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# Opposition to a Neoclassical Scenario: Hip hop in Contemporary Jazz

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Opposition to a Neoclassical Scenario: Hip hop in Contemporary Jazz

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty and the Department of Music

Bates College

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By

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Lewiston ME

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## **Abstract**

This project takes up the subject of contemporary jazz musicians who use influences from hip hop music to create new jazz compositions. This musical practice is part of a larger movement in jazz to integrate modern popular culture in a jazz setting; in part as a reaction to a conservative jazz movement that emerged in the 1980s and 90s. During the 1980s and 90s a group of young jazz musicians and critics, often referred to as neoclassicists, established themselves as part of a new iteration of jazz music based upon a conservative understanding of what constitutes the “jazz tradition.” The rigid adherence of neoclassicists to conventional jazz styles served an overall ideology of “respectability politics.” Hip hop-inflected jazz is one specific manifestation of a modern movement to include more recent popular music in the genre. The importance of this movement resides in its distinctive cultural and political dimensions. In both its aesthetic and conceptual elements, hip hop-based jazz presents itself as a product of contemporary African American intellectual thought. As a genre, hip hop-based jazz has received criticisms for its perceived accessibility and commercialism, and for whether it serves the perceived cultural prestige that neoclassicists associate with the music. Despite this criticism, many jazz musicians are establishing hip hop-based jazz as a new genre that has helped to democratize and politicize the genre based upon shared cultures, a reintroduction of dance sensibilities, and through emulation of music created through new technologies of production.

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## Introduction

In April of 2015, I first heard Kendrick Lamar's critically acclaimed album *To Pimp a Butterfly*. As a classically trained musician who had only recently discovered jazz and who had little exposure to hip hop, I found myself amazed at how Lamar integrated the two seemingly disparate genres to create one coherent musical experience. Starting with the first track of the album, "Wesley's Theory," I was amazed by the album's production, which employed a unique combination of samples and live instruments with interesting jazz-inspired harmonies. Upon hearing the second track of the album, "For Free," my amazement was intensified. Essentially, Lamar had taken a jazz bebop track and rapped over the music, with his rapping taking on the aspect of another soloist in the music. With each new track I was amazed with how the production remained constantly changing and new, but also with the way that Lamar incorporated influences from genres such as hip hop, jazz, funk, soul, and R&B. The final track of the album, "Mortal Man," constituted a jazz piece in the form of a suite, showing a unique influence from classical music.

After my first listen-through of Lamar's album, I found myself drawn to the combination of jazz and hip hop, and I immediately tried to find other artists working in this area. I first sought out the musicians that had collaborated with Lamar on the production for the album; which featured jazz artists or jazz-influenced artists such as Kamasi Washington, Robert Glasper, Stephen Bruner (better known as Thundercat), and Terrace Martin. As I explored each of these musicians and their catalogues of music, I began to realize that the genres of jazz and rap were intimately connected, and I began to seek out more collaborations between jazz and hip hop musicians on hip hop albums. I soon discovered that over the course of the past decade, musicians such as Glasper had begun to create jazz music that was heavily indebted to hip hop

and combined two seemingly disparate genres of music into one cohesive genre. For me, as a student just beginning to explore jazz, Lamar's album provided an accessible way to also explore the genre of hip hop. In numerous other cases, Lamar's album introduced hip hop fans to the world of jazz.

In this project, I will argue that the inclusion of rap elements in contemporary jazz is establishing a new movement in jazz history. Jazz and hip hop musicians are able to cite similarities in the two music's histories and cultures that situate both genres as part of a larger continuum of African American musical legacies. Additionally, I assert that in much the same way that swing, bebop, cool jazz, hard bop, free jazz, fusion, and neoclassical jazz have all manifested themselves as reactions to previous movements in jazz history, hip hop-based jazz is part of a larger reaction to the neoclassical movement. As a genre, hip hop-based jazz has been and to a certain extent still is, the object of well-worn criticisms over accessibility and commercialism, and over whether or not it serves the perceived cultural prestige of the music. Despite these criticisms, hip hop-based jazz musicians established their music as a new genre in jazz that has helped to democratize and politicize the genre based on shared cultures. This democratization and politicization can be understood as a reaction to the more conservative musical politics that surrounded jazz music in the 1980s and 90s.

### ***Different Conceptions of Jazz Historiography***

Many contemporary jazz musicians have begun to adopt influences from hip hop into their own jazz compositions. This jazz compositional practice has become part of a longstanding tradition and debate among musicians and critics in jazz music over how to define jazz as a genre, and over what types of music get to be called "jazz." In his influential 1991 article

“Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography,” Scott DeVaux argued that jazz historians, musicians, and critics should reconsider how they present the history of jazz. DeVaux argued that the existence of one definable “jazz tradition” was a recent construction, rather than constituting an objective historical reality. The use of the term “jazz tradition” by jazz historians and critics is in line with a jazz historiography that has tended to ignore the social significance of the music in order to focus on its aesthetic qualities.

Since the beginning of jazz history, the music has become subject to a debate about what is and is not part of the “tradition.” After the establishment of hot jazz as a genre, swing and big band jazz were introduced, and many musicians and critics argued that this new genre took away from the spontaneity that defined hot jazz; additionally, they argued that this led to the over-commercialization of the music. Advocates of swing argued that the music was an improvement upon the more chaotic nature of hot jazz and believed it to be a natural continuation of jazz as a larger genre.<sup>1</sup> This debate was continued with the introduction of bebop as a faster-paced and more improvisatory music based upon an ethic of virtuosity and competition. Bebop’s detractors argued that the music did not fit with the genre of jazz, based on an idealization of what was considered to be “primitive” qualities of jazz; the virtuosity and perceived intellectualism associated with bebop were reasons given for why bebop could not be considered a part of the jazz genre. By contrast, the supporters of bebop thought of the music as a logical extension to jazz. These critics and musicians believed the earlier types of jazz had been great for their time but seemed childish and simple compared to bebop. The musicians and critics that supported bebop as a new genre, emphasized what they saw as the organic nature of jazz, and established the music as an extension of the jazz tradition by citing its improvisatory nature. This debate

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<sup>1</sup> Scott DeVaux, “Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography,” *Black American Literature Forum* 25/3 (Fall 1991): 531-537.



was continued as the jazz canon was expanded to include cool jazz, hard bop, free jazz, and the avant-garde. The main premise of this debate has always concerned what types of music fit with the origins of jazz, the perceived authenticity of the music's performers, and whether the music is based on more commercial or artistic dimensions.<sup>2</sup>

In a more contemporary jazz world, these debates over the boundaries of the jazz tradition have taken on a new form. Starting in the mid-1970s and early 1980s, a new generation of more conservative jazz artists and critics emerged with the goal of returning the music to what they believed to be its fundamental roots and elements. These musicians and critics became known as neoclassicists, and they tried to establish themselves as defenders of the jazz tradition, charged with the task of policing the boundaries of the music. The neoclassicists spoke against the inclusion of genres such as fusion and much of free jazz within the genre boundaries of jazz. Additionally, in more recent years, those that still have neoclassicist views about jazz have expressed their disapproval towards hip hop, and they have argued against any positive relationship it could have with jazz.<sup>3</sup> To better explain and contextualize these negative views of hip hop, I will first explain the ideas behind the neoclassicists' movement.

The neoclassicist argument constituted the most recent manifestation of the debate over the boundaries of jazz. Initially, neoclassicists criticized fusion music and much of free jazz for deviating too far from what they defined as a single, linear jazz tradition. Neoclassicists generally believed that fusion music was overly commercialized, and that it no longer adhered to their construction of the tradition. These neoclassicists similarly believed that much of free jazz deviated from the established traditions of jazz. They believed that a balance needed to be found

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<sup>2</sup> DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition," 538-550.

<sup>3</sup> DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition," 538-550, 526-528, 549-552.

between the modernist continuity of the tradition on the one hand, and its basis in the music of the past on the other.<sup>4</sup>

Several aspects of the neoclassicist ideology are discussed in Eric Porter's chapter on Wynton Marsalis in his book *What is this Thing Called Jazz?* Porter argues here that Marsalis and other neoclassicists with similar ideologies have situated themselves as "gatekeepers" for jazz culture. Some neoclassicists such as Marsalis have referred to hip hop as part of a larger trend towards the erosion of cultural values in America.<sup>5</sup> These neoclassicists have positioned themselves as arbiters of the jazz canon based upon their conception of what scholars have called the *politics of respectability*. The idea of respectability politics refers to a discussion in the book *Righteous Discontent* by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham. In the book, Higginbotham uses respectability politics to refer to African American women in the early twentieth century who sought to influence the behavior of the African American community on the level of individuals. They tried to reform behaviors and attitudes in order to improve race relations in the United States. They wanted African Americans, as a group, to emulate "respectable" middle-class sensibilities and morals, and they stressed an idea of acceptance through self-betterment and upward mobility.<sup>6</sup> Respectability politics, both in the context of Higginbotham's book and as it applies in other contexts, has tended to contribute to class stratification for many African Americans and has the potential to contribute towards class-based discrimination. This class stratification is intensified through a respectability politics-based criticism of vernacular, working-class culture and sensibilities.

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<sup>4</sup> DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition," 526-531.

<sup>5</sup> Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?: African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 304.

<sup>6</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 186-191.

Neoclassicists such as Marsalis have used respectability politics ideologies as a set of behavioral and intellectual norms that they believe African Americans should follow. As part of these norms, they have outlined a canon that includes music adhering to their construction of jazz, but they have also attacked the legitimacy of other genres of music. Regarding the genres of funk and fusion, Marsalis stated in one interview, “my personal opinion about [fusion]: it’s like rock itself. If you were there it was a great way to meet women and have a good time.”<sup>7</sup> Although Marsalis’s meanings behind this quote are not entirely clear, they present some problematic ideologies. On the one hand, his statement places fusion as almost solely a type of party music while jazz is an intellectually stimulating genre that requires a type of thought inaccessible to a type of a more party-oriented atmosphere. But there is another potential implication to this quote, this statement could also imply that funk and fusion trivialize jazz in a way that makes it more appealing to women than jazz. Marsalis could be either implying that fusion music is only for the purpose of partying while jazz is intellectually stimulating, or that women only go to funk and fusion concerts since these groove-based genres of music are supposedly more enticing to women than the culturally prestigious music of jazz. Either one of these presents problematic treatments and assumptions for genre and gender.

Marsalis also spoke strongly against funk and fusion as genres of music that he considered to be overly-commercialized, emulating the reasoning of an earlier generation of jazz musicians and critics who did not immediately accept swing into the genre of jazz during the 1930s. Even as Marsalis and other jazz neoclassicists criticized jazz fusion as being overly commercial, he himself had become commercially successful based on his own image as a

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<sup>7</sup> Bill Milkowski, “Wynton Marsalis: One Future, Two Views,” *Jazztimes*, March 1, 2000.

“noncommercial” musician.<sup>8</sup> Marsalis saw jazz-rock fusion as appealing mostly to white musicians, and as music explicitly created to achieve commercial success.<sup>9</sup> With his own music, Marsalis made a purposeful artistic choice to play in a style that was not perceived as “commercial;” in this way, Marsalis established his commercial success as dependent on his identity as a jazz purist.

It also interesting to note that overall the politics of jazz in the 1980s took place against the backdrop of a larger movement of conservatism, which saw the embrace of so-called “family values.” In many ways, this neoclassical movement, and its trend towards respectability politics, was happening in tandem with the conservative politics of the 1980s. While Marsalis spoke against a perceived degradation of American values, he still situated himself in opposition to conservative politicians such as Ronald Reagan.<sup>10</sup> Marsalis’s conservative values, like those held by the African American middle-class women Higginbotham described in her study, were seen as a potential solution to improving race relations in the United States. These views regarding respectability were not necessarily in support of conservative politics as much as they were seen as a way for a marginalized group to gain acceptance in an increasingly socially conservative society. Although Marsalis positioned himself with respectability politics in a way that exacerbated tensions between different classes within the African American community, he still made an effort to separate himself from aspects of political conservatism that he saw as undermining the position of African Americans in American society.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Eric Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?: African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists*, (Berkeley: University of California Press), 291-292.

<sup>9</sup> Milkowski, “Wynton Marsalis.”

<sup>10</sup> Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 186-191.

<sup>11</sup> Ta-Nehisi Coates points out a similar ideology with Bill Cosby in his *Atlantic* article “This is How We Lost to the White Man.” In this article, Coates recounts watching a Cosby speak about racism as an “omnipresent” force in American culture. As a solution to this racism, Cosby argues that African American communities should focus on strong families and communities over rallies, protests, or pleas. Additionally, Coates paraphrases that Cosby argued that “blacks need to cleanse their culture, embrace personal responsibility, and reclaim the traditions that

In addition to their views on jazz, neoclassicists such as Marsalis and Crouch also spoke strongly against hip hop as an entire genre, which they presented as an example of the deteriorating values of African Americans in the United States. The genre of hip hop factored into their assessment of the relationship between African American music and commercialism. While many neoclassicists felt that music such as fusion represented an over-commercialization of jazz and an overall degradation of its culturally prestigious status, hip hop (in their view) manifested all of these characteristics to a much higher degree. Some hip hop artists, specifically in gangsta rap, used materialistic and hedonistic lyrics to portray certain realities of their lives, which neoclassicists found to be antagonistic to neoclassical beliefs about respectability. The combination of hip hop's commercialism and perceived immorality became a quintessential target of neoclassicist respectability arguments.<sup>12</sup> In more contemporary jazz, the roles have been switched. Many jazz musicians now look at the neoclassicist respectability arguments as too exclusive and are now attempting to become more embracing of all music genres, one of the most important being hip hop.

