this context of uncertainty as to how to interpret the teachings on music with respect to specific musical genres, and of discomfort with the license to create a new devotional culture.

I have located no extended harangues on jazz in Bahá'í publications, perhaps because there was no shortage of them in the general media. However, offhand denunciations of jazz by Bahá'ís did appear in commentaries on American youth and mass culture. On such matters Bahá'ís tended to share with other religionists the conviction that modern mass culture was decadent. In a 1936 letter Shoghi Effendi himself mentioned specifically “the degeneracy of art and music, the infection of literature, and the corruption of the press” as among the “outstanding characteristics of a decadent society, a society that must either be reborn or perish.” A 1937 *World Order* editorial echoed his concern: “The means of riotous living are too abundant around us to prevent youth from using them by any system of external restraints.”²⁹

A number of editorials in Bahá'í periodicals include references to jazz as emblematic of the desultory state of modern culture. One essay published in *Star of the West* on “true happiness” reproved those who “seek happiness in the pursuit of ‘pleasure.’ Our cabarets nightly are filled with habitués seeking the glare of lights and noisy jazz syncopations with their gross appeal. And likewise there is more or less resort to artificial and alcoholic stimulation. These but create a temporary exhilaration and forgetfulness of troubles or unfulfilled desires.” Another writer, though finding such common expressions as “hell-bent” or “flaming youth” to be “alarmingly dangerous and destructive,” blamed adults who had “developed crime and vice and nerve [w]racking jazz and speed. The children have lived what their elders were living, and with the vim and exuberance of youth they have rapidly pushed it farther.”³⁰ A 1941 *World Order* symposium on “Youth and a New World Order” employed jazz as a metaphor for anomic modern youth.

Jazz, discordant, confusing, symbolizes the state in which youth finds itself today. Youth is faced with the problem which its elders could not solve. . . . Youth has become heir to a world which is economically, socially, politically and religiously in a state of complete collapse. . . .

To youth, the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are as a Great Symphony rising out of a jumbled, jazzed era, fulfilling to them the promise of God that all mankind shall live in peace and harmony in a unified world.³¹

Bahá'ís also shared with more secular-minded critics both an aesthetic contempt for mass cultural products and a Leavisite nostalgia for preindustrial forms of amusement.³² A 1935 *World Order* article contended,

We have not been alert to make suitable substitutes for the old loyalties [to family, church, and community], but have simply followed a laissez faire system in regard to recreation with the result that business enterprise has stepped in with money-making rather than character-building as the dominant motive. Little wonder that much of our so-called recreation is simply excitement and thrills, or trivial and profitless amusement, or even that which positively degrades.

In an elegy to the edifying yet vanishing art of folk dancing, another Bahá'í writer prescribed

as a preliminary to any creative living, . . . a course in aesthetics; in the appreciation of nature; of beauty; of the rhythm in things. . . . Young people should be taught the beauty of impersonal movement, in groups, to beautiful and religious music; they should not be allowed to listen any longer to jazz, which has destroyed in a whole generation the capacity for understanding music.³³

For these Bahá'í commentators, aesthetic and moral issues were intertwined. The overt sensuality of jazz made it anathema to Bahá'ís who believed fundamentally that great art was spiritual and spiritual art was great. "Religion not only inspires the creation of more beautiful forms of art," a 1939 *World Order* editorial stated, "but it also arouses in the masses a more delicate and compelling appreciation for beauty as expressed in art." Citing the "irreligion" of the times, in which "sensuality tends to warp and tarnish all forms of art expression," the editorial concludes that Bahá'u'lláh's New World Order would promote "not only justice and moral integrity in world affairs, but also a greater refinement of that beauty-loving impulse which is the common heritage of humanity."³⁴

The excerpts quoted above indicate that Bahá'ís found jazz no less perplexing and unsettling to moral conventions and aesthetic values than mainstream religious Americans did. In making this point, it is not my intention to criticize these commentators for a lack of foresight or an insensitivity to jazz's charms. As a form of modern mass culture, emblematic of its more decadent excesses, jazz seemed to epitomize the musical "wings to self and passion" the leaders of the Faith had warned against, and thus strained the tolerance of the American Bahá'í community.

One prominent Bahá'í writer did, however, find redeeming qualities in jazz: Alain Leroy Locke (1885–1954). It is perhaps significant that Locke (who became a Bahá'í in 1918) was a primary figure in the Harlem Renaissance circles that included other African American intellectu-

als—Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, Claude McKay, and Zora Neale Hurston—who defended jazz and blues and articulated a black folk aesthetic. A Rhodes scholar, Howard University professor, and editor of the groundbreaking Harlem Renaissance anthology *The New Negro*, Locke was a pioneering advocate of “unity in diversity” and “multiculturalism,” terms that have become fundamental in the Bahá’í vocabulary (and, of course, are now in mainstream use).³⁵ Yet Locke’s views on jazz were qualified and ambivalent, for he brought to his studies the moral and aesthetic perspectives of both his social class and his professed faith, which proved to be at least as powerful as his urge to legitimize an important component of African American cultural heritage. We find personified in Locke the tensions jazz generated in American cultural life.

Locke’s critique was based on the same discomfort with modern mass-media culture expressed by other Bahá’í commentators.³⁶ He maintained “there is a vast difference between [jazz’s] first healthy and earthy expression in the original peasant paganism out of which it arose and its hectic, artificial and sometimes morally vicious counterpart which was the outcome of the vogue of artificial and commercialized jazz entertainment.” From their original “folk-stuff,” African American musicians and entertainers had “spawned a plague, profitable but profligate, that has done more moral harm than artistic good.” He conceded:

So, even those who violently condemn jazz and its influence are partly right. Its cult does have a direct relationship to the freer sexuality of this age. However, instead of blaming it on jazz, the vogue of jazz should be regarded as the symptom of a profound cultural unrest and change, first a reaction from Puritan repressions and then an escape from the tensions and monotonies of a machine-ridden, extroverted form of civilization.³⁷

Locke departed from the prevalent view, however, in his desire to find redeeming aesthetic and social value in jazz: “For better or worse, jazz is, however, the spiritual child of this age. Phases of it will disappear with the particular phase of civilization which gave birth to it; but some permanent contributions to music and art will have been made.” Locke embraced the unrefined, elemental emotional energy of jazz as its most positive trait, thereby articulating both an alternative aesthetic sensibility and a vision of jazz as a potentially beneficial social force in American culture. He celebrated the improvisatory and participatory ethos of jazz performance and lauded its unique role as a site of “interracial collaboration.”³⁸

More importantly, jazz, in its more serious form, has also become the characteristic musical speech of the modern age. Beginning as the primitive rhythms of the Congo, taking on the American

Negro's emotional revolt against the hardships and shackles of his life, jazz became more than the Negro's desperate antidote and cure for sorrow. It incorporated the typical American restlessness and unconventionality, embodied its revolt against the drabness of commonplace life, put pagan force behind the revolt against Puritan restraint, and finally became the Western World's life-saving flight from boredom and over-sophistication to the refuge of elemental emotion and primitive vigor. This is the credit side of the jazz ledger, against which the debit side we have already mentioned must be balanced, according to one's judgment and temperament and taste.³⁹

Locke's defense of the music was thus neither unequivocal nor particularly bold. For him, as for W. E. B. DuBois, slavery-era spirituals constituted the pinnacle of "Negro genius," and he hoped that a major composer would make something artistically substantial from such material.⁴⁰ In his writings he struggled publicly to reconcile the redeeming aesthetic qualities of jazz with the troubling moral and spiritual implications of its proliferation.

Birk's Works

The Harlem Renaissance intellectuals' eloquent apologetics for jazz, combined with the critical enthusiasm shown by European commentators such as Hughes Panassié, Charles Delauney, and Ernst Krenek, helped to foster a climate of respect for the music. The effects on mainstream aesthetic sensibilities were monumental. "To say that by our time jazz has become part of that entity we call art is only part of the truth," Levine notes. "Jazz in fact is one of those forces that have helped to transform our sense of art and culture."⁴¹

Significant changes in the music itself in the 1940s made it easier for the public to arrive at a more positive critical consensus about jazz. Although bedeviled by the image of the self-destructive heroin addict with a horn, bebop and its various offshoots demanded respect as serious, challenging music for *listening* rather than dancing. In the late 1950s State Department sponsorship of jazz tours to Cold War hotspots in the Third World exemplified a new regard for the music as the quintessential American art. Moreover, in the 1960s jazz's palette expanded to include rhythms, melodic scales, instrumentation, songs, and aesthetic concepts from folk and classical musics of Latin America, Arabia, South Asia, the Caribbean, West Africa, and East Asia, facilitating what I have characterized elsewhere as a "multilateral, truly global exchange of musical ideas, inspiration, and influence."⁴²

Dizzy Gillespie, of course, was prominent in all these developments, by helping to develop bebop, collaborating with Cuban musicians Mario

Bauzá and Chano Pozo to create Afro-Cuban jazz, and being the first jazz musician to tour abroad under State Department auspices. His artistic stature and charisma were pivotal to the wider acceptance of jazz among both mainstream Americans and adherents of the Bahá'í Faith.

Gillespie was introduced to the Bahá'í Faith by Beth McKintey, who contacted him in Milwaukee for an interview about Charlie Parker. Saxophonist Jay Corre says that initially Gillespie teased McKintey mercilessly: "He really put her down when she and her husband would go and see him in clubs. It was hard for Bahá'ís to be in clubs [because alcohol is prohibited]. . . . He made it hard for her, y'know, like, 'these straight-laced people comin' to see me.'"⁴³ McKintey persisted, sending the trumpeter Bahá'í literature, which he read while on tour and in the midst of some personal turmoil. Despondent about the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., Gillespie was grappling with "my own spiritual shortcomings." "If something hurt or impressed me badly—or just out of plain boredom—I'd lapse into getting drunk or act extremely uncivil, until it occurred to me that I was going around the world making myself look foolish before people who respected me and the music we played." Reading William Sears's 1961 book, *A Thief in the Night*, which relates Bahá'u'lláh to biblical prophecy, convinced him to join the Faith. When McKintey arranged a personal introduction to Sears, Gillespie recalled, "I had my declaration already in a sealed envelope, because when I read that book, I said, 'Boy, I really wanna be something like this.' I think this is what God wants."