### ***The Relationship Between Jazz and Hip Hop***

Jazz and hip hop are two genres that have particularly interesting cultural similarities and relationships. Many creators of hip hop music have established a history of, and precedent for, using jazz music in the production of new songs since the inception of the genre and have used

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fortified them in the past." Coates believes that this solution to racism is the opposite of Martin Luther King's "all-inclusive" dream and instead describes America as a country of competing powers. See Ta-Nehisi Coates, "This is How We Lost to the White Man," *The Atlantic*, May 2008. Marsalis had a similar type of conservative ideology on music and politics, but this conservatism contained many unique nuances. Some jazz scholars have called Marsalis "the ultimate Reagan-era jazz musician" while others such as Lewis Watts' and Eric Porter have stressed that while Marsalis was conservative in his conceptions of jazz, Marsalis practiced a vision of "African American exceptionalism" in which his views on music could be seen as a type of protest to conservative politics. See Eric Porter and Lewis Watts, *New Orleans Suite: Music and Culture in Transition*, (Berkeley: University of California Press), 73.

<sup>12</sup> Eric Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 306.

jazz to highlight a connection between jazz and hip hop, reference their own musical influences, or, in the case of groups such as the collective of hip hop artists, the Native Tongues, to bring into play an element of what they considered to be jazz music's intellectual playfulness.<sup>13</sup> Hip hop artists and producers have incorporated the work of jazz artists into their music and collaborated with jazz musicians to stress the perceived characteristics of jazz in their own music.

More recently, jazz artists have begun to utilize elements of hip hop in their jazz compositions, enacting a jazz/hip hop collaboration that flows in the opposite direction. The use of electronic instruments and sampling in hip hop and other types of electronically produced music has helped to create innovative new ideas for grooves and breakbeats. Electronic instruments and sampling enable producers to create new and creative structures and formal organizations in popular music. Sometimes when producers sample melodies or harmonies from existing pieces, they deconstruct these elements and put them back together in melodically or harmonically unique progressions. Influential producers such as J Dilla have created unique ways of imagining chords and have used drum beats that have been edited to sound more "human" than those grooves available on a typical drum machine.<sup>14</sup> Before Dilla, most producers used a feature on their samplers called quantization to make drum beats that were metronomically fixed. Dilla changed this practice by using the quantization feature to make the drums sound slightly "off," in a way that reflected the real-time discrepancies of live performers.<sup>15</sup> Since Dilla was quantizing these drums on a loop, the discrepancies in the rhythm

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<sup>13</sup> See Peter Watrous, "The Pop Life," *The New York Times*, 1991 and Justin A. Williams, "The Construction of Jazz-rap as High Art in Hip-Hop Music," *The Journal of Musicology* 27/ 4 (Fall 2010): 441-448.

<sup>14</sup> The term human is a subjective term that will be explained at more depth in a later chapter of this thesis.

<sup>15</sup> "Quantizing MIDI and Audio" Steinberg.help, accessed on March 28, 2018, [https://steinberg.help/cubase\\_pro\\_artist/v9/en/cubase\\_nuendo/topics/quantizing\\_midi\\_audio/quantizing\\_midi\\_audio\\_c.html](https://steinberg.help/cubase_pro_artist/v9/en/cubase_nuendo/topics/quantizing_midi_audio/quantizing_midi_audio_c.html).

were consistently placed. When jazz drummers play in this style, they try to replicate this same overlap of quantized precision and “live” rhythmic discrepancies.

In addition to referencing unique aesthetic influences from hip hop, such as drumming and harmonic techniques, jazz musicians are also referencing diverse and meaningful cultural subjects when they create jazz music in the style of hip hop. Modern jazz artists such as Robert Glasper and Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah are modern practitioners of hip hop-inspired jazz music. Glasper has created compositions with lyrics or titles that reference such political movements as Black Lives Matter. Additionally, he has given interviews where he talks about the significance of both hip hop and jazz in his musical and cultural upbringings. The shared influences of these genres of music shape the way in which he views music today, making their combination a natural next step. For his part, Adjuah has created songs that reference police brutality, and his most recent work is a trio of jazz albums released on the centennial anniversary of the first jazz recording.<sup>16</sup> In this trio of albums, Adjuah has given his albums and tracks names such as *Diaspora*: this particular title references the way in which his wide variety of cultural influences (in addition to those of Africans and African Americans) have been scattered across the globe, extending from the slave trade to legacies of white supremacy throughout America’s history.<sup>17</sup> Taken together, these combinations of jazz and hip hop constitute an effort by contemporary musicians to express views and ideas central to their cultural influences and identities.

Contemporary jazz musicians frequently use influences from hip hop in their jazz compositions and performances as a reaction to 1980s and 90s neoclassicism. In this project, I

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<sup>16</sup> Adjuah argues that the first ever jazz recording had negative implications about race and earlier jazz musicians. The release of this trio of albums is a type of protest against this recording. More will be discussed on this subject in a later chapter.

<sup>17</sup> Jennifer Odell, “Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah: ‘Speaking to All Human Beings,’” *Down Beat*, February 2018, 35.

will first examine the implications of neoclassical ideology in music, culture, and politics. After explaining neoclassicism, I will discuss early jazz-rap created at the time of neoclassicism and explain how various jazz musicians situated themselves in relation to hip hop. Next, I will explain how hip hop created innovations that translate to a jazz context and I will describe how contemporary jazz musicians have utilized hip hop in their music to situate themselves in opposition to neoclassicism. Finally, I will perform close analysis of two hip hop-infused jazz tracks to show some of the different ways that the influences from hip hop can be blended into a jazz setting.



## Chapter 1: Neoclassical Ideologies in Jazz

The mid-80s and the 90s constituted a period of change in the music scene of the United States. Alternative rock, dance pop, teen pop, and hip hop were all becoming more prominent in popular culture. As these genres of music experienced dramatic changes resulting from the inclusion of more sophisticated electronic instruments and recording technologies, some jazz musicians were moving in an opposing direction. Starting in the late 1970s, the jazz saxophonist Dexter Gordon returned to the United States after a stint in Europe and the excitement generated from his homecoming sparked a movement in jazz that had come once again to embrace classic jazz recordings over much of the fusion, avant-garde, and free jazz that had become prevalent in the latter part of the 1960s and into the 1970s. Gordon's return inspired and helped a group of highly talented young jazz musicians (who became known as the young lions) to reach a high level of popularity in the mainstream world of jazz.<sup>18</sup> Many of the musicians included in the categorization of young lions thought that the genres of fusion, free jazz, and the avant-garde had strayed too far from what they believed were the fundamental and traditional characteristics of jazz. As a new movement in jazz, these musicians called for a return to acoustic, blues-based jazz that would honor what they considered to be the genre's high cultural prestige.

### *The "Young Lions"*

The term young lions was first popularized by the jazz critic Gary Giddins in 1982.<sup>19</sup> This term was originally the name of a Jazz album from the 1960s that included musicians such as the saxophonist Wayne Shorter. The first usage of the term was for a straightforward hard bop date

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<sup>18</sup> See K. Heather Pinson, *The Jazz Image: Seeing Music through Herman Leonard's Photography*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 108, and Dale Chapman, *The Jazz Bubble: Neoclassical Jazz in Neoliberal Culture*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 65.

<sup>19</sup> Gary Giddins, "Jazz Turns Neoclassical," *Atlantic Monthly*, September 1982, 156-59.

for a group of young jazz musicians who would later go on to make contributions to a variety of jazz genres, including the integration of avant-garde elements with more mainstream jazz. The term was revived again in the 1980s to name a live compilation from the Kool Jazz Festival in the early 1980s. Again, Shorter was featured on the album, but it also featured performances from a younger generation of jazz musicians such as the virtuoso trumpeter, Wynton Marsalis. After the release of this compilation album, the term young lions became a term used to refer to an entire generation of young extremely talented musicians in the 1980s and 90s that were trying to return jazz to what they considered to be its roots in bebop and blues-based types of music.<sup>20</sup> Just like the original *Young Lions* album was an example of young jazz musicians playing straight ahead jazz, the young lions of the 1980s were trying to return to jazz in a more traditional form in a time following the heyday of fusion and experimental forms of jazz. These young lions came to represent a type of conservatism that provided a stark contrast to many of the new music genres of the time.

The phrase “Young Lion” was used to classify highly talented musicians such as Wynton and Branford Marsalis, Terence Blanchard, and Marcus Roberts, who were all part of a movement that has been variously referred to with classifications such as neoclassical, neoconservative, or neo-bop, depending on the observer.<sup>21</sup> One of the neoclassicist movement’s goals was to master all of the styles of their relatively narrow construction of jazz. A trumpet player such as Wynton Marsalis would learn to play in the styles of artists such as Louis Armstrong, Clifford Brown, and Dizzy Gillespie. The idea was that jazz artists should be students of the entire history of a neoclassically constructed conception of a single, linear jazz

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Palmer, “Perils Confront the Young Lions of Jazz,” *New York Times*, 22 May 1982.

<sup>21</sup> Although many of these artists were given the classifications of “Young Lion” or “neoclassicist,” some of them, such as Branford Marsalis, would go on to adopt more inclusive attitudes towards music than the mainstream neoclassical ideology. Examples of these alternative viewpoints will be given later in this chapter and the consequent chapter.

tradition. Many of the neoclassicists believed that only by mastering these specific types of jazz, would musicians be able to advance jazz as a genre in a way that fit the music's perceived cultural prestige. Although jazz has had a long and complex history, and has been the subject of constant debates over what truly fits into the genre, the neoclassicists chose only specific genres to fit into their own classification of jazz and essentially continued this history of classification-based debate.<sup>22</sup> The neoclassicists believed that jazz should stay true to what they believed to be its roots in New Orleans-, blues-, bebop-, hard bop-, and swing-based genres of jazz and they dismissed many types of avant-garde, fusion, or electronic jazz.<sup>23</sup> They argued that these fusion or experimental types of jazz detracted from the quality of the music and did not fit in logically with its historical progression. Fusion and electronic jazz introduced electronic elements into a historically acoustic genre, and often eliminated what were seen as proper "jazz" characteristics such as swing. The "Young Lions" believed these other fusion-oriented genres of jazz were essentially dumbing down the music to make it more accessible, as opposed to continuing what they considered to be a serious art form that was the result of decades of innovation.<sup>24</sup> With more experimental free jazz and the jazz avant-garde, many neoclassicists argued that the music was too dissonant and was hitting a metaphorical wall of atonality.

One influential author and jazz critic that adhered to neoclassicist ideologies, Stanley Crouch (Crouch would later go on to help create the Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York where he worked closely with Marsalis), wrote in a 2003 article entitled "Four Letter Words: Rap Fusion" that "We should laugh at those who make artistic claims for fusion."<sup>25</sup> In this same article, Crouch went on to assert that any innovations from jazz fusion were insubstantial and

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<sup>22</sup> See introduction for more on this history of jazz classification debates.

<sup>23</sup> DeVeaux, *Constructing the Jazz Tradition*, 526-531

<sup>24</sup> David Ake, *Jazz Cultures*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 151-152.

<sup>25</sup> Stanley Crouch, "Four-Letter Words: Rap & Fusion," *Jazz Times*, March 2002.

that any serious musician that played jazz fusion was more interested in making money than preserving what he defined as the high art of jazz. This was in line with the views of Marsalis and the other Young Lions, who believed that the introduction of new styles into jazz detracted from the longstanding histories and traditions of virtuosity and art established by generations of jazz musicians. Crouch had established himself as one of the most prominent voices of the neoclassical movement.

### *Miles Davis*

One particularly famous musician that was targeted by Crouch and other neoclassicists was Miles Davis. The neoclassicists had a complicated relationship with Miles Davis and his music. Although Davis is widely known as one of jazz's greatest innovators for both his early and later works, the conservative jazz musicians of the Neo-bop movement only considered his pre-fusion works to be legitimate forms of jazz. Wynton Marsalis is one an example of a neoclassical artist with complex views of Davis's contributions to jazz. Marsalis considered the majority of Davis's works after 1969 to be disappointments, compared with his earlier innovations in hard bop and modal jazz.<sup>26</sup> Marsalis looked to Davis's fusion music as a representation of everything that had gone wrong with jazz music; he argued that fusion was not based in the blues, and therefore was more of a type of pop music than it was any kind of jazz music.<sup>27</sup> Marsalis was suggesting that the separation between pop and jazz was a binary and stratified division, with pop, in his opinion, being a lesser genre of music than jazz. In his biography of Miles Davis, *So What*, John Szwed cites Marsalis to illuminate the trumpeter's

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<sup>26</sup> Ake, *Jazz Cultures*, 63

<sup>27</sup> John Szwed, *So What: The Life of Miles Davis*, (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2002), 378.

feelings regarding Davis's fusion explorations and about fusion in general. According to Marsalis,

[Davis] went from esoteric imitation of rock music, a combination of jazz and rock, to what he does today, Cyndi Lauper tunes and just blatant attempts to be. . . what the pop form of the day is. What fusion does is it relieves us, our country, of the problem of dealing with jazz and the contribution of the Negro to the mythology of America. The question in jazz has always been: is it pop music or is it a classical music?<sup>28</sup>

In this excerpt, Marsalis was essentially criticizing Davis for both adding popular elements into his music, and also for helping to erase the important cultural contributions of African Americans. Davis had gone from ostinato-centered grooves in the 1970s that included elements of rock instrumentation and rhythms, to more completely adopting conventional pop forms of that include Verses, a repeated Chorus, and a Bridge. In the 1980s, Davis even recorded covers from popular artists such as Cyndi Lauper and Michael Jackson that followed the song's strict formal contours. According Marsalis, this was an insult to jazz. Marsalis argued that by adopting pop influence into his music, Davis was adopting elements of both music that did not fit the perceived level of sophistication of jazz and classical music, but that it also was adopting forms of music that were more in line with what Marsalis saw as a white American culture. While Marsalis criticized Davis for combining different types of music, Marsalis took a more open approach to eclecticism in jazz music when he is dealing with music from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Ken Burns' documentary series on jazz, Marsalis is quoted describing this early jazz eclecticism in New Orleans as being like a big pot of gumbo. He describes,

One block you have an Italian family, various types of Negroes, you have some Creoles, you have Germans, you know, you have, everybody all intermingled, and they can't

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<sup>28</sup> Szwed, *So What*, 378

escape each other. And also you had a tradition of wildness in New Orleans, like gambling and people showing their behinds in different various ways, but you also had a lot of churches and religious fervor. You had voodoo. You know, you had all these things coming together now and, and, and you have people who don't like each other, but they have to deal with each other because they're living together, and they have, they're sharing in this culture, they're sharing in all this like gumbo, you know, everybody's gonna eat some gumbo.<sup>29</sup>

Marsalis believed that early New Orleans jazz was the result of people from all walks of life and influences coming to together to create music in a way that resembles people coming together to share a meal of gumbo; but at the same time, Marsalis still maintained that fusion genres combined types of music that were too different from what he considered to be jazz, to still be jazz. The “gumbo” conception of jazz that allowed people from diverse backgrounds to come together and share their influences was no longer viable to outspoken neoclassicists such as Marsalis.

In a sharp contrast to the viewpoints of Marsalis, Davis considered neo-bop to be a boring reiteration of what had already been created. The music did not fit Davis’s idea that jazz and music in general should try to move towards something new and innovative.<sup>30</sup> At one point, in reference to Marsalis, Davis criticized “They got Wynton playing some old dead European music.”<sup>31</sup> Marsalis on the other hand thought of jazz music as a type of high art that should follow in the footsteps of its original innovators. Marsalis and Davis essentially had two different conceptions of art and its purpose. Davis exercised more of a modernist understanding

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<sup>29</sup> Ken Burns and Buddy Bolden, *Jazz: Episode one, Gumbo*, directed by Ken Burns, (2001, United States: PBS Home Video), DVD.

<sup>30</sup> Maya Jaggi, “Blowing Up a Storm,” *The Guardian*, January 2003.

<sup>31</sup> Brian Boyles, “Locking Horns: When Miles Davis Met Wynton Marsalis,” *Off Beat Magazine*, August 2011.

that art should follow a linear progression of constant “progress.” By contrast, Marsalis practiced more of a preservationist attitude toward jazz, similar to that of conventional symphony orchestras. During one meeting between Davis and Marsalis, Davis received Marsalis with the quip, ““here comes the police.”” Davis had obvious disdain for Marsalis’s outspoken criticisms of fusion and “nontraditional” jazz music. More specifically, Davis disliked Marsalis’ attempts to create and enforce a boundary line for jazz in which jazz-hybrids were not considered legitimate forms of music. Another important distinction between the viewpoints of Davis and Marsalis was in their respective conceptions of commercialism. One of Marsalis’s criticisms of Davis and fusion in general was that they were overly commercialized ventures. Davis looked at his own music as a way to remain relevant and even expressed confusion that his music did not receive radio play. To Davis, radio play was a crucial way to influence younger generations.<sup>32</sup> Davis was fairly straightforward about his desires for commercial success and for widespread cultural relevance. Although Marsalis criticized these aspects of Davis’s music as being overly commercial, Marsalis himself represented commercialism in his own way. As a selling point, he established himself as an artist that would not succumb to the influence of commercialized music, which became a way to attract a neoclassically-minded audience. Ironically, Marsalis was making an obvious effort to pursue commercial success in more of a niche market. Additionally, Marsalis established himself as a musician that could speak the language of the recording industry and wore tailored suits to create a presentable appearance that complied with socially conservative ideas of the time, but it also adhered to a kind of dichotomy with youth, celebrity, and instant gratification on one side, and bourgeois quality, taste, and delayed gratification on the other. By creating this dichotomy, Marsalis wanted to require both his fans

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<sup>32</sup> George Cole, *The Last Miles: The Music of Miles Davis, 1980-1991*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 310.

and musicians to understand and appreciate jazz. Marsalis made his music highly accessible to a conservative neoclassical audience by following ideas of respectability politics.<sup>33</sup>

The differences in opinion between Marsalis and Davis eventually resulted in an onstage episode during Expo '86 in Vancouver, Canada. Marsalis believed that his extreme virtuosity on his instrument and over a certain sphere of jazz, gave him a monopoly on how to define jazz as a genre. He used this virtuosity as an attempt to invalidate many of the opinions and statements held by jazz critics. Marsalis had quickly established himself as one of the most accomplished trumpet players of all time, winning Grammys in both Classical music and Jazz. For this reason, Marsalis was a firm believer that he could make almost any statement about the music he wanted as long as he could back it up with his horn. Opinions such as those held by Marsalis often put himself and other young lions holding similar viewpoints, at odds with creators of other types of jazz influenced music, such as rap or fusion.<sup>34</sup> Specifically with Marsalis, his conservative definition of the jazz tradition—coupled with the way he used his own virtuosity as a form of legitimacy for his arguments—put him at odds with other musicians and critics. When Marsalis criticized Davis, he was criticizing Davis as a musician who had obtained an acceptable level of virtuosity but had then gone on to play popular music instead of jazz music. In the opinion of Marsalis, this was a misuse of Davis's virtuosity and was an insult to jazz, since it led people to see an equivalency between Davis' pop-influenced music and the genre of jazz.

At Expo '86, Marsalis ventured on stage during Davis's performance on a dare from his friends and bandmates, to, as Marsalis thought of it, publicly and musically address Davis's criticisms of his music.<sup>35</sup> After Wynton Marsalis played a short solo during the 1986 Vancouver Jazz Festival performance, Davis immediately ordered him off the stage. When Marsalis

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<sup>33</sup> Szwed, *So What*, 378

<sup>34</sup> Szwed, *So What*, 378

<sup>35</sup> Szwed, *So What*, 379



initially refused, Davis called for his band to stop playing.<sup>36</sup> On the surface, this incident appears to be a clash of two large egos. But it also demonstrated a deeper misunderstanding on the parts of Davis and Marsalis towards each other's overall philosophies towards music. From the perspective of Davis, the Expo '86 was an opportunity to showcase many of the jazz-fusion ideas he was exploring. As a fusion musician, he was moving towards more of a programmed set of arrangements, much like a rock or pop musician. To have Marsalis interrupt his show was a display of disrespect and contempt for his art. Marsalis approached the stage with the assumption that Davis as a jazz musician would accept Marsalis's solo as in the spirit of the jam session culture of jazz that helped lead to the creation and development of styles such as bebop. The event displayed arrogance on the side of Marsalis and showed that both Marsalis and Davis misunderstood each other's values on a fundamental level. Marsalis dismissed the music of Davis for being musically invalid because of its influence from pop music, while Davis dismissed the music of Marsalis as being part of a dying subset of jazz.

Although Wynton Marsalis, his brother Branford Marsalis, and critics such as Crouch were outspoken about their opinions about the jazz genre, not all of the young lions held the same views. Musicians such as Christian McBride and Roy Hargrove, who were often considered a part of the neoclassical movement, would later express disagreement with the views of the outspoken young lions. In a 2013 interview with *Jazz Times*, McBride uses an analogy to trees to explain his problems with neoclassicism, "I view the tradition as being like the roots of a tree. . . . But you can't just have the roots. Something's got to grow out of that: different branches, leaves, the tree's going to get taller."<sup>37</sup> McBride believes that neoclassical ideologies are important for their emphasis on the jazz tradition, but he also disagrees with the narrow

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<sup>36</sup> Szwed, *So What*, 379

<sup>37</sup> Nate Chinen, "Christian McBride Lays down Roots," *Jazz Times*, May 2013.

neoclassical conception of jazz. Another important idea worth noting, is that new scholarship about jazz in the 1970s has helped to flesh out this periods music and give it the attention it deserves. In an introduction to a 2010 edition of the Journal, *Jazz Perspectives*, the author Eric Porter wrote a piece entitled “Rethinking Jazz Through the 1970s.” In this introduction, Porter demonstrated that since the height of the neoclassical era in the 1980s and 90s, the world of jazz has come to be more accepting of the music from the 1970s. As mainstream genres of jazz have moved away from a neoclassical perspective, it has become more accepting of 1970s versions of fusion and free jazz.

### ***Neoclassicism and “Cultural Moynihanism”***

Neoclassicism as a movement in jazz is both a representation of and a reaction to the conservative cultural politics of the 1980s and 1990s. Many of the movement’s figureheads, such as Marsalis and Crouch, reinforce ideas such as respectability politics and the existence of a cultural hierarchy that exists both in music and in society. Specifically, they argued that many of these hierarchical elements could be found in an increasingly stratified difference between middle-class African Americans and African Americans of a lower socio-economic status. In his book, *What is this Thing Called Jazz*, Eric Porter dedicates a chapter to Wynton Marsalis and many of his ideologies relating to the genre of jazz. While describing Marsalis’s views about a cultural hierarchy that exists both in music and society, Porter describes an idea of *cultural Moynihanism*, a term coined by the authors and professors Jimmie Reeves and Richard Campbell.<sup>38</sup> The term cultural Moynihanism refers to a 1965 document entitled titled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* that was produced by the Assistant Secretary of Labor, Daniel Patrick Moynihan. The Moynihan Report has since become one of the most discussed

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<sup>38</sup> Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 317-318

and controversial documents of the twentieth century. In the report, Moynihan asserted that racial inequality was the result of lacking familial structures among African Americans of lower socio-economic statuses, instead of an issue that could be solved using civil-rights legislation.<sup>39</sup> According to the authors Reeves and Campbell, the Moynihan report provided a “blueprint” for the conservative political policies of the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>40</sup> Using the Moynihan report as a basis for their logic, many politicians and analysts blamed the increasing class divide among many African Americans on “racial pathologies” instead of economic trends or institutionalized racism.<sup>41</sup> The ideas in the Moynihan report helped to provide logic that led to a decrease in the use of institutional affirmative action, a reduction in the prevalence of social welfare programs, and was used as a justification for the growing number of incarcerated African Americans. While the United States economy in general saw improvement and expansion throughout the 1990s, in addition to a lowered crime rate, many African Americans found themselves unable to fully reap the benefits of the improved job market and found themselves with a smaller social safety net. At the same time, the 1980s and 90s also saw an increase in the presence of African American celebrities in American popular culture, social institutions, and the media, but this presence actually provided further justification for the conservative political policies of the time. The more prevalent examples of successful African Americans were used to further justify the pathologizing of African Americans from lower socio-economic statuses. Conservative politics of the 1980s and 90s attributed both examples of African American success and failure as the result of their own merits as individuals instead of the result of social policies, social movements,

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<sup>39</sup> Daniel Geary, “The Moynihan Report: An Annotated Edition,” *The Atlantic*, September 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Geary, “The Moynihan Report”

<sup>41</sup> Geary, “The Moynihan Report”

and economic forces. The ideologies of cultural Moynihanism helped to further racist ideologies in economic and business practices based on ideas of black pathology and criminalization.<sup>42</sup>

In many ways, neoclassical voices such as Marsalis and Crouch have become advocates for a type of cultural Moynihanism. Marsalis has linked his musical projects with ideas of “black exceptionalism” as an effort to refute ideas of black mental inferiority, which challenges the marginalization of African Americans in American culture. To discuss his ideas about “black exceptionalism,” Marsalis talks about a concept that he calls “black codes.” Marsalis defines these black codes,

Black codes mean a lot of things. Anything that reduces potential, that pushes your taste down to an obvious, animal level. Anything that makes you think less significance is more enjoyable. Anything that keeps you on the surface. The way they depict women in rock videos—black codes. People gobbling up junk food when they can afford something better—black codes. The argument that illiteracy is valid in a technological world—black codes. People who equate ignorance with soulfulness—definitely black codes. The overall quality of every true artist’s work is a rebellion against black codes. That’s the line I want to be in—and I definitely have plenty of examples.<sup>43</sup>

Marsalis’ defined these black codes as examples of racist stereotypes attributed to African Americans; but he defines these stereotypes as justification for his adoption of respectability arguments. Marsalis took it upon himself to personally disprove these perceptions of African Americans, but in doing so he became an advocate of respectability politics that made him

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<sup>42</sup> Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 317-318.

<sup>43</sup> Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 303

exclusionary towards the jazz avant-garde and black nationalism; a move that in many ways still supports the marginalization of some African Americans.<sup>44</sup>

One of the best examples of Marsalis's alignment with conservative policies and cultural Moynihanism can be seen in his condescension towards hip hop and what he perceives as the genre's moral shortcomings. This viewpoint furthered ideologies considering black influences—specifically among its youth—as cultural threats to American society. While examples of hip hop that display ideas of misogyny, violence, homophobia, and other morally controversial ideologies exist, Marsalis's dismissal of the whole genre on these grounds helps to support a larger condemnation of black youth as a population. Marsalis has helped to create an increase of prestige for jazz music, but at the same time, his refusal to accept elements of black popular culture has helped to influence a climate of disdain directed towards certain cultural affiliations of African Americans. Marsalis has established himself and his music as crucial components of African American high-culture and art but has rejected cultural nationalism and the engagement of young black Americans with popular culture.