Though not the first jazz musician to join the Bahá'í Faith—arranger Russell Garcia, drummer Sidney Bulkin, baritone saxophonist Marvin "Doc" Holladay, and trombonist Quentin "Butter" Jackson preceded him—Gillespie's conversion was significant because of his stature as a revolutionary artist. Bahá'í attitudes toward jazz may have softened considerably by then—Holladay, Garcia, and Corre reported in their interviews that New York and Los Angeles Bahá'ís were fairly tolerant of jazz in the 1950s—but Gillespie nevertheless felt compelled to mount a full-scale defense of the music's spiritual dimensions, which he believed had eluded listeners for too long. "A lot of people believe there is something 'wicked' about jazz music and musicians," he wrote in his 1979 autobiography, "but I believe they are the people most 'in tune' with the Universe."

The best example is the way that they perform; how do they come up with things that have never been played before? Where did they get it? They have to have some kind of divine inspiration. A lot of that negative opinion probably comes from ignorance, and then it has something to do with the early days of the music, which was supposed to have been conceived in a whorehouse. I don't believe

that. The jazz musicians were doing the same thing in the whorehouse as the whores, making a living. An evil society put them in there. I don't believe jazz was conceived in a whorehouse; it's clean, the motives and everything about jazz are spotless.⁴⁴

Gillespie's conversion to the Bahá'í Faith strengthened his conviction that jazz was a spiritual and worthy music: "I believe in the parallel between jazz and religion. Definitely! Definitely! . . . Our Creator chooses great artists. There is no other explanation for the fact that a guy like Charlie Parker had so much talent other than the fact that he was divinely inspired. Other guys practiced just as hard as he did, so why didn't they have it? There's no other explanation." Indeed, Gillespie felt vindicated as a jazzman by Bahá'í tolerance of cultural diversity: "In the Bahá'í religion we don't believe in cutting loose anything good. Cut loose your heritage? Bahá'ís believe that you bring it in and work with others."⁴⁵

Though the Bahá'í teachings on unity resonated with his prior beliefs, Gillespie acknowledged, "Becoming a Bahá'í changed my life in every way and gave me a new concept of the relationship between God and man—between man and his fellow man—man and his family." Biographer Alyn Shipton says that joining the Faith reinvigorated Gillespie's career and sense of self: "Belief in the succession of 'messengers' and application of the idea to music allowed him to regain belief in himself and reinvent himself as a teacher and prophet for the generation of younger musicians he encouraged over the years to come."⁴⁶ Some of Gillespie's most well-regarded projects in the last two decades of his career reflected the spiritual principles of the Bahá'í Faith—particularly the 1976 Brazilian jazz recording *Bahiana* and the United Nations Orchestra (1989–91). UNO's pan-American personnel and repertoire highlighted the epochal melding of African and European musical heritages that had created the musics of the Americas, thereby signifying the unity of humanity. "From the ideal platform of his United Nations Orchestra," Shipton comments, "with its pathbreaking fusion of musical styles from North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean, he had demonstrated his commitment to the principles of unity, peace, and brotherhood of which he spoke so often."⁴⁷

The musicians whom I interviewed for this project describe Gillespie as a restrained yet enthusiastic teacher of his newfound faith to his audiences, as well as a generous and gentle teacher of music. "There was no way to know when he was going to do this," Doc Holladay recalls,

but you'd be on the bandstand and Dizzy would say something about, "In case y'all don't know, I'm a Bahá'í, and I want you to meet my Bahá'í family." And he'd say, "All the Bahá'ís in the audience please stand up," and there'd be people all over the place, interspersed throughout the audience, [who] would stand up. . . .

Of course, all the diversity would show up immediately. . . . And oftentimes he'd play "Olinga," and he would talk some stuff about [Ugandan Bahá'í Enoch] Olinga.

Gillespie's stage banter sometimes alluded to the Faith's metaphysical teachings about the "contingent world" and the "spiritual realm"; he was also known to have the audience sing the invocation "Yá-Bahá'u'l-Abhá" while he played "Olinga." "Unbeknownst to ninety percent of them," Doc laughs, "they were singing praises to Bahá'u'lláh!"

Some jazz musicians—pianist Mike Longo, saxophonist James Moody, and vocalist Flora Purim among them—were inspired to join the Faith because of Gillespie's influence. Drummer Sherman Ferguson (1944–2006) stated unequivocally, "I'm a Bahá'í because of Dizzy Gillespie. I know I'm not the first one to say that." On a European tour with Kenny Burrell in 1977, Ferguson spotted Gillespie talking with some other musicians at a bar and decided to go speak to him. "I made a *faux pas* and I



Figure 2. Dizzy Gillespie performing with fellow Bahá'í musicians for the 1987 Peace Fest. Louis Gregory Bahá'í Institute, Hemingway, South Carolina. Courtesy of the National Bahá'í Archives, United States.

touched his face. And he said, 'Hey man, don't touch me.'" Ferguson was horribly embarrassed to have offended one of his idols, so apologizing profusely, he returned to his hotel room. An hour later, Gillespie came up to his room. "This was his way. He felt how bad *I* felt about what happened, so this was his way of alleviating my feelings." Ferguson asked him about the Bahá'í Faith, but Dizzy demurred, saying, "Man, this is not the time." Instead, he referred the drummer to Sears's *A Thief in the Night*, which helped convince Ferguson to declare. "I looked into a lot of things, but the Bahá'í Faith just seemed to be the one that had all the attributes of what I think spirituality and religion should be. . . . I am eternally grateful to Dizzy for not proselytizing and not preaching about it and not going into it at an improper time."

Purim found the Faith while en route to Australia with Gillespie's United Nations Orchestra. Impressed that the trumpeter had memorized his prayer book, Purim decided to accompany him to a Bahá'í function in Sydney.

So then I saw all these friendly people, and they were talking in little groups here and there, and I noticed that they were talking about very private things to each other, and kind of opening up. . . . I said [to Dizzy], "This is beautiful. Bring me anytime you go to parties like this. Who are these people? They are different, they're not the same kind of people you meet in parties." He said, "They're Bahá'ís, like me." . . . I said, "I want to be a Bahá'í." He said, "Wait a minute. Before you say that, you have to read some books." It was late at night, and their library was closed, but one of the people at the party said, "I am the librarian and I have the key, so I can go get some books."

Purim read *A Thief in the Night* and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Some Answered Questions*, "and after I read those books, I still wanted to be a Bahá'í. So they made me a Bahá'í while I was still in Australia."

Summing up Gillespie's importance within the Faith community, vocalist Tierney Sutton says that "Dizzy was a very, very powerful force. . . . He was an amazing example of the Faith in many, many ways," but she adds that he used to feel somewhat reluctant to talk about the Faith because he knew of his personal failings. "He was a tremendously deep Bahá'í, he really knew his stuff, he really believed it, and especially toward the end of his life he was a loose cannon teacher." Clearly, Gillespie's stature as a jazz artist, together with his disinclination to heavy-handed evangelizing, made the Bahá'í Faith more attractive to "spiritually seeking" jazz musicians,⁴⁸ and the connections he identified between his music and his religion reverberate in their respective testimonies.

Jazz as Spiritual Practice—Bahá'í Musicians Testify

To better understand this deepening connection between jazz and the Bahá'í Faith from a phenomenological perspective, I interviewed several musicians and one jazz critic about what attracted them to this religion, how Bahá'í teachings influence their creative endeavors, and how they situate jazz within their respective Bahá'í-inspired worldviews and spiritual praxis. Most of the musicians with whom I spoke identify themselves mainly as jazz artists, heirs to a primarily (African) American musical tradition in which rhythmic swing and improvisation are fundamental attributes. Their commitment to the jazz idiom is strengthened by a common (if not unanimous) belief that it has peculiar traits reflecting Bahá'í spiritual and social values, which further motivates them to bring jazz into the devotional and social life of the Bahá'í community.⁴⁹

Conversion Narratives

All but one of the musicians who spoke to me had converted to the Bahá'í Faith (Ben Koen was raised as a Bahá'í by parents who had converted from Judaism and Methodism). When asked about what attracted them to this religion, most replied that “it made sense” or was more “logical” than other religions they had explored or been raised in. “It just seemed to make sense to me at the time,” says saxophonist Ernie Hensley, former leader of the renowned Air Force jazz band The Airmen of Note. The Episcopal Church in which he was raised “didn’t seem to be relevant to the times. The Faith seemed to be more on top of what’s going on in the world. They had the answers.”

The theological teachings validating all religions were most attractive to some. Raised “nominally Catholic,” jazz critic Jack Bowers found it inconceivable that “a certain group of people were going to heaven and everyone else was going to hell. It did not make any sense to me at all. I said, ‘Wait a minute, there are more Muslims and Buddhists in the world than there are Christians; you mean all those people are going to hell because they don’t believe in Jesus Christ?’”

“The churches asked me to believe so many illogical things,” Russ Garcia says. “When you’ve got loads and loads of different churches telling you they’re the only one, and if you don’t belong to their club, you’re going to burn in hell, somebody has to be wrong. Our logic couldn’t accept this.”

Declaring his allegiance to the Faith was a wrenching experience—“a mental hell”—for pianist and vocalist Keith Williams, who had a strong background in the Baptist and African Methodist churches. Growing up near San Francisco, he encountered many Jews, Black Muslims, and Buddhists. “You saw these people, man, they seemed to be leading beautiful

lives, they were wonderful people, they helped the community. And I said, 'Well, how is God dealing with them?' . . . You can't say these people are going to hell because they don't believe in Jesus. And the people who professed to be Christians, you'd find out they were drinking, they were gambling, they were beating their wives." He took these questions to his pastor, who could only recommend that Williams pray more and keep going to church. When friends invited him to a Bahá'í gathering, he initially went "as a spy, to know the enemy," but he found resolutions to his theological doubts. "Emotionally, I couldn't accept it, but rationally . . . it made sense." Finally, he said to himself, "I'm a Bahá'í. I'm going to fireside tonight and I'm going to declare. . . . I don't know if I'm going to hell, but I'll just leave this in God's hands. This is the truth."