Another seemingly ironic aspect of Marsalis's views is his disdain for hip hop's treatment of women, despite his own ideologies in jazz that conform to a patriarchal treatment of jazz history. According to Porter, Marsalis has argued that ““great men”” of jazz are capable of lifting the entire black community and ““Saving America.””<sup>45</sup> Marsalis has placed his views in line with the problematic belief expressed by many conservatives, black nationalists, and populist religious fundamentalists that problems with American society can be solved with the reassertion of the patriarchy.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 326-327

<sup>45</sup> Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 328

<sup>46</sup> Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 329

### *Jazz at Lincoln Center (JALC)*

One of the sites where neoclassical ideas about jazz are most likely to be articulated can be found in the policies of Jazz at Lincoln Center (JALC) under the leadership of Marsalis as the artistic director. The JALC program was founded to help improve how American's viewed jazz as a music. Specifically, the program helped to establish jazz as a form of high art with a prestige equal to that of classical music, but with a distinctive sound due to its origins as an African American music instead of a European-based genre. The JALC program came to epitomize the ideologies of the jazz neoclassical movement and was used by Marsalis and Crouch as a platform to promote the narrative of a single linear jazz tradition.<sup>47</sup> The establishment of JALC had some precedent in earlier non-profit organizations that were instituted to help promote jazz music. At least until the 1960s, these earlier organizations, such as the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), often included a similar construction of the jazz canon to that of JALC. The AACM used this idea of the jazz canon to demonstrate that the plural musics of jazz were the result of originality on the part of musicians and helped to promote the idea that experimental jazz musicians could be part of the jazz canon because of their originality. This is where the JALC program differed from organizations such as the AACM. While the AACM acknowledged the part jazz standards had played in the establishment of their own playing and jazz music as a genre, JALC criticized experimental artists for deviating too far from the tradition of jazz standards. JALC established jazz music as a single linear tradition and argued that many of the more experimental types of jazz music that organizations such as the AACM had supported were disrespectful of this tradition of standards. While the AACM and other similar early organizations that promoted jazz established black

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<sup>47</sup> George E. Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 441-442

musical traditions and classical music as two separate genre areas, JALC sought to improve the perceived prestige of jazz music by treating it as an equivalent genre to classical music. With Marsalis leading JALC as an artistic director, the organization became an economic powerhouse of jazz music.<sup>48</sup>

The author Farah Jasmine Griffin has argued that many of Marsalis's and JALC's ideologies were well suited to appease sponsors to obtain enough funds for all of the programs they wished to provide. The promotion of neoclassicism as a means to obtain resources was highly successful and resulted in JALC becoming the most powerful and influential jazz organization in the world. Griffin compared JALC's economic success and power to that of a Walmart Supercenter: she argued that the introduction of such a powerful and resource heavy organization such as JALC had the same impact on smaller jazz organizations as the introduction Walmart Supercenters have on smaller local "mom and pop" businesses.<sup>49</sup> Through his important roles in both JALC and the neoclassicism movement, Marsalis received plenty of media attention and became one of the predominant voices for the future of jazz music.

Marsalis quickly gained the support of influential black intellectuals and the press. The philosopher Cornel West enthusiastically endorsed Marsalis and called him an "intellectual freedom fighter." Even the critic and writer Amiri Baraka, who has a long history of political activism and supported the efforts of the AACM, ambivalently accepted Marsalis for preserving an African-American tradition and for showing a degree of progressivism in his work. The press also revealed their largely favorable opinion towards Marsalis's work with a 1995 New York Times piece entitled "'Stop Nitpicking a Genius,'" which dismissed many criticisms of

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<sup>48</sup> Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, 442-443

<sup>49</sup> Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, 444

Marsalis's versions of jazz history and the jazz canon.<sup>50</sup> With this intellectual and institutional support, the JALC program and neoclassical jazz in general came to define the jazz mainstream, and in doing so excluded many more experimental jazz artists who did not adopt swing-based music or who adopted too much influence from European types of music. These experimental jazz artists found themselves excluded both by the newly established ideas of jazz as a site of high culture and by aspects of African American popular culture. Some musicians, such as Roscoe Mitchell and Leroy Jenkins, warned that the institutionalization of jazz would lead young musicians to have distorted views of jazz. These young musicians would see jazz as a genre that turned away innovation and new views. Additionally, the institutionalization of jazz through forces such as the JALC and Marsalis became a representation of what record companies at the time wanted to establish as commercially viable forms of music.<sup>51</sup>

The disagreements within jazz between neoclassicists such as Marsalis and other types of jazz avant-garde music at the time could in many ways be considered its own type of political conversation between a jazz "right" and a jazz "left." While Marsalis and the JALC program tried to demonstrate black exceptionalism as a way to combat politically conservative views that pathologized the African American community, these views were seen as more conservative within the jazz community. Herman Gray discusses this idea of a jazz right and left in his book *Cultural Moves: African Americans and the Politics of Representation*. Gray gives the credit for this idea of a specific jazz right and left to the jazz musician Don Byron. As quoted by Gray, Byron says, "I made the case that jazz's left half is being marginalized. It is being marginalized by people who present jazz in institutions, on the radio, in print and everybody knows that."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, 445

<sup>51</sup> Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, 445-446

<sup>52</sup> Gray, *Cultural Moves : African Americans and the Politics of Representation*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 62



Gray then further quotes Byron to explicitly compare the politics of jazz to national politics. Gray quotes Byron, “I thought jazz left of Lincoln Center needed an institutional home because it didn’t have one. . . . I think Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center have really elevated jazz’s status and the music and musicians I know could use that sort of help. The way I see it, jazz is a two-headed monster, with a Democratic and Republican side, and without the Democratic side the beast dies.” Essentially Gray and Byron are arguing that jazz has become a highly politicized genre of music, but also that each side of the argument brings important ideas about jazz to the table that enable the genre to continue to grow survive. Jazz neoclassicists and the JALC program have helped to give jazz sustainable institutionalization by giving the genre funding and support similar to classical music. The downside of jazz institutionalization, is that it creates a narrative of jazz in which major experimentation is no longer acceptable. This is where the jazz left serves its role to help to continue its legacy as a constantly evolving genre that can draw from a diverse range of influences.

In a continuation of his jazz left discussion, Gray includes an interview given by *Down Beat* magazine’s Kevin Whitehead to the AACM member and trumpet player Lester Bowie and M-BASE member Greg Osby. This interview includes important criticisms of the downsides to the JALC program. In response to a sarcastic comment made by Whitehead about the institutionalization of jazz in organizations such as the JALC, Bowie said “I agree with you. Love to see jazz at Lincoln Center—it should have been there years ago. Every city should have a jazz orchestra with budgets equal to the Philharmonic’s. But don’t negate the other things that are happening, don’t stunt the growth of the music. We’re not gonna sacrifice the music to get to the concert hall.”<sup>53</sup> This thought is continued by Osby, “These people [folks associated with Jazz at Lincoln Center] have to expand their tolerance of other branches of the tree. These are all

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<sup>53</sup> Gray, *Cultural Moves*, 65

facets coming from the same root source. I consider what I'm doing, what Lester's been doing, to be truer to jazz's historical motive than playing works reminiscent of other times, another climate."<sup>54</sup> Bowie finishes this idea by saying, "It's not a simple music anymore. So it does belong in the street, on the farm, it needs equal access everywhere, the same as country western, rap, anything. Because jazz is all these . . . jazz is hip hop, dixie-land anything people playing it want it to be. "Man don't listen to that Argentinean shit, it might influence you." C'mon baby! Influence me!"<sup>55</sup> Bowie and Osby expressed a few important criticisms of the JALC and neoclassicism in this interview. They argue that the JALC's and neoclassicists' exclusionary definition of jazz limits the genre's ability to grow and that jazz should not become exclusive just for the purpose of being accepted as a prestigious form of music. Instead, they argue that the definition of jazz should be expanded to include all potential influences, whether or not they fit into a narrative of respectability politics.

As a movement in jazz, neoclassicism was established as a reaction to 1980s and 90s conservative ideologies that treated racial inequality as largely the result of unstable family structures for African Americans from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Many African Americans adopted a type of "politics of respectability" that created a hierarchy of cultural and intellectual values as a way of disproving this racism, but in doing so they conformed to many of the conservative values of the time. As a part of this "politics of respectability," some jazz musicians and critics created jazz neoclassicism, which created a narrow definition for what music could be considered jazz. The main neoclassical ideologies tended to praise music that was sufficiently similar to their narrow construction of a jazz lineage, while also avoiding elements of commercialization or influences that they thought would align with many of the

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<sup>54</sup> Gray, *Cultural Moves*, 65-66

<sup>55</sup> Gray, *Cultural Moves*, 66

negative stereotypes associated with African Americans. But this avoidance of commercialism was not without irony; while jazz neoclassicists such as Marsalis railed against musicians such as Miles Davis for turning towards popular music's, Marsalis himself created a type of commercial jazz empire through his work in the JALC program that made success as a jazz musician that was not part of the neoclassicist ideology basically impossible. Jazz musicians that did not conform to this specific style of music were unable to fully integrate themselves into the world of jazz. As a movement in jazz history, neoclassicism is now remembered by many musicians and critics as both a time period in which jazz was established as a prestigious and academic music and as a time of musical exclusivity and conservatism.

## Chapter 2: From Jazz to Hip Hop

In a 1989 article, the author and professor Trey Ellis coined the term New Black Aesthetic (NBA) to describe a generation of African Americans who had grown up as intellectuals and appreciators of African American art. While growing up, Ellis considered himself to be well educated, and through his middle-class status, he also saw himself as removed from many of the negative stereotypes attributed to black people. Ellis describes the NBA as a group that “. . . grew up feeling misunderstood by both the black worlds and the white.”<sup>56</sup> Ellis created the term NBA to describe other young black middle-class Americans who were interested in exploring historical and contemporary aspects of African American influences on American culture. Ellis’s theoretical NBA consumed and produced cultural works such as film, literature, and music genres ranging from neoclassical jazz to rap.<sup>57</sup> Ellis describes the NBA as a movement of African American intellectualism that occurred alongside films by Spike Lee, comedians such as Eddie Murphy, and music genres that ranged from neoclassical jazz to certain types of hip hop.

Although Ellis described the NBA as a retroactively positioned and cohesive group of African American intellectuals living at a time contemporaneous to the era of neoclassical jazz, the people making up the NBA on the one hand, and the artists and critics of neoclassical jazz on the other, were ideologically distinctive groups. The eclectic vision of the NBA provides a context to examine how both jazz-rap and neoclassicism resonate with one another, as well as the way that they contrast with one another. The movement of neoclassical jazz fits in with Ellis’s general concept of the NBA as a group of African American intellectuals working in a moment of cultural ferment, but its musicians defined it as a movement with different values than the

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<sup>56</sup> Trey Ellis, “The New Black Aesthetic,” *Callaloo*, no. 38, (Winter 1989): 234.

<sup>57</sup> Ellis, “The New Black Aesthetic,” 237.

NBA. One of the fundamental differences between the jazz neoclassical movement and the NBA was the latter's acceptance of rap and other music genres as important contributions to the African American intellectual legacy. By contrast, a figure like Stanley Crouch, a critic who has been supportive of the neoclassical movement, is quick to speak out against rap, and against what he perceives to be its negative consequences. In an essay included in Robert O'Meally's 1998 collection of essays, *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, Crouch calls rap a new form of minstrelsy, and argues that it is a way for white audiences to take advantage of African Americans in demeaning displays.<sup>58</sup> Crouch only views rap as a commodity exploited by white record company employees and audiences, instead of viewing it as an important piece of African American intellectual history. While the NBA praised rap that they considered to be intellectually stimulating, Crouch dismissed all rap as exploitative of African Americans. In Crouch's opinion, participating in the culture of rap music was detrimental to African Americans' abilities to be respected members of American culture.

### ***1980s and 90s Rap "Respectability Politics"***

Rap in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s inspired the creation of groups within the rap world that ideologically paralleled the polarized groups that had developed in jazz. The jazz world was experiencing ideological differences between neoclassical musicians and more fusion-oriented musicians, but the neoclassical musicians also joined in as heavy critics of rap as an entire genre. Vocal neoclassicists such as Marsalis and Crouch expressed heavy criticisms of rap and situated the genre as one of the African American community's greatest plagues. In an interview from the year 2000 with *Jazz Times*, Wynton Marsalis was asked for his own opinion

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<sup>58</sup> Stanley Crouch, "Blues to Be Constitutional: A Long Look at the Wild Wherefores of Our Democratic Lives as Symbolized in the Making of Rhythm and Tune," in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, ed. George O'Meally (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 156-157.

about hip hop jazz as a way to return jazz to a dance-oriented music and introduce more audiences to the genre. Wynton replies with a vehement explanation for why he does not believe hip hop jazz is a valid part of the jazz genre; “I don’t believe in any of that, mainly because even though it’s failed miserably somebody keeps propping it up. And they’re propping it up with words, they’re not propping it up with music.”<sup>59</sup> Wynton does not believe that hip hop contributes anything musically since he looks at the main point of the music as the words. But this viewpoint seems to ignore a whole culture of producers and their virtuosity in finding and editing unique samples. Wynton in the same interview later returns to hip hop jazz with a problematic statement,

I mean, where’s the music? That’s my only question about hip hop jazz. Some young musicians all want to imitate hip hop and all this other shit. Why would we want to imitate that? What is in that world that we want to get? I mean, there’s one thing that we will definitely get in terms of them fine-ass women they have. But you know, besides that, man, we ain’t gonna get no music. I guarantee you that.<sup>60</sup>

The only benefit Wynton sees in hip hop is a highly problematic and gendered one that hip hop has “fine-ass women.” Ironically, one of Wynton’s earlier criticisms of rap as a genre was that it objectified women, yet here in this interview for *Jazz Times*, Wynton seems to imply that the only thing jazz can gain from hip hop is the objectification of women.

This pressure from jazz neoclassicists and other conservatives critical of rap music perhaps contributed to the tendency of some rap musicians to engage in respectability politics. Just as the jazz world saw debates between a jazz “left” and jazz “right,” some rap musicians

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<sup>59</sup> Milkowski, “Wynton Marsalis.”

<sup>60</sup> Milowski, “Wynton Marsalis.”

held viewpoints that adhered to a kind of respectability politics while others tried to portray the realities of their life, whether or not these realities fit in with respectability politics.

In 1988, NWA released their album *Straight Outta Compton* and brought gangsta rap to a mainstream audience. This music had two seemingly contrasting dimensions. In many ways, NWA and gangsta rap in general illuminated the socioeconomic, race, and power dynamics of American society by emphasizing the socioeconomic conditions that were faced by many African Americans in urban areas. At the same time, the music of NWA seemed to glorify violence, misogyny, and greed in the context of such controversial songs as “F\*ck tha police” and “Straight Outta Compton.” As NWA and other gangsta rap artists such as Ice-T and Run DMC gained popularity, groups such as the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) began to protest the subject matter of rap in general. As these groups gained political and cultural traction, rap music as a genre became positioned as a destructive, anti-social, and controversial type of music.<sup>61</sup>

In a response to gangsta rap’s subject matter and to the reputation of rap in general, some rappers chose to create new alternative forms of rap that focused on positivity and on a notion of “elevating” the genre. This tension between gangsta rap and the respectability politics of “positivity” rap was in some sense analogous to Marsalis’s efforts to define jazz as superior to rap in its entirety. These new forms of alternative rap adhered to a respectability-based ideology that was similar in some ways to the more conservative viewpoints of Marsalis. One of the most prominent genres from this movement was jazz-rap, which began in part as an effort by groups such as the Digable planets and A Tribe Called Quest to make rap more “intellectual” and culturally prestigious, in addition to highlighting the artists’ general appreciation for the music.

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<sup>61</sup> Greg Wahl, “‘I Fought the Law (And I Cold Won)’: Hip-hop in the Mainstream,” *College Literature* 26/1 (Winter, 1999), 100-102.

These artists connected rap to the legacy of jazz, which had recently gained a greater degree of academic legitimacy, largely through the work done by neoclassical artists such as Wynton Marsalis and the establishment of the JLAC program. It is also notable that many artists involved in jazz-rap and rap in general had parents that were involved in various jazz scenes. To name a few of these artists, Grandmaster D.S.T.'s father managed the careers of jazz artists Max Roach and Clifford Brown, and Nas's father, Olu Dara, played saxophone. The jazz influences from these musicians' upbringings were at least partially responsible for the jazz influences in their music. The Digable Planets, for example, would throw in references to bebop and hard bop musicians while also rapping about Marxist philosophy. Within the jazz-rap genre, the late 1980s saw the emergence of the Native Tongues, a loose collective of New York rap musicians. The collective included groups such as A Tribe Called Quest, De La Soul, and the Jungle Brothers and was inspired by Africa Bambaataa's Zulu Nation, an international hip hop awareness group that promoted peace and positivity. The Native Tongue artists focused on Afrocentric, politically conscious, socially engaged, and peaceful lyrics that tended to be more positive than much of the gangsta rap of the time.<sup>62</sup> The group De La Soul even parodied gangsta rap in their video for the song "Me, Myself, and I" by donning golden chains that clashed with their own "preppy fashion sense."<sup>63</sup>

Some artists in the Native Tongues, such as the group A Tribe Called Quest, even collaborated with jazz musicians in the production of their music. On their 1991 album, *The Low-End Theory*, A Tribe Called Quest brought in the jazz bassist, Ron Carter, to record on various tracks. In a New York Times interview with Q-Tip (one of the rappers in A Tribe Called Quest), the rapper explained that they wanted an acoustic bass sound, so they employed the jazz

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<sup>62</sup> Williams, "The Construction of Jazz-rap as High Art in Hip-Hop Music," 442

<sup>63</sup> Wahl, "'I Fought the Law (And I Cold Won),'" 104-106.



bassist Ron Carter. Their use of Carter as a bass player allowed them to allude to the music of their parents, at the same time that it allowed them to draw upon the cultural capital that jazz respectability could provide. The use of jazz music provided a generational connection to an older tradition and legacy of African American intellectualism. Additionally, largely thanks to the efforts of neoclassical musicians, jazz had recently gained more cultural prestige. These rap artists wanted to reference and bring this sense of cultural prestige into their own music. The rap artists presented jazz as a music that had begun as a more revolutionary and underground style of music, but had gained the status of a form of high art. The inclusion of jazz in hip hop suggests that many rap artists were attempting to elevate the music and provide a sense of musical and cultural legitimacy.

Q-Tip gives a different set of reasons for including jazz music in A Tribe Called Quest's approach to hip hop. He states, "I like making the connection [between jazz and hip hop] because jazz was, like, intimidating music, and they pitched it *underground*. The music industry made it *underground*, which is the same thing with hip hop."<sup>64</sup> This connection to the *underground* emphasizes different types of cultural capital than we might see with a neoclassical or high art approach to jazz music. While the connections these artists made to bebop emphasize some of the romanticized ideas of jazz as a type of alternative to mainstream genres of music, neoclassical musicians focused more on bebop's culturally prestigious innovations as a form of "African American exceptionalism." In this comparison, Q-Tip invokes the underground legacy that hip hop shares with jazz. In the same way that music such as bebop was an underground venture that could only be fully understood by those who were hip, Q-Tip believed that underground hip hop could only be truly appreciated by those that were knowledgeable about its culture. The use of acoustic instruments, such as a walking acoustic bass, saxophone, trumpet

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<sup>64</sup> Peter Watrous, "The Pop Life."

with a mute, and jazz guitar all seem to signify qualities of jazz. In the right context, these instruments (such as a walking acoustic bass) are obvious references to jazz and have been referred to as jazz codes by the musicologist Justin Williams.<sup>65</sup> Jazz-rap groups in the Native Tongues were trying to stress the connection that both jazz and hip hop began as predominantly African American forms of music, which helped stress an authentic connection to the values of the *underground* and helped the music to be accepted by more alternative communities. Additionally, there was an important connection between the jam session culture of bebop in tiny underground clubs and the rap battle culture in hip hop. In the jam session culture of bebop, jazz musicians would battle each other by improvising solos over jazz heads, while in hip hop, rappers would battle each other by improvising lyrics and rhythms on the spot over a beat.

### ***“So What’s the Scenario”***

One song that demonstrates many of the values of the Native Tongues is “Scenario” by A Tribe Called Quest, featuring Leaders of the New School. The beat for “Scenario” includes a combination of rock, jazz, funk, and hip hop, and the lyrics are playful, emphasizing fun and demonstrating the significance of word play over the construction of a broader narrative. Additionally, the track features a breakout verse from Busta Rhymes, a member of Leaders of the New School. “Scenario” was included on Time magazine’s list of the All-TIME 100 Songs.<sup>66</sup> The track begins with a sample of an organ trio vamp from “Oblighetto” by Brother Jack McDuff, before including a sample of rock-inflected drums come from Jimmy Hendrix’s “Little Miss Lover.” This musical accompaniment is continued throughout the track with a few breaks in the beat between verses. The song starts with a hook that the group collectively raps,

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<sup>65</sup> Williams, “The Construction of Jazz-rap as High Art in Hip-Hop Music,” 443-445.

<sup>66</sup> Clare Suddath, “All-Time 100 Songs: ‘Scenario,’” *Time*, October 21, 2001.

“Here we go, yo, here we go, yo/ So what, so what, so what's the scenario?”<sup>67</sup> After the hook, the first verse is rapped by Phife Dawg. He starts his rap with the lines, “Ayo, Bo knows this (What?)/ And Bo knows that (What?)/ But Bo don't know jack, 'cause Bo can't rap.”<sup>68</sup> From his very first lines, Phife Dawg makes multiple references to the popular culture of the time and engages in word play. The phrase, “Bo knows this” refers to a Nike ad campaign from the 1990s with the multisport athlete Bo Jackson. Although Bo Jackson was highly skilled in many pursuits, Phife Dawg argues that he cannot rap. The phrase he “don't know jack” is both slang for saying that Bo Jackson does not know anything about rap, and a play on his last name, Jackson. The rest of his verse continues with similar types of wordplay that reference common English phrases with unique twists. The next verse features the rapper Charlie Brown, who references pop-culture icons such as Bob Marley and the television show host Arsenio Hall. He also uses playful phrases such as “And wow-how-now-wow, how now, Brown cow?,” which is a variation on a phrase commonly used to teach English pronunciation.<sup>69</sup> The third verse is by Dinco D and includes references to the television show Scooby Doo and plays on common phrases such as “Pop goes the weasel” and “Later Alligator.” The fourth verse is rapped by Q-Tip and includes references to Shakespeare and Africa Bambaataa's Zulu Nation before setting up Busta Rhymes verse.

Busta Rhymes' verse is perhaps the most famous from this track. An article by Martin Connor for Soundfly analyzes Busta Rhymes' verse and explains that the most important and unique aspects of this verse have more to do with its unique rhythms and articulations than with what he is saying with respect to content. Busta Rhymes focuses on the actual rhythms of the

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<sup>67</sup> A Tribe Called Quest featuring Leaders of the New School, “Scenario,” released September 23, 1992, track 14 from *The Low End Theory*, Zomba Recording LLC, Apple Music.

<sup>68</sup> A Tribe Called Quest featuring Leaders of the New School, “Scenario.”

<sup>69</sup> A Tribe Called Quest featuring Leaders of the New School, “Scenario.”

words and how he can put these together in unique combinations. He uses a mixture of staccatos, triplets, quintuplets, and unique syncopations. Even when he repeats the same word he varies the rhythms, demonstrating a highly complex understanding of musical time and phrasing. The inclusion of onomatopoeia and percussive sounds such “uh” further complement his ability to create unique rhythms and phrases.<sup>70</sup> Lyrically, Busta Rhymes also calls out the stylistic choices of gangsters and gangsta rappers by saying “change your little drawers 'cause your pants were saggin’.”<sup>71</sup> With this line Busta Rhymes explicitly separates himself and his music from gangsta rap. The song “Scenario” provides a great window into jazz-rap and the stylistic choices of the Native Tongues. The samples used in “Scenario” showcase influences from rock, jazz, and funk that demonstrates the artists’ wide variety of musical knowledge and tastes, the lyrics include playful wordplay and references to academic and pop culture related ideas, and the rhythms and phrasing used, especially by Busta Rhymes, demonstrates a virtuosic approach to music that parallels soloists in bebop.<sup>72</sup>

### ***Jazz Musicians Create Rap Music***

As jazz-rap continued to gain prevalence, some prominent jazz artists even began to create their own rap-influenced albums. This effort on the part of jazz musicians showed that some, such as Miles Davis, thought jazz had something to gain from hip hop, while others, such as Branford Marsalis thought that jazz could add an element of “respectability” to hip hop. In the year 1992, in the year after Davis’s death, his album *Doo-Bop* was released. Before he created *Doo-Bop*, Davis was once quoted saying, “I’ve been experimenting with some rap songs

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<sup>70</sup> Martin Connor, “How Busta Rhymes Concocted the Perfect Rap Verse in ‘Scenario,’” *Sound Fly*, January 24, 2017.

<sup>71</sup> A Tribe Called Quest featuring Leaders of the New School, “Scenario.”

<sup>72</sup> For further reading on the connection between hip hop and bebop, see Mark Anthony Neal's article in *The Other Side of Nowhere*, entitled "A Way Out of No Way."

because I think there's some heavy rhythms up in that music. I heard that Max Roach said that he thought the next Charlie Parker might come out of rap melodies and rhythms. Sometimes you can't get those rhythms out of your head."<sup>73</sup> Aesthetically, Davis was predicting that rap was going to make innovations in the ways that musicians conceptualize and create rhythms. Another important aspect of Davis's decision to create a hip hop album was his desire to make more culturally relevant music that specifically resonated with youth culture. Davis's tour manager from this period of time, Gordon Meltzer recalls Davis's strong desire to be commercially relevant. Meltzer remembers,

"I remember sitting in his apartment one day in summer and Miles—who hated air conditioning—had the windows open, even though it was like one hundred fifty degrees with one hundred and ten percent humidity. And he hears kids walking down the street carrying radios and there were lots of tunes that were on Russell's label, a lot of hip hop stuff and nothing of his. He wanted his stuff to be out there and he wanted to record it in full takes, instead of this coaching phrase-by-phrase way."<sup>74</sup>

One of Davis's main motivations in creating the music for *Doo-Bop* was to produce music that could potentially get radio play or that would resonate with what he heard from youth culture. Davis wanted his music to influence and be heard by others. To achieve this, he created the aesthetically risky album *Doo Bop*.

Davis asked Simmons to find a producer for him and was set up with the relatively unknown Easy Mo Bee. Davis and Mo Bee worked together starting in 1991, and by the time of Davis's death, they had only completed six tracks for the album. Mo Bee was then asked to complete the album based on rough studio recordings and he added three tracks to the album

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<sup>73</sup> Cole, *The Last Miles*, 308.

<sup>74</sup> Cole, *The Last Miles*, 310.

before it was released on June 30, 1992.<sup>75</sup> Although the album won a Grammy in 1993, it was given predominantly negative reviews by both jazz and rap critics. The music critic Stuart Nicholson, for instance, argued that the sound produced by live instruments did not fit with electronic sounds, and that the hip hop influence took away from Davis's ability to tell a story. The producer of *Doo-Bop*, Mo Bee, remembers reading a review (although the exact review is not specified) that said that the album sounded like a commercial pop version of hip hop jazz. Bee remembers that the album was criticized for not being "underground" enough. These unnamed critics argued that Davis was not sufficiently cutting edge from a hip hop perspective.<sup>76</sup> Instead, Davis was viewed as an important and defining personality in the world of jazz who decided to experiment with hip hop music.