Bahá'í teachings on racial amity are central to the conversion narratives of several musicians. Bassist Phil Morrison discovered the Faith in the early 1960s in Hawai'i, which he describes as not being very friendly toward people of African descent.

But I did meet some local folks that were very nice and very warm and friendly and stuff, and come to find out they were Bahá'í. So that impressed me, the fact that they didn't show the typical distance or racism, you know what I mean, really stand-offish-ness towards me as a black person. So that stuck with me. They never told me much about the Faith, and I didn't ask much, but I was just impressed with them as a people.

White musicians Mike Longo and Doc Holladay were profoundly impressed by the Bahá'í embrace of racial diversity. Raised in Florida and Kansas, respectively, they were disgusted with segregation and as young men habitually violated the taboos about interracial fraternizing. Longo claims that when his bandleader father hired altoist Julian "Cannonball" Adderley to perform for a street dance, "This was the first time in the history of Ft. Lauderdale that a racially mixed band was put together." The audience was initially shocked, but then "Cannonball played 'Stars Fell on Alabama,' and he just melted everybody's hearts. . . . The music just killed everybody." Later, Longo's father quit his membership in the local country club when Adderley was not allowed to eat in the dining room with the rest of the band. Longo followed his father's example, defying Florida's segregation regime and touring the chitlin circuit with a rhythm-and-blues band. Holladay says racism caused him "subconscious turmoil." His childhood friend, a black drummer named Smitty, navigated segregation skillfully, but Doc says, "I couldn't figure out who the heck I was. It was pretty obvious that I really wasn't a part of what was there, but there was no place for me to *be*." Eventually he just "gave up on ever being a part of the white community, because the white community and I didn't get along." He was warmly accepted into the

community of black jazz musicians, “not only because of any technical facility that I possessed, but because of a sincerity of purpose, a sensitivity to musicianship, and an understanding of the aesthetic and spiritual reality of the art.”⁵⁰

Several common themes emerge in these conversion narratives: spiritual questing; a willingness to question received religious explanations; and a desire to find logic and confirmation of prior beliefs or common-sense morality in religious practice. Many informants hinted that these characteristics are especially well developed in jazz musicians because of the exploratory, complex, and improvisational nature of their music. Becoming Bahá'ís thus meshed well with their musical identities.

Progressive Revelation and Musical Revolution

Reflecting on connections between their faith and their art, several musicians mentioned a parallel proposed by Dizzy Gillespie: an analogy between the progressive revelation of religion by a series of prophets and the evolution of jazz. Jay Corre has given public lectures on this theme, demonstrating similarities between the progressive revelation by prophets and the evolution of trumpet styles from Louis Armstrong to Roy Eldridge to Dizzy Gillespie. “And I’ll play the different styles, and I’ll say, ‘One never put down the other, it’s just a different time.’”

“Different geniuses, or those players who have an insight, can change the way that other people play for many years,” Keith Williams says. “There’s one faith, but it’s delivered, revealed in a progressive manner, and so is music. So is all truth.” Since both the Faith and jazz are relatively new forms of expression, they both have a “freshness and newness,” he claims. The improvisation and “innate freedom of jazz has a correlation to the new expressions of this new age, where people are looking at things in a whole different way. It’s like you’re spiritually improvising, in a way,” Williams adds. “Whereas with classical music, the forms are more set and you pretty much *interpret* what has already been written as opposed to coming up with something completely new from certain constructs.”

Jazz and Bahá'í Social Ideology

Committed to the social application of spiritual principles, Bahá'ís detect synchronicity between their religion’s social teachings and actual practices in jazz history and performance. “Bahá'ís [are] seemingly very interested in the oppressed, the persecuted, the downtrodden; even Bahá'u'lláh’s been in prison for these social reforms,” Phil Morrison states. “And jazz music started in this country by people who were oppressed and persecuted and treated unjustly, to one extent or another. So . . . the Bahá'í Faith has a certain appeal to people of all backgrounds,

but particularly people who are oppressed, minorities, because [it's] very concerned about the minorities."

In a similar vein, Holladay has described the jazz community as the "first model of race unity," presenting it as an example for Bahá'ís in particular and society at large to emulate.

The criteria for acceptance into that sphere of unified humanity, rested on musical knowledge, cultural comprehension, and performance capability. Although this had obvious elitist consequences, it also was the most integrated and unified environment of racially diverse people that existed at that time. (This was many years before the Bahá'í community had begun to work on a practical application of its fundamental teaching of race unity.)⁵¹

Tierney Sutton offers yet another link between the Faith and jazz, describing the collaborative process of creating music with her long-standing trio as akin to the process of selfless consultation encouraged in the religion. "The processes that my band uses to arrange and to create what we do, we have all come to recognize them as Bahá'í processes . . . of consultation and problem-solving." Sutton says jazz can frequently be "competitive" and "egoish." Because jazz has been underappreciated and its practitioners underpaid for so long, a kind of underdog mentality develops that in turn fosters self-indulgent soloing. "I'm a jazz musician, and I'm uninterested in hearing somebody play twenty-five choruses of something. . . . You're supposed to be serving the music, not showing off." In Sutton's band such self-indulgence is considered a "spiritual rift." Their aesthetic demands restraint from each member. "My band's way of showing off is to do as little of it as possible and to try to be absolutely in service of the moment. And these guys [pianist Christian Jacob, bassist Trey Henry, and drummer Ray Brinker] have chops like nobody's business. . . . When you have total virtuosos that are deciding to make an artistic, restrained choice, there's a power to that."

Ingrid Monson's and Paul Berliner's studies demonstrate the importance of group interaction in jazz performance, a crucial balance between individual and collective expression that trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, among others, has publicly described as emblematic of American democracy.⁵² Bahá'í jazz musicians find in these aspects of jazz clear resonance with their spiritual teachings, hence for them the performance of jazz creates opportunities to put into practice the ideals of Bahá'í social behavior in the so-called contingent world.

Feelin' the Spirit: Performance as Prayer

Most Bahá'í jazz musicians describe profound, mystical connections between their musical performances and their spiritual beliefs and prac-

tices. What emerges from their accounts is a dialectic between faith and music, in which Bahá'í doctrines influence their respective musical conceptions, and their immersion in jazz shapes their views and practice of spirituality. When asked about these connections, the musicians almost invariably referred to two specific principles from the Bahá'í scriptures: the notion that work performed in the spirit of service is a form of worship,⁵³ and the exalted status and spiritual function of music. On the other hand, because jazz—with its emphasis on individual expression, group collaboration, and improvisation—is seen as “in line” with Bahá'í teachings on the individual “investigation of truth,” consultation, and mystical exploration, it can enrich the spiritual journey of the believer.

Acceptance of the work-is-worship ethos has encouraged French hornist John Clark's efforts as a composer since the 1970s. Struggling to support his family as a musician, he might have decided that composing was

pretty frivolous, why should I be doing this, I should get a *real* job. . . . I think being a Bahá'í really influenced me a lot, especially in the beginning, as a composer. Because I was really just beginning to be some kind of a composer when I became a Bahá'í, and seeing that work as my worship made a really huge difference, it gave me more motivation to do it, and to try to do it well. I think without being a Bahá'í, and without having that concept of work and worship, that it might have been hard for me to do any writing.

Ferguson feels strongly that musical performance should be respected as “work.” He tells of leaving for a gig and being upbraided by his wife: “‘You’re not going to *work*, you’re going to play music! That’s not work.’ I said, ‘Look, you get up there and carry those drums and play that music and you tell me that’s not work.’ But because it’s called *playing* music she didn’t see it in that context.”

Bahá'í musicians approach their work with a prayerful attitude. Invoking ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s exhortation to offer “a prayer that shall rise above words and letters and transcend the murmur of syllables and sounds,”⁵⁴ saxophonist and ethnomusicologist Ben Koen claims that “[m]usic is a kind of worship, it is a prayer, a spiritual practice for me. Sometimes it’s more like a meditative practice, a prayer coming out in the music. I might be having a prayer in my mind and I’m just kind of voicing it on my saxophone or on a flute. . . . It’s a very mystical process.” Jay Corre describes his own playing in a similar manner: “I am playing not for my ego, I am playing because of what I do [for a living], and it’s worship.” “When I play the drums and I play music, I’m praying,” Ferguson said. Even though performing is fun and joyful, he still regards it as serious and reverent (though this may be hard to achieve in the context of a tavern). “But you have to do that anyway. Just playing my instrument is a religious experience.” “Every time I’m on stage,” Flora Purim muses, “I

think of [Dizzy], I think of the Faith, my spiritual being [is] in touch with the highest power possible—[I] close my eyes and let it come through me. That's how it affects me." Before each performance or recording session, Sutton and her bandmates say a prayer attributed to Irish Bahá'í George Townshend (1876–1957) that begins, "Make me a hollow reed from which the pith of self has been blown."⁵⁵ Sutton says their aim is "getting out of the way and letting the spirit move through you . . . and trying to achieve the greatest amount of reverence and humility onstage that you can possibly achieve. . . . To have four people that are all in that state of mind is a really powerful thing."

Bahá'í jazz artists find further validation in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the significance of music.⁵⁶ Jack Bowers puts it this way:

To me, one of the proofs of the existence of a Creator, a Higher Being, is our response to music. Because why should we respond to different notes, why should there be such a profound spiritual feeling when we listen to music? To me, that says that there is something *in us* that is more than flesh and blood. There is a spirit there that reacts to beauty. I have no eye for visual art. . . . When I look at a painting, I say, "Okay, fine, what do I do now?" But music is entirely different.