Branford Marsalis, who got his own start in the world of jazz-rap through his collaboration on a Gang Starr track called "A Jazz Thing," had his own critiques of *Doo-Bop*. Branford argued that the existence of the back beat made it less like jazz and believed that Davis was actually just creating hip hop music. He said, "The thing that makes jazz 'jazz' is the constant motion of the band and this allows you to play in a way that is always evolving, but when you get rid of the constant motion it limits the things you can play."<sup>77</sup> Marsalis also said that the *Doo-Bop* album was an unfinished attempt by Davis that had not yet reached its full potential at the time of his death. The idea that Marsalis even accepted jazz-rap at all showed that he took a more liberal approach to music than many of his fellow neoclassicists. In the 1980s, Branford left his brother's quintet to go on tour with Sting, which indicated that he perhaps bought into neoclassical ideology to a lesser extent than his brother Wynton. When one considers Wynton's belittling comments towards artists such as Miles Davis who had performed

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<sup>75</sup> Cole, *The Last Miles*, 307-322

<sup>76</sup> Cole, *The Last Miles*, 335

<sup>77</sup> Cole, *The Last Miles*, 337

in more pop-oriented contexts, Branford's decision to tour with a pop musician highlights an ideological distinction between his views and those of his brother. It demonstrated that Branford had a more inclusive view of what jazz music could encompass than his brother and other leaders of the neoclassical movement.<sup>78</sup> In the mid-90s, Branford continued this experimentation when he formed a jazz-rap group under the pseudonym Buckshot LeFonque. Buckshot LeFonque provides a good lens to examine many of Branford's somewhat confusing political and musical views. With this project, Branford combined his knowledge of jazz with knowledge from DJs and MCs to create music that he labeled as "African American music" instead of merely jazz.

Branford's approach to music in his Buckshot LeFonque project is ideologically similar to Ellis's conception of an NBA since they both try to create a greater connection between multiple different African American art-forms. The use of the term "African American music" as opposed to more genre specific terms such as jazz or hip hop, is an example of how Buckshot LeFonque aligns with a larger legacy of musical signifyin(g). Signifyin(g) is a word play practice among African American vernacular culture that was given its theoretical academic name by the American literary critic, Henry Louis Gates Jr. in his 1988 work *The Signifying Monkey*. To engage in signifyin(g) is to make playful rhetorical references and associations.<sup>79</sup> The musicologist Samuel A. Floyd Jr. has used the term *Signifyin(g)* to explain how similar references are made in many African American forms of music. Signifyin(g) could describe a blues artist referencing a work song or a jazz artist referencing the blues or to the quotation of a melodic idea in a solo to provide a playful reference to another musical work. In the history of African American styles of music, this theoretical idea of Signifyin(g) helps explain musical quotations between genres and has created cultural connections between different types of

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<sup>78</sup> Jaggi, "Blowing Up a Storm."

<sup>79</sup> Samuel A. Floyd, "Ring Shout! Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Black Music Inquiry," *Black Music Research Journal*, 22 (2002): 55-56.

music.<sup>80</sup> Marsalis's use of the term "African American music" seems to refer to a larger history of musical connections across genres. In his Buckshot LeFonque project, Marsalis wanted to emphasize this relationship between jazz and rap by combining jazz sensibilities with hip hop influences.

At first glance, Branford's exploration of hip hop seems like a progressive form of experimentation and a move away from neoclassical jazz sensibilities, but a closer look reveals the way in which he engages in a projection of neoclassical ideals onto all forms of African-American music and art. In a description of the project on his website, Marsalis refers to the project as an effort to "de-ghettoize" rap and other types of African-American music that he and other neoclassicists considered problematic for the image of African Americans.<sup>81</sup> While his brother Wynton spoke against the entirety of rap as a genre, Branford took it upon himself to change the genre to fit a neoclassical image. He shows a similar vein of thinking to Native Tongues and other early forms of jazz-rap, who sought to distance themselves from the negative perceptions of gangsta rap, but there is an added dimension of Branford trying to position jazz as a more prestigious genre of music that has the ability to "save" hip hop. Although Marsalis makes an effort to connect two types of music with similar origins, he fails to recognize the importance of hip hop as its one viable genre and believes that he is somehow in a position to improve hip hop by asserting ideas of "respectability politics." Additionally, Marsalis further distances himself from jazz-rap groups with his comments outside of his Buckshot project that establish a musical hierarchy that situates jazz as a superior form of music.

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<sup>80</sup> Floyd, "Ring Shout!" 55-56

<sup>81</sup> "Buckshot LeFonque," Branford Marsalis, accessed March 28, 2018, <http://www.branfordmarsalis.com/albums/buckshot-lefonque>



The song “Music Evolution” demonstrates many of the values Branford included in his Buckshot LeFonque project. The song opens up with an upright bass playing a vamped jazz-inspired line. At 13”, a hook enters accompanied by a synthesizer,

Music evolution change

Sometimes the common makes it sound strange

Add a little this, take out a little that

Then you'll come up with jazz called rap

Where it's at, bring it back

Because it is an ill format<sup>82</sup>

In the hook, Buckshot LeFonque is arguing that the combination of jazz and rap is just a natural part of musical evolution. The hook also seems to assert that this rap music is just jazz in a new form. From the beginning, this song allows for a new interpretation of jazz that accepts its contributions to hip hop. This interpretation provides a contrast with the ideas expressed by neoclassical jazz musicians such as Wynton Marsalis and Stanley Crouch.

At 25”, a drum beat, and guitar enter along with rapped lyrics. This remains the beat under the subsequent rapped verses; when the hook comes back in, a horn section plays a melodic line in the background. Also, throughout the hooks, there are background record scratches and other sound effects such as reverb. Starting at 3’4” is a trumpet solo that lasts until 3’11”, and then the hook cycles a few more times and the lyrics fade out at the end of the song. The lyrics of this song allude to many neoclassically-influenced jazz concepts, in addition to references and rebuttals to negative hip hop rhetoric.<sup>83</sup> The lyrics take on the playful qualities of other jazz-rap and make references to jazz culture and other African American-influenced

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<sup>82</sup> Buckshot LeFonque, “Music Evolution,” released April 1, 1997, track 2 from *Music Evolution*, Sony Music, Youtube.

<sup>83</sup> LeFonque, “Music Evolution.”

elements of popular culture. The first few lyrics reference “Satchmo,” a nickname for Louis Armstrong; this begins to set up a historical narrative for jazz-rap that parallels narratives created by neoclassical jazz musicians. The lyrics go on to say,

Also

Developin' ways to make dough

Although

We always heard no when at a show

The Klan couldn't keep the man from makin' mo'

Better Blues<sup>84</sup>

These lyrics remind the listener that early jazz provided African Americans a new way to make money and to improve their economic standing. Additionally, at a time when many black people were denied access to white musical venues and shows, they were still able to make their own music through jazz. Also, the phrase, “makin’ Mo’ Better Blues” seems to be a reference to the 1990 Spike Lee film, which Branford Marsalis contributed to musically. Buckshot LeFonque is drawing a parallel between early jazz and early rap by treating them both as music’s that provided new ways for African Americans to improve their socio-economic statuses and create empowering music. In another line in the song, the MC raps, “Jazz gone up another level/ Real without making a deal with the devil.”<sup>85</sup> These lyrics references many negative opinions held about rap by more conservative observers in the United States: even Branford Marsalis’s brother Wynton spoke strongly against rap as an entire genre. Through his Buckshot LeFonque project, Branford seems to be disagreeing with his brother about rap as a genre and arguing that it has the potential to fit in with a neoclassical jazz lineage. But also, at the same time, his logic for the

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<sup>84</sup> LeFonque, “Music Evolution.”

<sup>85</sup> LeFonque, “Music Evolution.”

legitimization of rap as a genre is to approach it only through its connection to jazz, and not because of its own merit as a genre. Ultimately, Branford thought of his Buckshot LeFonque project as saving hip hop with jazz while also helping to continue a musical development of jazz without degrading its cultural prestige. To further draw a connection to a neoclassically-oriented lineage, the first verse draws parallels between jazz and rap through the practice of scatting; which is argued to be an early precursor to rap. In the lyrics, Cab Calloway, an early jazz band leader and scat singer, is called a “dope MC,” with Buckshot’s vocalist asserting that even the rap musical practice of using MC’s was based in a jazz lineage. The first verse again contests the views of jazz purists when it states that some will try to make the inclusion of jazz in rap “die.” This line of the verse speaks to those that consider rap as a genre to be degrading, and to those that think that the inclusion of jazz and hip hop degrades jazz’s cultural prestige. Through the Buckshot LeFonque project, Branford Marsalis argues the opposite, that these are connected traditions that work together to form a cohesive music.

The second verse begins after a reiteration of the hook and again addresses negative perceptions of jazz-rap. The MC states,

But I'm here to cause a debate and contemplate

Why jazz and hip hop is considered second rate

But what' the use

If I proceed to break it loose

There's always an excuse why the rapper gets abuse<sup>86</sup>

Here, the Buckshot LeFonque MC expresses confusion as to why negative perceptions exist about rap. In the context of the rest of the song, these lines seem to be saying that rap is a legitimate, so-called “first rate” genre, because it belongs to the same historical and prestigious

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<sup>86</sup> LeFonque, “Music Evolution.”

lineage of jazz. Throughout the song, there are also uses of word play similar in style to the lyrics of the Native Tongues.

The Buckshot LeFonque project seems to be Branford Marsalis's way of addressing the pathologization of African Americans in American culture. While his brother Wynton speaks out against rap as an entirely negative genre, Branford tries to use jazz and the construction of a neoclassical jazz lineage to create a similar type of cultural prestige for rap to what neoclassicists created for jazz. Additionally, while Wynton joins in on criticisms of rap, Branford seems to take it upon himself to depathologize, or in his words to "deghetto-tize" African American youth-culture through jazz.

Hip hop in the 1980s and 90s included class and respectability debates similar to those surrounding jazz during the same same period. On the one hand there was rap such as gangsta rap that included many of the hedonistic and misogynistic lyrics that many people associated with all hip hop. On the other hand was more underground rap such as the Native Tongues and jazz-rap. These artists took it upon themselves to "elevate" hip hop as a genre through their lyrics and musical samples. As a connected idea, some jazz musicians, such as Miles Davis and Branford Marsalis created their own takes on jazz-rap, although in the case of Marsalis, he tried to impose a neoclassical ideology upon rap and took it upon himself to try to save a genre that did not need to be saved. These early examples of jazz-rap helped provide a foundation for future jazz and hip hop artists. Since these first instances of jazz-rap, producers such as J Dilla have helped to revolutionize the genre of hip hop. In my next chapter, I will discuss many of Dilla's innovative contributions to hip hop and I will provide an analogy for how many jazz musicians have begun to conceptualize genre through the views of the rapper and producer Andre 3000.

### Chapter 3: Hip Hop Innovation and Conceptions of Genre

The modern forms of both jazz and rap have become intertwined since the 90s. In the later part of the 90s into the early 2000s, jazz musicians, such as Greg Osby, Gary Thomas, Stanley Clarke, Bill Evans, Barry Finnerty, and Roy Hargrove created their own works infusing ideas of rap with jazz.<sup>87</sup> Many of these works, such as Stanley Clarke's *1, 2 to the Bass*, payed homage to the jazz-rap artists of the 90s. In the case of Clarke, he even collaborated with Q-Tip, from A Tribe Called Quest.<sup>88</sup> This collaboration reinforces the sense of a strong relationship between jazz and rap that was articulated by earlier artists. Roy Hargrove's album, *The RH Factor*, follows more of a neo soul feel that shows influence from artists such as J Dilla and D'Angelo, but also adds more its own jazz and live instrument feel.

Recent albums such as Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp a Butterfly* have helped open up a new a diverse array of solo opportunities for the album's featured jazz musicians, which include artists such as Robert Glasper, Thundercat, Kamasi Washington, and Terrace Martin. All of these musicians are part of a new generation of jazz musicians that are utilizing hip hop vocabulary in jazz composition. In many ways, 1990s producers such as James Dewitt Yancey, known by the stage name J Dilla, and soul musicians such as Michael Eugene Archer, known by the stage name D'Angelo, have helped to define the sounds of modern jazz-rap and even contemporary jazz. The work of these early producers and musicians helped to contribute to a greater legacy of jazz-rap and have influenced the specific aspects of hip hop that modern jazz musicians emulated.

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<sup>87</sup> Cole, *The Last Miles*, 339

<sup>88</sup> Cole, *The Last Miles*, 339

## *The Musical Contributions of J Dilla*

In many ways, J Dilla revolutionized jazz and other genres related to sampling. The influence of Dilla has become so pronounced that Dilla ensembles have been created at prestigious music schools such as Berklee College of Music in Boston.<sup>89</sup> Other professional groups such as Abstract Orchestra and the Roots released albums playing Dilla's music in band situations. One of Dilla's most famous sampling methods involved his treatment of drums. Like other producers, Dilla would take drum breaks from existing recordings and splice them into new recordings. He created his own unique way of editing these drum grooves to sound slightly behind or ahead of the normal beat. Dilla created these drum beats with an Akai MPC3000, which is a sampler that allows the user to assign samples to different trigger pads. The Akai MPC3000 has a feature allowing producers to quantize, or to reset beats with more precision and to help correct errors in the timing of recording, but it can also be adapted for more creative uses.<sup>90</sup> J Dilla used the quantization feature to deliberately make the drums sound slightly imprecise in relation to the underlying subdivisions of the beat. While many hip hop producers used this technology to create precise and machine-like drum beats, Dilla tried to make his beats sound more "human" and unique. This style of drum sampling can be can now be played in electronic synthesized settings and has also been emulated by live drummers. Many musicians now refer to this type of drum beat (either in its live or sampled form) as the "Dilla beat," and it is utilized in soul, R & B, and jazz.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Boyuan Gao, "The Dilla Ensemble Builds a Bridge to Brooklyn," *Berklee College of Music*, March 28, 2018, <https://www.berklee.edu/news/2026/the-dilla-ensemble-builds-a-bridge-to-brooklyn>.