Because of scriptural testimonies to music's spiritual potency, Bahá'í musicians regard their music as a form of service, as evident in the slogan Phil Morrison uses for his trio with Keith Williams: "Striving to be of service to humanity by promoting international harmony through music." Sherman Ferguson likewise regarded "bringing joy to other people's hearts" as a form of service and thus of worship, even when performing in a tavern. While it is not unusual for performers of religious music to characterize their work in similar ways, the musicians here are bringing what Stephen A. Marini has called "sacred intentionality" to a musical genre that has long been regarded as secular and worldly—or "earthy"—even if the context for performance is *not* "consciously prepared to facilitate such a religious event."⁵⁷

Some Bahá'í musicians believe that jazz has special attributes that make it spiritually efficacious, while others concede that other genres are equally so. Garcia, for instance, characterizes jazz as music for the modern era, as the Bahá'í Faith is a religion for a new age. Clark and Longo both mention the principle of unity-in-diversity as being the essence of both jazz and the Faith. Holladay concurs, asserting that jazz is "so in tune with the Bahá'í Faith, that it's almost a natural fit." The key to this "fit" is improvisation, or what Doc prefers to call "extemporaneous composition," which he distinguishes from the mere "manipulation of chord changes." "[T]o be composing extemporaneously is very much

in tune with how one is taught by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi to teach the Faith. You open up your mouth and you let the Concourse work *through* you."⁵⁸

Not surprisingly, several of these musicians have expressed their devotion to the Bahá'í Faith quite openly through compositions, album titles, ensemble names, or liner notes.⁵⁹ Others are more reserved about their religion, sticking to a standard repertoire or choosing less overt ways to express Bahá'í identity. However, practically all the musicians testify to subtle yet profound influences from their faith on their music. Corre credits the Faith with changing his whole performance ethos: "Bahá'í in a way has changed my competitiveness in the music, it made me more a team player. When you're a young tenor player, you're on fire, you're a lion, and then all of a sudden you become a Bahá'í and you sort of mellow out and it's not important to cut some other guy. Y'know, that used to be the thing, 'I'm gonna play better than you.'" Garcia, who had an enormously successful career scoring for film and television in addition to his work with jazz and pop artists, muses, "I think for most of us, in the beginning of our careers, our goal was probably to be famous and rich. But, when you become a Bahá'í, your goal is to build a beautiful world and to be of service. Of course, it changes your music and your whole way of playing or writing."

Mike Longo offers powerful testimony to these effects. After converting to the Faith, he still struggled with "some old habits." One night in Boston, having recited a Bahá'í healing prayer before bed, he awoke in the middle of the night with a panic attack. He likens the episode to "shedding your old skin, like a snake sheds its skin." At his next gig, he says, "the piano said *WOOONG*, it started vibrating, and I said, 'Oh my God, that's that sound I've been looking for my whole life.' . . . I would just touch the piano and this vibration would be there, and that would affect all the other musicians, pull them in. It's *still* doing that." He adds:

There's natural music out there in the universe, and you just go and *get* it. . . . Dizzy used to say the same thing in his own words, he used to say, "Man, this music's just out here waiting for somebody to come get it." He would tell you, "If the music tells you to come over there, you go over there." And so, through the Bahá'í Faith I was able to elevate myself musically—or the Faith elevated me—to the point where I was able to get to that place as a composer and as a player. And also, all these musical mysteries started to penetrate me as a result of the Bahá'í Faith, which might sorta elevate me to the next level of music. . . . Seemed like my spiritual growth and my musical growth became one and the same.

Longo attributes any success he has had to spiritual forces beyond his own control.

The way that I've taught the Faith is through the music itself, so the musicians that are attracted to me and want to play on my bands and stuff like that, are being attracted for the right reasons without even knowing it. And so, they are reacting, because the Bahá'í Faith is what motivates my music. . . . [T]hat's what's drawing them in. They might attribute it to me, but it isn't really attributable to me.

Teaching the Faith and Preaching Jazz

'Abdu'l-Bahá once alluded to the utility of music in proclamation, saying, "In sooth, although music is a material affair, yet its tremendous effect is spiritual, and its greatest attachment is to the realm of the spirit. If a person desires to deliver a discourse, it will prove more effectual after musical melodies."⁶⁰ Whether through the obvious use of Bahá'í imagery and terminology, or simply presenting familiar music with a reverent, prayerful attitude, most Bahá'í jazz musicians consider their music to be an effective means for attracting non-Bahá'ís to Bahá'í-sponsored events and for teaching their religion to general audiences.

Bahá'ís have thus incorporated jazz into their "firesides" (gatherings in private homes at which non-Bahá'ís can receive information about the Faith). Russ Garcia hosted "jazz firesides" at his Hollywood home as early as the 1950s and 1960s, before embarking on a sea voyage to the South Pacific to teach the Faith.⁶¹ "We're still teaching all over the world, because I'm still working around the world," Garcia says. "We all know that Shoghi Effendi said when we use the arts and the media to teach this Faith, it's going to spread like wildfire." Trumpeter Warren Kime hosted similar gatherings in suburban Chicago: "We used jazz music in our firesides *all* the time. Every show, every time. . . . We kept it connected to the Faith. I think people really felt it."

Most of the musicians I interviewed had played at similar gatherings, though they have mixed feelings about their efficacy. Phil Morrison and Keith Williams play jazz firesides fairly often and regard them positively. "Oftentimes [at] jazz firesides you just play jazz and people come, and Keith and I usually sprinkle information about the Bahá'í Faith throughout our presentation," Morrison explains. "But sometimes we may not, I mean, if it's people [who] are really against religion, or we sense that they just want to hear music, then we [say,] 'Come and hear a free jazz concert presentation,' and then they're around Bahá'ís and there's this Bahá'í literature, or they associate the name 'Bahá'í' with something positive, nice cookies and punch or whatever." On the other hand, John Clark rarely performs for Bahá'í gatherings anymore. "Who wants to listen to somebody play solo French horn? If someone asks me to play at a Bahá'í event, I tell them, 'Listen, I'm just going to be there with my horn, I don't

think anyone wants to hear that.” He did perform in such a manner years ago, but “it never really went over.” “Sometimes they ask because they want some live music, and they don’t want to have to pay for it. But it would be much better to put some more thought into it.”

Imagining Jazz as “Glocal” Music

For these Bahá’ís, jazz is appropriate to their specific religious practice because it is arguably the quintessential “glocal” music—an expressive form with roots in diverse geocultural settings, but with strong “local” moorings in African America and the United States more generally, which has gone on to become a globally shared art. Sociologist Michael McMullen describes this stance as “situated universalism.” Bahá’í identity “is reflexive,” McMullen argues, “in that it is the product of a dialectical relationship between the local and global levels. . . . Their global worldview and concern is directed toward a situated, defined local community.” This makes the Faith a “universal religious response” to globalization and the consequential tensions between global and local identities.⁶²

Bahá’í jazz musicians are illustrative of a situated universalist stance because they emphasize the African American origins and characteristics of jazz—playing the nationalism card, if you will—but in service to a *postnational* vision of world unity in which jazz has universal significance and is one of an infinite variety of expressive idioms. “This [musical] evolution could have taken place under no other circumstances except through the introduction of the odious practice of slavery into America with the slaves having come from the continent of Africa,” Doc Holladay maintains. “What began as an abomination of human dignity and in the oppression of a highly sophisticated and culturally elevated people ended in the creation of a world-embracing cultural prodigy.”⁶³ Moreover, jazz, with roots in three continents, becomes a metaphor for the essential unity of humanity, an expressive form that would not have come into existence had Africans, Europeans, and Amerindians not come into contact in the Americas.

Some of these musicians go so far as to suggest it is no mere coincidence that this contact occurred simultaneously with Bahá’u’lláh’s ministry half a world away: they attribute the musical transculturation that produced “American indigenous classical music” to the “mysterious forces” unleashed by Bahá’u’lláh’s revelation propelling humanity toward unity.⁶⁴ Mike Longo asserts that jazz, as “the marriage between the African rhythmic culture and the European harmonic culture, which is another way of saying black and white culture,” is thus “a reflection of the power that was unleashed by the Bahá’í Revelation.” John Clark, too, sees a special resonance with Bahá’í teachings, describing jazz as a “fusion of concepts and musical ideas from two different continents,

and it's uniquely American, and it encompasses so many [harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic] disciplines. . . . There's no other kind of music in the world, I think, that comes from such diverse origins and fuses so well into one thing." Bahá'í conceptions of jazz thus exemplify the synergy between "local" and "global" identities described by McMullen and other theorists of globalization.⁶⁵

Taste Matters

Having researched earlier negative Bahá'í reactions to jazz, I asked each musician if he or she had encountered any resistance or controversy over the appropriateness of jazz for reverent worship. Responses varied dramatically, with some saying that Bahá'ís have been very receptive to their music, while others spoke of ignorance and indifference toward jazz within the community, and a couple had experienced more direct remonstrance from fellow Bahá'ís. The issue of aesthetics often emerged in the course of our conversations, with several respondents expressing dismay about the musical sophistication of the Bahá'í community and the aesthetic quality of its music, which, although stylistically diverse, is arguably dominated by folk and New Age styles (one commentator has described Bahá'í music, somewhat scornfully, as "A solitary individual, strapped to his guitar, play[ing] dimly-evocative melodies for audiences encouraged to echo, or at least mime, lyrics in various appropriate places").⁶⁶ Many of the jazz musicians with whom I spoke hope to educate their fellow Bahá'ís about the artistic merit, cultural importance, and spiritual efficacy of jazz.

Tierney Sutton spoke at length about the mediocrity of much Bahá'í music. "The standard, I think, that frequently exists in the Bahá'í community about how good or how excellent or how trained musicians should be to represent the Faith is tragically low. . . . I think they're accustomed to mediocrity. . . . But that's true of most people in our culture, not just the Bahá'ís." While she thinks there is a place for hobbyists or amateur musicians to perform in the community, when it comes to presenting the Faith to the public there should be a higher standard of excellence. "I think we don't have that standard for the arts at all." Sutton rarely performs for Bahá'í events, "because the Bahá'í community doesn't know how to deal with it."⁶⁷ In her recordings and live performances, she sticks almost exclusively to jazz standards. "My standard as a Bahá'í in choosing repertoire is basically that 'this must be excellent.' Also, I'm of the opinion that the most spiritual and powerful art does not hit anybody over the head about the internal process, and once it does it's impoverished. So I have never been interested in doing 'Bahá'í music.' In fact I kind of find it distasteful." She says that if she were to try to compose a Bahá'í song, "my standard of excellence would be so high, that I'd

probably never get anywhere. Or if I were to try to set the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh to music, I feel unworthy to do that. But I do feel worthy of taking what I feel are excellent compositions, that frequently have some element of what I consider spirituality in them, and presenting them in the most reverent and excellent way that I can."