<sup>90</sup> "Quantizing MIDI and Audio" Steinber.help, accessed on March 28, 2018, [https://steinber.help/cubase\\_pro\\_artist/v9/en/cubase\\_nuendo/topics/quantizing\\_midi\\_audio/quantizing\\_midi\\_audio\\_c.html](https://steinber.help/cubase_pro_artist/v9/en/cubase_nuendo/topics/quantizing_midi_audio/quantizing_midi_audio_c.html).

<sup>91</sup> "Producers – Get Your Rhythms to Swing like Dilla's." *FACT Magazine: Music News, New Music*. FACT Magazine, 08 May 2013. Web. 12 Mar. 2017.

Dilla also established himself as unique in his ability to manipulate samples. In an interview, Ahmir Khalib Thompson, known professionally as Questlove, explains the complexity of Dilla's sampling abilities. Questlove is the drummer for the Roots and a previous collaborator of Dilla's. He remembers watching as Dilla sampled the Roy Ayers track "Ain't Got Time," to be used in the song "Little Brother" by the hip hop duo Blackstar. According to Questlove, Dilla took even the smallest pieces of instrumental music from the Roy Ayers track and spliced them together. He likened this process to solving a "10,000-piece puzzle in record time" and he further emphasized that each "microchop" Dilla made was indiscernible.<sup>92</sup>

The jazz and hip hop pianist Robert Glasper further explains Dilla's sampling techniques in an interview for Jazz Night in America. In the interview, Glasper addresses some of the reasons why hip hop producers like to make use of jazz samples and discusses musical examples from the producers Dilla and Pete rock. After explaining that jazz can provide interesting harmonic colors, he goes into a short analysis of specific tracks. With respect to Dilla, Glasper discusses tracks Dilla produced for other artists, such as "Get this Money" for Slum Village and "Stakes is High" for De La Soul. These tracks sample Herbie Hancock's "Come Running to Me" and Ahmad Jamal's "Swahililand" respectively. Glasper explains that Dilla "made people want to play like his beats."<sup>93</sup> In the Slum Village track, Glasper explains that Dilla slowed down the beat, changed the pitch, and used the techniques of "chopping" and "lifting" to create his own version of the work. Chopping is a process in which the producer divides the sampled rhythm into smaller segments, and then changes the order of the original recording around, while lifting refers to keeping the order of the original recording mostly intact. In the two examples

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<sup>92</sup> Red Bull Music Academy, "Couch Wisdom: Questlove on J Dilla's Sampling Technique," YouTube video. Posted February 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-h1K34Y468>.

<sup>93</sup> Jazz Night in America, "Jazz is the Mother of Hip Hop," YouTube video. Posted April 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Caxwobl1iKX4>

discussed by Glasper, Dilla was able to get by without extensive chopping, although he did change aspects such as speed, pitch, and quantization. With regard to sampling jazz in general, Glasper explains that producers use jazz to include more complex melodic ideas in their music.<sup>94</sup> The music of J Dilla has since become a tremendous influence in the worlds of hip hop, jazz, and neo-soul as players try to emulate the sound and feeling of his beats in a band setting with instruments.

D'Angelo, a musician and occasional collaborator of Dilla's, created his own version of the offset drum beat popularized by Dilla. In the sessions for his album *Voodoo*, D'Angelo asked Questlove to play drums in an offset style that was similar to the Dilla beat. Questlove explains that both D'Angelo and Dilla created similar concepts for this type of beat almost independently from each other. They both used the established idea of sampling beats in hip hop but added the element of dragging drum samples or live drumming slightly behind or ahead of the beat to set their songs apart. Questlove also explains that in the case of D'Angelo, it was more of a happy accident that was inspired by the work of hip hop and producers, while in the case of Dilla it was an actual effort to make his electronic drum beats sound both more "human" and unique. At the same time that Questlove was recording *Voodoo*, he was also recording with neo-soul singer Erykah Badu and the hip hop artist Common (Lonnie Rashid Lynn, Jr.). These artists were all connected and able to share ideas, which led each one to popularize their influences from Dilla and hip hop in contexts outside of hip hop.<sup>95</sup>

Many modern producers continue to be influenced by the music of Dilla. The production styles of producers such as Just Blaze and Kanye West have been shaped by Dilla's techniques

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<sup>94</sup> Jazz Night in America, "Jazz is the Mother of Hip Hop."

<sup>95</sup> Red Bull Music Academy, "Couch Wisdom."



and some hip hop fans have even donned shirts with the phrase, “J Dilla Changed My Life.”<sup>96</sup> In the world of hip hop producers, Dilla is unique for having a kind of life after his death, much like rappers such as Tupac Shakur and Notorious BIG.<sup>97</sup> In a 2013 interview, Kanye West, who is one of the most commercially successful producers and rappers in hip hop and a former collaborator of Dilla, discusses Dilla’s style and how it redefined hip hop production. West notes that he always feels the need to ask, “‘if Dilla was alive, would he like this?’ I have to work on behalf of Dilla.”<sup>98</sup> West goes on to assert that Dilla had, arguably, the best sounding drums in the history of hip hop. He also noted that Dilla’s tracks had an “organic” and “warm” feel that was always in the forefront of the mix. In this way, Dilla was able to create a unique and emotional connection to his audience.<sup>99</sup> West situates Dilla as both one of his own largest influences and as one of the most prolific producers in the history of hip hop.

In the same 2013 interview, West also contextualizes Dilla’s unique background in hip hop through his fashion choices. West explains stereotypes in hip hop such as “backpackers” and artists who donned gold chains as part of their fashion. The so-called “backpacker” rappers included many of the rap artists of the 90s and their fans, who sought to elevate the status of the genre through their lyrics and samples. Often, these rappers were placed in opposition to gangsta rap, which was more controversial and often thought of as somehow less intellectually stimulating. West describes Dilla’s relationship to these movements through his choice to wear chains as a fashion statement. These chains were often associated with gangsta rap and the stereotypes of inferior education or talent. Dilla was unique because he established himself as a producer who bridged the gap between gangsta rap and so-called backpacker rap. In his use of

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<sup>96</sup> Kelley Louise Carter, “The Battle For J Dilla’s Legacy,” *Vibe Magazine*, January 13, 2009.

<sup>97</sup> Simon Reynolds, “The Cult of J Dilla,” *The Guardian*, June 16, 2009.

<sup>98</sup> Hypebeast, “Exclusive: Uncut Kanye West Interview From 2013,” YouTube video, Posted on March 7, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJAobv6NKEI>

<sup>99</sup> Hypebeast, “Exclusive: Uncut Kanye West Interview From 2013”

fashion and in many of his associations, he was aligned with more of the mainstream and gangsta rap movements, but in his sound and musical innovations he was accessible to a population trying to “elevate” hip hop to a form of high art.

Another interesting view of Dilla comes from an interview with the bass player Stephen Bruner, who goes by the stage name “Thundercat.” Thundercat explains how he had a “Dilla moment” when he and the producer Steven Ellison, who goes by stage name Flying Lotus, showed Herbie Hancock a Dilla track that sampled one of Hancock’s own songs. They played Hancock the Dilla-produced Slum Village song, “Get Dis Money,” which samples Hancock’s “Come Running to Me.” Thundercat explains this as a unique and highly memorable moment in which he was able to share the sampled work of Dilla with the artist Dilla had sampled.<sup>100</sup> Other prominent hip hop producers have spoken about the influence of Dilla on the genre. The Detroit producer House Shoes, expressed his belief that Dilla ““can do a Primo beat better than Premier. He can do a Dre beat better than Dre, and he can out-rock Pete Rock.”<sup>101</sup> House Shoes introduces many of the most famous and highly regarded producers and asserts that Dilla had the ability to produce in each of their own styles better than they could themselves. He also argued that none of these producers had the ability to emulate the work of Dilla.<sup>102</sup> From these recollections by various artists, it becomes clear that Dilla was considered one of the most versatile producers in hip hop. He was able create music in the style of other producers, while also including his one unique style.

Even though Dilla is considered to be one of the most innovative producers in hip hop, he was still following a tradition that had been established by other great producers. One of the

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<sup>100</sup> Sama’an Ashrawi, “Thundercat’s J Dilla Moment,” YouTube video, posted on February 5, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gaURwQ6hZ7A>

<sup>101</sup> Carter, “The Battle For J Dilla’s Legacy.”

<sup>102</sup> Carter, “The Battle For J Dilla’s Legacy.”

most influential of these producers was Pete Rock. Rock established himself as a unique producer by putting short excerpts of rare soul, R&B, and jazz songs onto his records. This use of an eclectic range of materials created a kind of challenge for other producers, as they tried to identify where these samples had come from. Dilla had grown up listening to Rock and based many aspects of his own sampling techniques on Rock's own work. After Dilla died, Rock was asked to help Dilla's mother Maureen Yancey craft the post-humous LP *Jay Stay Paid*.<sup>103</sup> During this time, Rock learned from Yancey that Dilla had been highly influenced by Rock's own work.<sup>104</sup> In the same way that Dilla had grown up listening to Rock, Rock began incorporating Dilla's work into his own. Rock describes his own album, *Petestrumentals 2*, as a response to Dilla's album *Donuts*. Rock recalls his experience listening to the groundbreaking Dilla album: "'Boy was I blown away. I didn't expect to hear that. I knew Dilla was dope but damn!! I played that album to death, and I still do. It was a cleverly made instrumental album. The way he was doing things... it's always the way that has you like 'Wow, did you hear what he did?'"<sup>105</sup> Even a producer such as Rock, who had been instrumental in the development of Dilla, found his own production style challenged and influenced in response to Dilla's innovations.

Those hip hop artists using jazz vocabulary in the late 1990s and 2000s were often direct participants in the work of producers such as Rock and Dilla. Dilla was featured as a producer on albums such as Common's *Like Water for Chocolate* (2000) and *Be* (2005), and the Roots released an album covering Dilla songs in 2010, called *Dilla Joints*. Many of these artists were strong believers in the idea that hip hop was a logical offshoot from jazz. The rapper Nas had an

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<sup>103</sup> Schloss, Joseph Glenn Schloss, "Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip Hop," (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2014), 57

<sup>104</sup> Grant Brydon, "Exclusive Interview: Pete Rock— 'It was J Dilla's 'Donuts' That Made Me Do *Petestrumentals 2*,'" *RWD Magazine*, 2015

<sup>105</sup> Brydon, "Exclusive Interview: Pete Rock."

interesting perspective on this concept. His father Olu Dara was a jazz trumpeter, and Nas has utilized this influence in his own music. In Nas's words, "My father's style is laid back, old school jazz player type-intellectual shit going on. My shit is the same way, but from a young perspective, living right now in the New World Order."<sup>106</sup> Nas considers his own work to be a logical and intellectually-based continuation of his father's jazz music. He does not consider either jazz or rap to be a form of music superior to the other. He instead thinks of the two genres as interconnected styles of music from two different generations of artists.

### ***Andre 3000's Views on Musical Genre***

Another important artist who has utilized jazz samples in his production is Andre 3000 (Andre Benjamin). Both in the context of his rap duo, Outkast and in his solo pursuits, Andre 3000 has explored connections between rap and jazz with albums such as *The Love Below* and his lesser known work on the television show, *Class of 3000*. Although he was likely influenced by Dilla, he has more explicitly stated one of his major influences to be A Tribe Called Quest. At the 2016 funeral of Phife Dawg, one of the members of A Tribe Called Quest, Andre 3000 gave a tribute speech in which he praised the group's ability to use intelligent rap in a relevant and inspiring way. Andre 3000 remember hearing another member of the group, Q-Tip, using the word "elation" in a song. Andre remembered thinking, "We can use these words too? We can be smart? Yeah, man. [Q-Tip] gave me fuel."<sup>107</sup> The musical influence of A Tribe Called Quest and jazz in general is also prevalent in Andre 3000's approach to production. On his album, *The Love Below*, Andre 3000 employs a jazz backing track on the song "Love Hater." He uses swinging acoustic drums, a walking bass, big band style horn riffs, piano and guitar

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<sup>106</sup> Ericka Blount, "Where Jazz Meets Hip-Hop," *Jazz Times*, April 1, 1998.

<sup>107</sup> Jason Newman, "Read Andre 3000's Moving Tribute to Tribe Called Quest, Phife Dawg," *Rolling Stone*, April 6, 2016.

comping, and even a jazz guitar solo. Also, on this album, Andre 3000 uses musical influences from drum and bass music in his interpretation of the Rodger and Hammerstein song, “My Favorite Things.” The placement of this song in a jazz setting is an obvious reference to the jazz saxophonist John Coltrane, who did his own version of the song. In Andre 3000’s version, he utilizes a repeated synthesized percussion and an electric bass line under an acoustic piano that plays a jazz inspired solo. Andre 3000 uses an electronic synth to emulate Coltrane’s saxophone melody.<sup>108</sup> In much the same ways as A Tribe Called Quest or other such artists, Andre 3000 uses this album to establish his own work in the lineage of jazz.