Jay Corre expressed similar opinions: "The caliber of the music that the Bahá'ís are accepting now is not . . . I don't know, it's not professional." Reflecting on his past performances for proclamation activities and devotional meetings, Corre says, "the only thing they like about you is basically—and I hope I'm not negative—is that you're a Bahá'í. . . . Dizzy did a talk down here [in Florida], and I think he said it right. He said, 'They asked me to play,' he says, 'but I didn't bring my horn.'" Dizzy thought the only thing the Bahá'ís would remember would be his famously inflated cheeks: "The only reason they liked Dizzy Gillespie, basically, is he's a Bahá'í, because of the caliber of music [in the Bahá'í community]." Ferguson remarked that some Bahá'ís know something about jazz music and can appreciate it, but "some are just being nice Bahá'ís, which is cool. Because jazz music is not for everybody. It's not intended to be for everybody. One thing about jazz music is that you've got to work at it to listen to it. . . . You have to pay attention to it. And the attention span of human beings nowadays has gotten even worse." Ernie Hensley agrees, noting, "Jazz is a music that's not readily accepted by most people, even in the Bahá'í Faith."

Aside from ignorance or indifference, some have encountered more direct resistance to jazz in Bahá'í devotional life. Clark recalls a gig at Maine's Green Acre Bahá'í School, at which one listener commented that he "didn't think jazz was appropriate for the Bahá'í Faith at all." Such objections are rare, Clark observes, and in this case came from an older believer who probably grew up thinking of jazz as nightclub music. Warren Kime was discouraged by official Bahá'í reactions to his concept album *Children of Time*, on which he presented the "Old World Order" on side A and the "New World Order" on side B.

I paid for it, pressed it, started a mail-order record thing. We got them all over the world. . . . I did a lot of research, and I went to a carnival one time and took tape recorders and went up and down there to get information, you know, the barkers would be yelling and screaming. All kinds of things. Blew up a bomb. Just really tried to show the direction things were going. And then just turn it over, and we brought in all the Writings [in various languages]. . . . It was very effective. For a while there we were using it for firesides.

However, he concedes, "There didn't seem to be much interest among the powers-that-be in the Faith."

Koen admits that he has heard fellow Bahá'ís make derogatory com-

ments about some kinds of music, but that even if many Bahá'ís don't "get" jazz, "there is a context for growth and for change [in the community], and that is what's beautiful to me." Although to some extent reactions to music are culturally conditioned, he explains, the world-embracing vision mandated in the Faith makes it more likely that believers will accept or respect (if not necessarily "dig") different idiomatic expressions.

Williams and Morrison have had more positive responses, joking that "Bahá'ís make the best audiences," because they respond enthusiastically to the music, "like the Apollo Theater." Still, Williams admits, "I think the folk-type thing has been done a lot, and maybe too much. I think we need to get more diversity in terms of musical expression in the Faith. . . . I love [Bahá'í folk singer] Red Grammer, he's topnotch. But I'm glad that more hip-hop is being used, more jazz is being used." He adds:

I think Bahá'ís are a little more open-minded than that in general. But I think people are maybe more comfortable with certain types of [music], usually slower music or chanting is something which people may feel is more "reverent." I still think there's that ignorance about what *is* reverent and what *isn't* reverent. I think there's still the "European mentality," there's still too much of that in the Faith, in terms of classical music is the best way to do it, or *this* type of music is. It's just lack of knowledge, of knowing the *motive* of where that music's coming from.

He believes Bahá'ís need to be exposed to jazz so as to relate better to the outside world: "You don't take a Schubert string quartet into the ghetto," he quips.

While Bahá'í jazz musicians may wish that their coreligionists were more open to their music, they do have their own musical prejudices or opinions about "appropriateness." "I still don't want to hear the screamin' meemies [heavy metal] behind a prayer or with the lyrics of Bahá'u'lláh," Garcia opines. "I think that's in bad taste, and it's not expressing love or good feelings."

In an interview with Bob Bernotas, Bahá'í saxophonist James Moody used even stronger language to deride hip-hop and other contemporary forms:

Look, you've got all these people on the stage last night. I'm talking about the American Music Awards. What music? I mean, there was no music at all. And when it comes to rap, to me "rap" is "to talk," OK? And to me, rhythm isn't music. Music is harmony, melody, and rhythm combined, together. . . .

But you see, the devil has the world in his hands right now and the only way people are going to survive is to go spiritually, with

God. My wife, Linda, and I, we're Bahá'ís and Bahá'ís believe that there's one country and mankind is one. . . .

. . . [J]azz is gold, platinum, diamond. Jazz is wonderful. You go to a jazz concert, do you see anybody want to kill someone or shoot someone or start a riot? That's because, first of all, music is supposed to express beauty. But the music that they play now, you feel like you want to kill somebody when you hear it.

And you have all these people in the high positions, and the low ones, too, that could really elevate everyone if they put something on that was decent. And when I say decent, I mean some decent music. And that's what jazz is. But the majority of the people, what they listen to today is a bunch of shit, and I'd like for you to put it exactly like that because there's no other way for me to say it. It doesn't sound like "doo doo," it sounds like shit.

. . . Buddy Rich was right when he said, "All that music, rock and roll and that stuff, is played by morons for imbeciles."⁶⁸

While advocating artistic diversity within the community in principle, clearly some Bahá'í musicians do not advocate a blind tolerance of all forms of musical expression. Their objections to certain idioms are both aesthetic and spiritual, highlighting again the link between artistic excellence and spiritual potency that is foundational to Bahá'í aesthetics.

Creating Culture

For decades the leading institutions of the Bahá'í Faith have issued statements urging believers to create a "new culture." There are several different interpretations of this phrase. Shoghi Effendi spoke of a "culture of unity," a Bahá'í model of equality, thoughtful and respectful deliberation, and unity of purpose for the broader society to emulate. Others speak of a "culture of growth," by which they mean a continual effort by Bahá'ís to study the scriptures, deepen their faith, teach it to others, and foster "a natural expectation of growth, just like children."⁶⁹

For artists, "new culture" has additional connotations: the creation of artistic pursuits that reflect Bahá'í values while honoring the unity-in-diversity principle, and that provide believers with alternatives to the materialistic and hedonistic cultural products available in the mainstream media. Bahá'í artists in all media have become more organized, purposeful, and proactive in this regard, trying simultaneously to enrich the community's cultural life and to propagate the Faith through their art.⁷⁰

I asked the jazz musicians to comment on this "new Bahá'í culture," and to elucidate their own roles in realizing it. There was virtual unanimity that music could be a positive force for social change and the spiri-

tualization of humanity, and several indicated that these were primary motives behind their music: "I want to make music that will change the world into a rose garden," Garcia says, for instance. Many expressed outright disgust with the current state of musical culture. Corre laments the recent emphasis on visuality in music, saying "people listen to music through their eyes." Ferguson characterized the current situation as excessively negative:

People are going in the wrong direction. They are putting emphasis on negative things as opposed to positive. There are some things in the music field that bring *down* the race, brings down not just the African American race, but the human race. Most of the rap stuff, the hip-hop stuff, is giving negative information. And it's going to the wrong people. I mean, it's perpetrating ignorance to people that *should* have more sense.

Mentioning the "penchant for violence" that pervades music and games, Ferguson laughed, "Thank God I don't have any children, because I would probably be a hated parent!"

Hensley sadly remarks on the tenacity of this culture, even within the Bahá'í community: "When I was on the [Las Vegas Local Spiritual] Assembly, I just noticed that there was so much stuff that was contrary to the Faith going on. . . . They've asked me to counsel some of the [teen-age] boys. They don't have a clue what the Faith is about. Not a clue. You know, walking around with the hip-hop garb, rap crap, and the girls with their little hip huggers." The "old world order" of materialism and narcissism "is very well entrenched" and shows few signs of disappearing anytime soon. "But we're young yet," he says hopefully. "Bahá'ís a thousand years from now will wonder how we did it."

Some musicians expressed a staunch faith that a new culture will develop naturally as humanity matures toward greater unity. Shoghi Effendi regarded music "as a natural cultural development," and cautioned that there should not "be any cultivation of 'Bahá'í Music' any more than we are trying to develop a Bahá'í school of painting or writing." Referring to this statement, Koen contends,

The underlying importance is not so much in *what kind* of music is going to be made. . . . There's going to be just an explosion of diverse expressions musically. But the prerequisite to it should be, which is really where our focus is, on transforming our own selves as individuals. . . . So it's not so much that I'm sitting down and saying, "How can I make my music or my teaching reflect this or that principle?" Rather, if I transform myself, becoming more in tune with Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, hopefully, this will be reflected in my music.

Longo, too, sees himself “going along in the flow of that.” Noting the enthusiasm of the audience on his live recording from the Detroit Jazz Festival, he says, “Of course they don’t realize, but that’s the Bahá’í spirit that’s doing that to them. . . . I think the music itself has a transforming quality that at least turns people in the direction of what Shoghi Effendi is talking about. And I don’t think it’s something that someone has to consciously try to do. It’s inevitable.” In Clark’s estimation, jazz will have a prominent role in a new Bahá’í culture. “It expresses what America is all about. It expresses what unity-through-diversity is all about. If jazz didn’t have a place in that, I’d be really kind of disturbed. But it should be presented in a certain way, it should be presented with dignity and refinement.”

These Bahá’ís exhibit a determination to beautify the world through jazz music, to create art unprecedented in its aesthetic excellence and spiritual benefits. Implicit in the Bahá’í jazz musician’s self-conception is the notion of serving a higher calling and of responsibility for unifying humanity through music. Nat Hentoff highlighted that aspect of Dizzy Gillespie’s philosophy:

A member of the serene Bahá’í faith, Dizzy once told me that his religion taught him “eventually, mankind will become unified, when there is a world government and everybody belongs to it, and you don’t need a passport. There’ll be an international language taught in all schools. This should take another thousand or 2,000 years. But on the way, we get little pinches of unification. Like the United Nations.”

“And jazz?” I asked.

“Yeah, yeah,” he said. “That really is a pinch of unification. It really makes me feel good to belong to jazz, to that part of society.”⁷¹

Bahá’í jazz musicians are only beginning to build coalitions with their fellow believers in other arts media—many seem to prefer to do this on an individual basis, as is more typical in the jazz culture—but the underlying motivations are similar. As noted earlier, the real struggle seems to be to create a Bahá’í culture that is both spiritually efficacious and aesthetically exceptional. “If *we’re* not pushing the envelope,” Sutton asks, “who will?”

Conclusion

In a review of Ben Koen’s album *Reliance*, Simon Mawhinney remarks, “The recording is dedicated to Bahá’u’lláh. When we consider that earlier in the century jazz was roundly maligned for its decadence (for example by the Sufi musician [Hazrat] Inayat Khan), it is fascinating to observe this musical language evolving to become a vehicle of adoration.”⁷² Jazz

has indeed become so, and not just for Bahá'ís: some jazz fans consider “spiritual jazz” a viable subgenre.⁷³

But Bahá'ís who perform or enjoy jazz have particularly well-defined notions of how their music and their faith intersect, harmonize, and reinforce one another. They liken the progressive revelation of religious truth by a series of prophets to the evolution of jazz music by a handful of visionary artists; they detect connections between the individual's spiritual journey and the probing exploration of improvisation or “extemporaneous composition”; they see the process of interactive group performance as akin to the Bahá'í principles of selflessness and consultation; they view jazz's multicultural roots as emblematic of unity-in-diversity; and they regard the creation of beauty as inseparable from spiritual deepening. For them, jazz is sacred music whose secular aspects do not diminish its capacity to enable and enrich the seeker's spiritual journey.

I would add that the gradual, sometimes grudging, and still less-than-universal acceptance of jazz has nonetheless had a profound effect on the American Bahá'í community. What so perplexed the early American believers about jazz was how to reconcile it within the aesthetic-spiritual framework laid down in the Bahá'í scriptures. They were certainly not alone in thinking jazz was crass and hedonistic. But as later generations of Bahá'ís came to accept it—in no small part because of the efforts of the jazz musicians in their midst—they developed broader, more inclusive interpretations of the scriptural injunctions on musical aesthetics. In other words, jazz generated more expansive notions of beauty, dignity, and spiritual potency in art among American Bahá'ís.

The current eclecticism of Bahá'í music would have been unthinkable without the initial encounter with jazz, and without the resolve of respected, high-profile musicians to defend their music within the faith community and to deploy it on behalf of its proclamation campaigns. Without understating the persistent differences in musical taste within America's diverse Bahá'í community, it is possible that jazz thus contributed to its maturation toward the lofty goals of tolerance and inclusion to which it aspires.

NOTES

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1. John Coltrane, *A Love Supreme* (Impulse! AS-77, 1964). In *A Love Supreme: The Story of John Coltrane's Signature Album* (New York: Viking, 2002), Ashley Kahn remarks on the record's impact: “Many listeners of the day, more attuned to the cool, guarded aesthetic

of the jazz scene, found the album's unblinking message of reawakened spirituality uncommonly discomfiting" (xvii). See also the chapter "Coltrane and Beyond," in David W. Stowe, *How Sweet the Sound: Music in the Spiritual Lives of Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

2. On the historical connections between jazz and religion, see Dizzy Gillespie, with Al Fraser, *to BE, or not . . . to BOP: Memoirs* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1979), 291–93; Nat Hentoff, *The Jazz Life* (1962; New York: Da Capo, 1975), 69; Neil Leonard, *Jazz: Myth and Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 42; and Sterling Stuckey, "The Music That Is in One's Soul: On the Sacred Origins of Jazz and the Blues," *Lenox Avenue* 1 (1995): 77, 84–85. Representative works include: John Coltrane, *A Love Supreme (Deluxe Edition)* (1965; Impulse! 314 589 945, 2002), *Ascension* (1965; Impulse! 543413, 2000), *Om* (1965; Impulse! 39118, 1989), and *Meditations* (1965; Impulse! 39139, 1997); Tony Scott, *Music for Zen Meditation and Other Joys* (1965; Verve 314 521 444, 1997); Duke Ellington's Sacred Concerts—*Concert of Sacred Music* (1966; BMG International 19254, 1998); *Second Sacred Concert* (1969; Prestige 24045, 1992), and *Duke Ellington's Third Sacred Concert* (RCA API 0785, 1976); Terry Gibbs, *Plays Jewish Melodies in Jazztime* (1963; Mercury/Verve 589673, 2002); Yusef Lateef, *Prayer to the East* (Savoy SV-0210, 1957); Pharoah Sanders, *Karma* (1969; Impulse! IMPD 153, 1995); Kalaparusha Maurice McIntyre, *Humility in the Light of the Creator* (Delmark DD-419, 1969); Mary Lou Williams, *Black Christ of the Andes* (1964; Smithsonian Folkways 40816, 2004) and *Mary Lou's Mass* (1970; Smithsonian Folkways 40815, 2005); Alice Coltrane, *Universal Consciousness* (1971; Impulse! 589514, 2002); Archie Shepp and Horace Parlan, *Goin' Home* (1977; Steeplechase 31079, 1994); and Chucho Valdés, "Misa Negra" ("The Black Mass"), *The Best of Irakere* (Columbia/Legacy CK 57719, 1994).

3. Colleen Shaddox, "This I Believe: Jazz Is the Sound of God Laughing," *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, June 13, 2005, available online at <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4683842>>. See also Leonard, *Jazz*; and Aaron McCarroll Gallegos, "A Sax Divine," *Utne Reader* (July–Aug. 1999): 96–98, which describes services at San Francisco's St. John Coltrane African Orthodox Church.

4. Michael Bruce McDonald, "Traning the Nineties, or the Present Relevance of John Coltrane's Music of Theophany and Negation," *African American Review* 29, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 275–76. In a similar vein, in their preface to *Neglected Wells: Spirituality and the Arts* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), editors Anne M. Murphy and Eoin G. Cassidy contend that "Our century has experienced and continues to experience what might be described as a crisis of meaning. Yet there is much evidence in our contemporary society of a hunger for the spiritual" (6).

5. Paul Berliner's monumental *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) quotes soloists who testify to feeling "as if their creations come from outside themselves," and to attaining states of euphoria or heightened awareness through the act of performing (391–95).

6. Jon Michael Spencer, *Theological Music: Introduction to Theomusicology* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1991), xi. "In almost all of my theomusicological readings," Spencer acknowledges, "I stick fairly close to applying this new discipline in the context of Christian cultures" (xiv).

7. I have deposited audiotapes and written summaries of my interviews with Bahá'í jazz musicians in the National Bahá'í Archives in Wilmette, Illinois, <http://www.bahai.us/content/view/66/36/>. See also "The Bahá'í Voice Presents: Dizzy Gillespie, Bahá'í Jazz Ambassador," <http://www.unbf.ca/clubs/abs/dizzy.htm>.

8. Deanne Bogdan, "Musical Spirituality: Reflections on Identity and the Ethics of Embodied Aesthetic Experience in/and the Academy," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 85. In her essay "Pathways to God: Beauty, the Road Less Traveled," Eoin G. Cassidy likewise avers, "the aesthetic dimension of reality offers the contemporary secular society one of the very few points of contact with a world in which the spiritual can be appreciated" (in *Neglected Wells*, ed. Murphy and Cassidy, 11).

9. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 392.

10. Essays in *Jazz Planet*, ed. E. Taylor Atkins (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003) describe the processes by which jazz became a global cultural form, as well as the mixed reactions it provoked in various countries. The phrase “new Bahá’í culture” appears frequently in exhortations from the Universal House of Justice and the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States (see, for instance, “Annual Message of the National Spiritual Assembly: Ridván 2004,” *American Bahá’í*, June 5, 2004, 5–6).

11. In January 2004 New York City Bahá’ís renamed their center’s auditorium in honor of Dizzy Gillespie and inaugurated a series of weekly jazz concerts (see www.bahainyc.org; Veronica Shoffstall, “Bebop Blazons in Dizzy’s Hall,” *American Bahá’í*, Feb. 26, 2004, 5, 30; and “Bahá’í Center Honors Diz,” <http://www.jazztimes.com/JazzNews/XCNewsPlus.asp?cmd=view&articleid=1187>). The February 2003 opening of the Louis G. Gregory Museum in Charleston, South Carolina, included a jazz performance by baritone saxophonist Marvin “Doc” Holladay as part of a multicultural arts festival (<http://www.bahaiworldnews.org>). Race Unity Day celebrated by the Bahá’ís often includes jazz performances as well.

12. Readers unfamiliar with the Faith’s history and tenets are directed to the website sponsored by the Office of Public Information of the Bahá’í International Community, <http://info.bahai.org>; *The Bahá’ís: A Profile of the Bahá’í Faith and Its Worldwide Community* (Haifa: Office of Public Information, Bahá’í National Community, 2005); Peter Smith, *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Bahá’í Faith* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000); and William S. Hatcher and J. Douglas Martin, *The Bahá’í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing, 2002). Smith, *A Concise Encyclopedia*, 78–79, outlines the theological status of Bahá’u’lláh in fulfillment of Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Sunní and Shí’ih Muslim, Zoroastrian, and Bábí prophecies. Space considerations prevent me from providing a more thorough overview of the Bahá’í Faith here.

13. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1997), 118–19. Margaret Caton, “Bahá’í Influences on Mírzá ‘Abdu’lláh, Qájár Court Musician and Master of the *Radíf*,” in *From Iran East and West*, ed. Juan R. Cole and Moojan Momen, *Studies in Bábí and Bahá’í History*, 2 (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1984), 30–64, provides cultural context for the complex Muslim attitudes and policies toward music. With regard to the Bahá’í change in attitude toward music, R. Jackson Armstrong-Ingram, *Music, Devotions, and Mashriqu’l-Adhkár*, *Studies in Bábí and Bahá’í History*, vol. 4 (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1987) writes: “The Islamic dichotomy had opposed devotional song to secular music; the Bahá’í dichotomy sees them as parallel activities which should be directed to compatible ends. In Western culture, the important dichotomy was not between music and devotional song but between popular and elite forms of music, whether in a devotional or secular context” (326).

14. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992), 61, 38. In endorsing music, Bahá’u’lláh was reaffirming Sufi ideas and practices, which taught that listening to music could lead to ecstasy (*hál*) through which ultimate truth might be achieved. Sufis had gatherings (*samá*) for the purpose of listening to music, but as Caton notes, “The Sufis themselves were concerned that music should only excite spiritual sensibilities, rather than carnal ones . . .” (“Bahá’í Influences on Mírzá ‘Abdu’lláh,” 50–51).

15. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Table Talk,” Akká, July 1909, quoted in Universal House of Justice [UHJ], *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 2 (Maryborough, Victoria: Bahá’í Publications Australia, 1991), 77, 79; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in *The Divine Art of Living: Selections from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 4th ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1979), 100. See also Kerry Hart, “The Role of Music in the Advancement of Civilization,” *Journal of Bahá’í Studies* 2, no. 1 (1989–90): 1–16. Even stronger language on musical aesthetics appears in a 1913 guide for children’s lessons, used at the first Bahá’í Mashriqu’l-Adhkár (House of Worship) in ‘Ishqábád, Russia (Mohammed Ali Alkany [Al’ Qá’íní], *Lessons in Religion*,

trans. Edith Roohie Sanderson [Boston: Tudor Press, 1923]; quoted in Armstrong-Ingram, *Music*, 16): "The holy religious laws permit listening to songs and melodies and when these are sung in such wise as not to exceed the limit of refinement and dignity which are as ornaments to the temple [body] of man they aid the soul to mount into the loftiest realms of exaltation. . . . But when music ceases to be refined and dignified, becoming frivolous and sensual, it is assuredly forbidden and is unlawful. For in so doing, that which made it lawful, that is, its power of attracting intelligences and liberating souls so as to enable them to mount unto divine horizons, is completely annulled and the contrary effect is produced: that is, the mind is veiled, the soul becomes turbid and man sinks into a condition which is not worthy of his station" (40). Qá'íní may have been the cantor at the 'Ishqábád House of Worship.

16. Letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, April 7 and March 17, 1935, quoted in UHJ, *Compilation*, 80–81. The most recently published English-language compilation of Bahá'í writings on music is *Music: A Ladder for the Soul* (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2005).

17. Armstrong-Ingram, *Music*, 4, 257.

18. Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, July 20, 1946, quoted in UHJ, *Compilation*, 81.

19. "[C]onsider how much *marvelous* notes or a *charming* song influence the spirits! A *wonderful* song giveth wings to the spirit and filleth the heart with exaltation. . . ." 'Abdu'l-Bahá quoted in UHJ, *Compilation*, 75 (emphasis added). On the spiritual importance of sensitivity to musical aesthetics, see Hart, "Role of Music," 12–14. Ludwig Tuman adds, "Beauty . . . plays an essential role in aiding humanity to fulfill the very purpose of its existence: to know and to love God. Its purpose in the world of creation is to draw the human soul into a spiral of spiritual growth, carried upward on the wings of love toward the kingdom of the most great Beauty" ("The Spiritual Role of Art," *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 4, no. 4 [1991–92]: 78–79).

20. *World Order* resumed publication in 1966 and continues to be a major forum for Bahá'í perspectives on politics, society, and the arts.

21. See Armstrong-Ingram, *Music*, 340; and Robert H. Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America*, vol. 1, *Origins, 1892–1900* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), xix–xx, 102–4, 126–27.

22. Lawrence W. Levine, "Jazz and American Culture," in *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 173–74. See also James Lincoln Collier, *Jazz: The American Theme Song* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 127–33.

23. See Neil Leonard, *Jazz and the White Americans: The Acceptance of a New Art Form* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); James Lincoln Collier, *The Reception of Jazz in America: A New View* (Brooklyn: Institute for Studies in American Music, 1988); Kathy J. Ogren, *The Jazz Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); and *Culture Shock—The Devil's Music: 1920s Jazz* (PBS Video CULS-102, 1999).

24. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, 119. On black middle-class responses to jazz, see LeRoi Jones [Amiri Baraka], *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (1963; New York: Quill, 1999), 123–36; Collier, *Reception of Jazz*, 13–14; and Ogren, *Jazz Revolution*, 111–38.

25. See Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* (1939; Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), 33–34; Gayle Morrison, *To Move the World: Louis G. Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), 5–6, 64–66, 107, 267; Mark Lloyd Perry, "The Chicago Bahá'í Community, 1921–1939," Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1986, 286, 292–93, 299–303; and Michael McMullen, *The Bahá'í: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 161–62.

26. Stuckey characterizes "the sacred as cradle for the 'secular' in the black musical tradition" ("Music That Is in One's Soul," 85). Dorsey and Jackson's melding of blues

and spirituals to create modern gospel, and Charles's incorporation of gospel changes and singing techniques into rhythm and blues are illustrative. See also *The Theology of American Popular Music*, special issue of *Black Sacred Music: A Journal of Theomusicology* 3, no. 2 (1989).

27. Armstrong-Ingram, *Music*, 87–117, 255, 330.

28. The "Embrace the World" tour of western North America (April 15–May 11, 2004) and the companion CD *Embrace the World*, vol. 1 (Insignia Records IR-104, 2004) hint at the varieties of Bahá'í-inspired music: see James Humphrey, "Global Sounds Embrace the Audience," Bahá'í World News Service, <http://www.bahaiworldnews.org/story.cfm?storyid=304>. The Bahá'í encouragement of stylistic diversity in music nonetheless depends on context: policies for music in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár (based on instructions from 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi) allow only vocal music, with no instrumental accompaniment, hand clapping, or dancing.

29. Shoghi Effendi, "The Unfoldment of World Civilization" (Mar. 11, 1936), in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), 187–88; and "Youth and Character," *World Order* 3, no. 6 (Sept. 1937): 201–2.

30. Walter B. Guy, M.D., "Steps Toward the Larger Life," *Star of the West* 20, no. 9 (Dec. 1929): 273; and Rosa V. Winterburn, "The Promise of Youth," *Star of the West* 19, no. 6 (Sept. 1928): 168. I thank Roger Dahl for locating these articles.

31. Pari Zia-Walrath, "The Greatest Challenge," *World Order* 6, no. 11 (Feb. 1941): 379–80.

32. Writing in 1933, F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson "looked back longingly to a cultural golden age, a mythic rural past, when there was a shared culture uncorrupted by commercial interests—the time of the 'organic community.'" See John Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture: From Folklore to Globalization*, Blackwell Manifestos (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 23; cf. Leavis and Thompson, *Culture and Environment* (1933; Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1977).

33. Bertha Hyde Kirkpatrick, "Social Trends in American Life 6: Recreation," *World Order* 1, no. 7 (Oct. 1935): 267–69; and Winifred Duncan, "Expression of Group Life," *World Order* 1, no. 9 (Dec. 1935): 337, 338.

34. S. C. [probably Stanwood Cobb], "Religion and Culture," *World Order* 5, no. 2 (May 1939): 41–42.

35. Alain LeRoy Locke, *The New Negro* (1925; New York: Atheneum, 1970). See Christopher Buck, *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 2005), for a long-overdue assessment of the impact Locke's religiosity had on his intellectual projects.

36. Juan R. I. Cole, *Modernity and the Millennium: The Genesis of the Baha'i Faith in the Nineteenth-Century Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), describes the early Iranian believers as being ambivalent toward modernity: excited and heartened by the political concepts of individual liberty and the technological developments that made the unity of humanity seem plausible, yet chagrined by the secularism, materialism, and violence exhibited by more advanced nations.

37. Alain Locke, *The Negro and His Music* (Washington, D.C.: The Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1936), 87–88.

38. *Ibid.*, 82, 89.

39. *Ibid.*, 90.

40. See for instance, *ibid.*, 10, 25; and chapter 4 of Margaret Just Butcher, *The Negro in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1956), which is based on Locke's notes and manuscripts.

41. Levine, "Jazz and American Culture," 185–86.

42. See Jones, *Blues People*, 188, 190; Lisa Davenport, "Jazz and the Cold War: Black Culture as an Instrument of American Foreign Policy," in *Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of Black People in Diaspora*, ed. Darlene Clarke Hine and Jacqueline McLeod (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 282–315; Atkins, ed., *Jazz Planet*, xix; Penny

M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Michael J. Budds, *Jazz in the Sixties: The Expansion of Musical Resources and Techniques*, rev. ed. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1990); and Gillespie, with Fraser, *to BE, or not . . . to BOP*, 203, 317–25, and 413–27.

43. Unless cited otherwise, all quotations from musicians are from telephone interviews I conducted. They include: Jack Bowers (May 14, 2004); John Clark (Jan. 31, 2004); Jay Corre (Jan. 26, 2004); Sherman Ferguson (May 20, 2004); Russell Garcia (May 28, 2004); Ernest Hensley (Aug. 23, 2004); Marvin “Doc” Holladay (April 9, 2004); Warren Kime (Oct. 13, 2004); Benjamin Koen (June 4, 2004); Mike Longo (Feb. 14, 2004); Phil Morrison (Oct. 9, 2003); Flora Purim (Oct. 21, 2004); Tierney Sutton (April 26, 2004); and Keith Williams (April 4, 2004).

44. Gillespie, with Fraser, *to BE, or not . . . to BOP*, 472–76.

45. *Ibid.*, 430.

46. Alyn Shipton, *Groovin’ High: The Life of Dizzy Gillespie* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 333–34. Regarding the parallels between progressive revelation and musical revolution, Gillespie himself wrote, “In our music we have the same thing happening as in my religion the Bahá’í faith. Guys come for a specific age to be the dominant force—not the only one—but the dominant force in that era” (*to BE, or not . . . to BOP*, 486).

47. In addition to the clear evocation of the name Bahá’í in the title *Bahiana* (1976; Pablo PACD-2625–708, 1996), the album includes a tribute to Enoch Olinga, a Ugandan Bahá’í designated a Hand of the Cause of God. Olinga and his family were murdered in 1979. Shipton, *Groovin’ High*, 357, 363. See also the DVDs *Dizzy Gillespie and the United Nations Orchestra Live at the Royal Festival Hall, London* (Eagle Eye Media EE19004, 2001), and *Calle 54*, dir. Fernando Trueba (Miramax 22597, 2000).

48. Though her own spiritual path has been more aligned with Hinduism, Alice Coltrane’s 1971 album *Universal Consciousness* features a prayer by Bahá’u’lláh in the liner notes, and lists Him as one of many “Manifestations” whose assistance is needed in the “great spiritual battle . . . within the nethermost regions of the human soul” (1971; Verve 314 589 514–2, 2002).

49. This is not to imply that the boundaries between jazz and other genres are absolute and impermeable: many Bahá’í musicians (such as Bob Alcivar, Faraz Khosein, and KC Porter) use jazz elements in their music, just as jazz artists have drawn extensively on ideas and textures from other musical traditions (as evident, for instance, in Phil Morrison and Keith Williams’s collaboration with Chinese musicians on the World Unity Jazz Ensemble’s *China Skies* [Dr. Mac Records DM 921, 2000], in Flora Purim’s Brazilian-flavored jazz, in Doc Holladay’s frequent use of *atenteben*, an Ashanti flute, or in Ben Koen’s musical meditations using East and Central Asian wind and percussion instruments [*Songs from Green Mountain*, Green Mountain Records GMR-92, 1999]).

50. Last quotation from Marvin “Doc” Holladay, “The Jazz Community: The First Model of Racial Unity,” in *Earth Circles: Bahá’í Perspectives on Global Issues*, ed. Michael Fitzgerald, (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 2003), 28.

51. Holladay, “Jazz Community,” 23. These remarks resonate with the following comment by trumpeter Wynton Marsalis: “It all starts with God. . . . Even the philosophy of jazz has its underpinning in Christianity. Jesus Christ brought democracy to the world. All are equal. There’s no aspect of your birth that makes you superior to another person. We are all part of God’s oneness. It’s the same with jazz music. Equality is in the music. And it returns to God” (quoted in Stowe, *How Sweet the Sound*, 217).

52. Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, esp. part 3; and Wynton Marsalis, commentary in Ken Burns’s *Jazz* (Florentine Films/PBS Home Video, 2000).

53. “O people of Bahá! It is incumbent upon each one of you to engage in some occupation—such as a craft, a trade or the like. We have exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship of the one true God. . . . Waste not your hours in idleness and sloth, but occupy yourselves with what will profit you and others” (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 30).

54. *Bahá'í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2002), 69–70.

55. The full text of the prayer and a letter from the Universal House of Justice regarding its origins are available at <http://bahai-library.com/uhj/hollow.reed.html>. Sutton recited this prayer in front of the audience at the Birdland jazz club in New York before recording a live performance, eventually released on the Grammy-nominated *I'm with the Band* (Telarc 83616, 2005). See Alexander Gelfand, "She's with the Band," *JAZZIZ*, Sept. 2005, 33–34; "Portrait of a Class Act," *American Bahá'í*, Nov. 23, 2005, 35.

56. "Music is regarded as a praiseworthy science at the Threshold of the Almighty" ('Abdu'l-Bahá quoted in UHJ, *Compilation*, 76); "It is incumbent upon each child to know something of music, it is necessary that the schools teach it in order that the souls and hearts of the pupils may become vivified and exhilarated and their lives be brightened with enjoyment" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, comp. Howard MacNutt [Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982], 52).

57. Stephen A. Marini, *Sacred Song in America: Religion, Music, and Public Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 7.

58. Marvin "Doc" Holladay, *Life, On the Fence* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000), 213–14, offers a powerful account of this creative process taking place when he recorded solo improvisations in the basement of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois, eventually released as *Wings for the Spirit* (New Conception Music, 2003): "As I heard the theme flow out of the instrument I knew this was not like anything I had ever done before in my entire life as a performer. It was, in a word, beautiful. Never have I come close to that kind of beauty; and as I heard it come out the end of the baritone sax, I knew that I was not in control of this expression but that it was coming from some source beyond my understanding. As I listened to the music I began to say to myself, 'If I can just take that idea and develop it. . . .' 'NO!' came another voice. 'Leave it alone. It's too good for you to mess with.' I continued to play, realizing all the time that this was extraordinarily beautiful. Amazed at what I was producing, I was in a state of wonder. Then I heard another idea that lent itself to further permutation and I thought, 'Hey! If I take this and. . . .' 'NO!' Again that other voice shouted at me, 'Leave it alone. Don't mess with it. It's cool.'" Unfortunately, a technical glitch prevented that particular extemporaneous composition from being captured on tape. Holladay recorded more at that session, but says that what eventually was released as *Wings for the Spirit* could not compare to the first unrecorded take.

59. Band names reflect Bahá'í emphasis on world unity—Koen's Unity Ensemble, Corre's World Citizens, Morrison and Williams's World Unity Jazz Ensemble, and Ferguson's JazzUnion (*Welcome to My Vision . . .*, jazz/a/sance 67725–70052, 2002)—just as song and album titles evoke phrases and images from Bahá'í scripture. Examples include Phil Morrison, "The Earth Is One Country," "The Valley of Search," and "Pupil of the Eye" (from *China Skies*); John Clark, "Abhá Kingdom" (*Faces*, ECM 1176, 1981) and "I Will" (*I Will*, Postcards 1016, 1997); Mike Longo, "Dawn of a New Day" (*Dawn of a New Day*, Consolidated Artists CAP 927, 1998), "Ocean of His Might" (*900 Shares of the Blues*, Groove GM 3304, 1975), and "Like a Thief in the Night" (*Like a Thief in the Night*, Delta 17124, 1997); Doc Holladay, "Sweetness and Light" (*Sweetness and Light*, Consolidated Artists CAP 931, 1998), "Bahjí," and "Meditation for the Martyrs" (*Wings for the Spirit*); Daryl Lowery, "We Can Move the World" (*Instant Groove*, dml jazz 01–0404, 2004); and Russ Garcia, *The Pathway to Peace and The Unquenchable Flame* (an opera about the Bábí poet-martyr Quarratu'l-'Ayn Táhirih).

60. 'Abdu'l-Bahá quoted in UHJ, *Compilation*, 77.

61. Gina Mauriello Garcia, *Adventures of Dawn-Breaker* (Happy Camp, Calif.: Naturegraph Publishers, 1987) recounts the Garcias' global travels in service to the Bahá'í Faith.

62. McMullen, *The Bahá'í*, 12, 175. On Bahá'í visions of postnational or global citizenship, see Charles V. Carnegie, *Postnationalism Prefigured: Caribbean Borderlands* (Piscataway, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

63. Holladay, *Life, On the Fence*, 171.

64. Shoghi Effendi frequently referred to such “mysterious forces” (see for instance *Advent*, 87). “American indigenous classical music” is Doc Holladay’s favored description for jazz, a variation on the common phrase “America’s classical music” used by Billy Taylor and other advocates for jazz. See Holladay, *Life, On the Fence*, 160–71; Billy Taylor, “Jazz: America’s Classical Music” [1986], reprinted in *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History*, ed. Robert Walser (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 328–32; and House Congressional Resolution 57 (designating jazz “a rare and valuable national American treasure”), Sept. 23, 1987 (H7825–27), reprinted in Walser, ed., *Keeping Time*, 332–33.

65. Studies that emphasize the complex dance between local and global cultures include: Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1992); *Global/Local: Cultural Productions and the Transnational Imaginary*, eds. Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996); *The Cultures of Globalization*, eds. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998); Arjun Appadurai, *Globalization* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001); and *Many Globalizations: Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World*, eds. Peter L. Berger and Samuel P. Huntington (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

66. Inder Manocha, “Bahá’í Art: Fact or Fiction?” *Bahá’í Studies Review* 3, no. 1 (1993): 67.

67. Sutton made an exception for the Second Bahá’í World Congress in 1992, singing Graham Major’s “The Maid of Heaven” because “it wasn’t derivative of Christian music.”

68. Bob Bernotas, interview with James Moody, http://www.melmartin.com/html_pages/Interviews/moody.html.

69. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, 163; and Peter Khan, “2001: Five Year Plan,” http://bahai-library.com/?file=khan_2001_five-year_plan.html.

70. See, for instance, “Arts Dialogue: Bahá’í Association for the Arts,” <http://bahai-library.com/bafa/>.

71. Nat Hentoff, “Final Chorus: Remembering Dizzy,” *JazzTimes* (Sept. 2004), http://jazztimes.com/columns_and_features/final_chorus/index.cfm?id=46.

72. Simon Mawhinney, review of *Reliance* by Ben Koen (Qing Shan Music, 1997), *Bahá’í Studies Review* 9 (1999–2000): 232.

Khan (1882–1927) wrote of jazz: “Maybe one day the Western world will awaken to India’s music, as now the West is awakening to the poetry of the East, and beginning to appreciate such works as those of Rabindranath Tagore. There will come a time when they will ask for music of that kind, and then it will not be found; it will be too late. But there is no doubt that, if that music, which is magic, which is built upon a psychological basis, is introduced in the West, it will root out all such things as jazz. People seem to spoil their senses; this jazz music is destroying people’s delicacy of sense. Thousands every day are dancing to jazz music, and they forget the effect it has upon their spirit, upon their mind, upon their delicate senses” (“The Vina—Music—from The Sufi Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan,” <http://murshid.net/music/vina.html>).

73. See, for instance, Judith Schlesinger, “Jazz and Healing,” <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=864>. I thank Jay Corre for referring me to Schlesinger’s essay.