Andre 3000 again followed his interests in jazz music with his cancelled television show, *Class of 3000*. The show, which was shown on the Cartoon Network, follows the fictional teacher Sunny Bridges (voiced by Andre 3000) and his class at a performing arts school in Atlanta.<sup>109</sup> In just the theme song of the show, the music switches from a hip hop beat infused with funk guitar and synthesized keyboards to a swung jazz section with a walking bass line, comping, and jazz horn lines. When the music switches to the jazz inspired section, one member of the class is heard remarking, “Excuse me but, um, the radio people don't play songs without words anymore.”<sup>110</sup> The teacher, Sunny Bridges responds that the music just needs to be “jamming” for people to like it. In many ways, this show reflects Andre 3000’s own attitudes toward music. In the television show *Class of 3000* and his own music, Andre 3000 tries to musically demonstrate his desire to not be confined to one specific type of music, and to be able to move seamlessly between a large variety of genres (in much the same manner as an artist like Prince). He instead considers the most important part of music to be its feel. This belief has

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<sup>108</sup> Outkast, *Speakerboxxx/The Love Below*, released September 22, 2003, Arista Records, Inc., Apple Music.

<sup>109</sup> Virginia Heffernan, “Hey, Kids, a Hip-Hop Star Has Savvy Advice for You,” *The New York Times*, November 2, 2006.

<sup>110</sup> Class of 3000, “Class of 3000 Theme,” release July 2, 2007, track 1 from *Music Volume One*, LaFace Records LLC, Apple Music.

enabled Andre 3000 to create eclectic and unique music that draws upon influences from multiple genres. The eclectic music of Andre 3000 provides a good contextualization for the way in which many jazz musicians use influences from hip hop. In a similar way to Andre 3000, many contemporary jazz musicians choose to combine a large variety of influences and to not confine themselves to one genre. I will discuss how and why contemporary jazz musicians are creating their own eclectic music in the next chapter of this project.

## Chapter 4: From Hip Hop to Jazz

The interconnected histories of jazz and hip hop have led many jazz musicians to adopt hip hop aesthetics into their compositions. This includes musicians I have already mentioned—such as Robert Glasper and Roy Hargrove—artists who are implementing hip hop inspired beats, grooves, and harmonies into their music. Additionally, hip hop influenced jazz has enabled some jazz musicians to get gigs as both jazz performers and hip hop producers. One such musician who I will further discuss in this chapter is Terrace Martin, a close collaborator of Robert Glasper who has made a name for himself in both the hip hop and jazz communities. Hip hop has essentially become a vehicle through which many people have been able to discover jazz. Even though integrating hip hop into jazz has become prevalent in the modern jazz community, it has brought with it more complicated discussions of identity, race, and authenticity.

### *Herbie Hancock*

All jazz musicians that use influences from hip hop have cited cultural and musical similarities that both genres of music share, but they each have their own unique take on what these cultural and musical similarities are. One of the earliest examples of a jazz musician creating hip hop was Herbie Hancock with his early instrumental hip hop track “Rockit” in 1983. In the Hip Hop Documentary “Scratch,” Mix Master Mike (who has DJayed for groups such as the Beastie Boys) and DJ Qbert both cited watching Herbie Hancock perform on television with Grandmaster DST as their main introduction to the DJ technique of scratching and to the type of virtuosity it could introduce to music.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> *Scratch*, directed by Doug Pray, (2001; New York, NY: Palm Pictures, 2001), DVD.

Hancock also situated his own music and views about music in a position of opposition to neoclassical musicians such as Wynton Marsalis. An interview in *Musician* magazine includes a discussion between Hancock and Marsalis in which Hancock pushes back on many of Marsalis' efforts to police the boundaries of the jazz genre. One of the first of these points in the interview occurs when the interviewer and Marsalis assert that jazz is a more meaningful music than pop. Here, Hancock expresses that he disagrees with this assertion and believes that music can take on many different forms, with purposes that should not have to compete with each other. This starts a heated discussion about the role and legitimacy of pop music as a genre. When Marsalis asserts one of his main arguments that all pop music is more of an expression of sexuality than of actual musical material, Hancock disagrees and argues that there is so much more expression to pop music and that the use of electronics in no way has any implications of sex. Later in the interview, Marsalis tries to argue that the sole purpose of pop music is to sell records, and that he knows this because he used to play pop.<sup>112</sup> At this point, Hancock cuts Wynton off with a retort, "Wynton, you don't [know]. You *think* you know."<sup>113</sup> In this interview, Marsalis makes many of the assertions he usually makes about sexuality and commercialism in pop music, but Hancock offers alternative interpretations to all of these. Today, the more inclusive viewpoints of Hancock still inform many of his musical decisions and his decision to continue to pursue a connection between hip hop and jazz music.

In a recent interview with *Down Beat*, Hancock describes the connected elements of jazz and rap and specifically his engagement with them; he notes "[a]ll the elements have been marinating," and that "[t]he elements were bubbling beneath the surface. Now they're

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<sup>112</sup> Rafi Zabor and Vic Garbarini, "Wynton Vs. Herbie: The Purist and the Crossbreeder Duke It Out." *Musician*, (March 1985): 52–64; reprinted in Robert Walser, ed., *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 343-350.

<sup>113</sup> Zabor and Barbarini, "Wynton Vs. Herbie, 350



exploding.”<sup>114</sup> Through his works such as “Watermelon Man,” *Head Hunters*, and “Rockit,” Hancock explored musical ideas such as ostinato-based song form, hip hop scratching, and electronically produced drums that implied the strong connections between jazz and rap, but now with his new album he is even more fully immersing himself in these elements. This desire to further connect the music genres of jazz and hip hop led Hancock to seek out collaborative opportunities with Los Angeles-based musicians such as Robert Glasper and Terrace Martin.<sup>115</sup>

### *The Los Angeles Scene*

A thriving Los Angeles music scene has entered a position of national prominence since the release of Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp a Butterfly*. Many of the musicians performed on Lamar's album and have since released their own critically acclaimed albums that portray a large diversity of musical influences. These musicians include, among others, the jazz musician and producer Terrace Martin, and the saxophonist Kamasi Washington. The pianist Robert Glasper has also been heavily involved in the LA music scene since his work on *To Pimp a Butterfly*, though he presently resides in Brooklyn, New York. As a group, the musicians of this LA scene have created a unique environment for sharing influences and collaboration. Each musician has released their own solo projects that were influenced by their work and collaborations with the other musicians in the scene.<sup>116</sup>

One artist that Glasper has been compared to is Herbie Hancock, who offered his own compliments for and analysis of Glasper's playing. Hancock has recently been collaborating with Glasper and Martin on a new album of which a release date has yet to be set. Although

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<sup>114</sup> Philip Lutz, “No Barriers. No Limits. No Fear.” *Down Beat*, April 2018, 26.

<sup>115</sup> Lutz, “No Barriers. No Limits. No Fear.” 26-27.

<sup>116</sup> Erick Ducker, “LA jazz: How Kamasi Washington and Thundercat are Breathing New Life into the West Coast Scene,” *The Guardian*, July 22, 2015.

Hancock was familiar with Gasper's work, it wasn't until they began to collaborate that he fully realized the impact his own music had on artists such as Gasper and their work with both jazz and hip hop.<sup>117</sup> Hancock recalled, "I found out [Gasper] was a devotee of my music. . . He had even recorded some of my tunes and put a new approach to them."<sup>118</sup> Even though Hancock recognizes the depth of his influence on Gasper's playing, he still talks about Gasper's unique musical style and innovations. According to Hancock, "[Gasper] has made a style of repeating short, provocative phrases and building on that. It could be a melody or something that involves some harmony with a melodic element to it that repeats over and over and has enough space for other elements to be added—building structure and textures around what Robert started."<sup>119</sup> Essentially, Hancock is describing Gasper's own unique improvisatory style in which he creates loops of jazz inspired harmonies. Within these repeated harmonies Gasper includes the melodic elements, which are his "short, provocative phrases." Gasper is melding his jazz theoretical concepts with the repetitive and groove-based aspects of hip hop in order to integrate jazz and hip hop structures into one cohesive and unique sound. After establishing these grooves, Gasper bases his improvisations on the established vamps, but includes new ideas such as chord substitutions and improvised melodic ideas to intensify his original ideas.

In an interview for his album *Covered*, Gasper further discusses specific musical ideas he takes from hip hop and compares much of his musical philosophy to that of Miles Davis. Gasper explains that when Davis performed, he tended to play music the audience would know instead of more experimental or complicated music. In a similar way, Gasper limits traditional jazz soloing in his performances and instead focuses on groove-based improvisation.<sup>120</sup> With

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<sup>117</sup> Lutz, "No Barriers. No Limits. No Fear." 28.

<sup>118</sup> Lutz, "No Barriers. No Limits. No Fear." 28.

<sup>119</sup> Lutz, "No Barriers. No Limits. No Fear." 28.

<sup>120</sup> Jacob Glickstaff, "Robert Gasper," *Contact: Portraits and Conversation*, June 2010.

this comparison to Davis, Gasper places himself in opposition to the views of artists such as Wynton Marsalis, who believed that jazz should be elevated to consideration as a “high art” form rather than being adapted for more general appreciation. At the same time, Gasper does not completely exclude soloing from his music, since he thinks it is still an important piece of jazz culture for both the performer and the audience. Instead, Gasper avoids what he sees as excessive soloing. In the same interview, Gasper connects his own works to ideas of repetition. He expresses the idea that there is beauty in repetition and relates this idea to meditation and spiritualism. Gasper notes, that while jazz performance tends to change in every bar, hip hop includes an element of repetition that creates space for the thoughts of both the performer and the audience. This space and repetition allows the performers to nod their head along to the music. In many of his recordings and performances, Gasper aims to emulate a producer who samples jazz, instead of performing as a jazz musician in the strictest sense.<sup>121</sup> In this way, Gasper uses vamp- and groove-based musical influences to establish himself as different from neoclassical jazz musicians such as Wynton Marsalis.<sup>122</sup> Gasper implies that straight-ahead jazz has a tendency to over-complicate matters and to take away from the spiritual aspects of the music.

Another musician who has worked within the LA music scene is the jazz and hip hop musician Terrace Martin. Martin’s parents were both jazz musicians, but he himself found jazz through his discovery of jazz-inflected hip hop musicians such as A Tribe Called Quest.<sup>123</sup> Martin grew up playing both jazz and hip hop and found his way to work with high profile hip hop musicians such as Dr. Dre, Pete Rock, and Snoop Dogg. In 2015, he produced Kendrick Lamar’s album *To Pimp a Butterfly*, which would go onto win multiple Grammys. In many

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<sup>121</sup> Glickstaff, “Robert Gasper.”

<sup>122</sup> Gasper also has been criticized for his problematic and gendered description of the appeal for groove-based music in an interview with Ethan Iverson. This discussion will be elaborated on in the next chapter.

<sup>123</sup> Matthew Allen, “[Influencers] Why Everyone Wants to Work with Terrace Martin,” *Ebony*, March 24, 2016.

ways, this album helped to establish Martin as a leader in a new movement in jazz. Hancock also speaks highly of Martin and has stated, “[Martin’s] a real producer, a conceptual thinker. He’s been at the forefront of a movement of jazz that’s emerging with the youth right now.” Here, Hancock defines Martin’s work as part of a larger movement of jazz that is largely based on hip hop aesthetics. Hancock establishes Martin’s work as a core contribution to jazz style, and not as a separate entity. Additionally, Hancock describes Martin’s work as “cutting edge,” which positions Martin as one of the main innovators of this new jazz genre.<sup>124</sup> After hearing Martin’s work on *To Pimp a Butterfly*, Hancock asked Martin to work on his own album as both a producer and musician. Martin saw this as another example of hip hop bringing him back to jazz.

In his interview with *Down Beat*, Martin expresses his musical disagreements with the viewpoints of “jazz purists” and their exclusive classifications of genres. He notes, “[t]he cats who still believe in barriers, we don’t see them around. I guess they’re in their box hanging out together.”<sup>125</sup> Here, Martin explicitly situates his own music as a type of jazz and argues against those who do not accept jazz that has been influenced by other genres as part of larger jazz legacy. Martin is establishing his own work, in part, as a pointed attempt to move away from more narrow conceptions of jazz as a genre.

Martin also places his own work in the context of jazz history. He first states that the fact that he is even being interviewed by *Down Beat* magazine highlights a tendency towards the blurring of the lines between popular music and jazz in contemporary culture. Martin goes on to state how he views the modern jazz scene, noting that, “I look at hip hop and jazz as one thing. I think there’s boring jazz just like there’s boring hip hop. I think there’s good jazz just like

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<sup>124</sup> Lutz, “No Barriers. No Limits. No Fear.” 31.

<sup>125</sup> Lutz, “No Barriers. No Limits. No Fear.” 31.

there's good hip hop. But I think the younger generation—18, 19, 20 years old—they don't call it jazz; they call our name. That's Robert's record, that's Thundercat's, that's Kamasi's."<sup>126</sup> Martin is describing just how diverse the modern genre of jazz has become. Each artist he names has a unique style that explores different elements of jazz, and this uniqueness has made it hard to classify each one as part of some unified jazz genre. Instead, from his standpoint, their musical styles need to be understood on their own terms.

Another interesting aspect of the *Down Beat* interview with Martin is the way in which he compares the specific musicians involved with both jazz and hip hop. Comparing his experiences working with both Hancock and Lamar, he states, ““What’s cool about working with Herbie and Kendrick—something they have in common—is that everything is happening right there. The ideas are in that room and everybody’s giving their best. They’re both cutting-edge and into breaking rules for the right reason.”” Martin argues that in many ways, the musicians in the genres of both hip hop and jazz share the similar goal of trying to develop and push for new sounds. In this way, Martin and other artists performing similar music have situated themselves as revolutionaries, pushing the boundaries of both hip hop and jazz. At the end of the *Down Beat* interview, Martin adds that even though he is considered part of this movement in jazz, he does not want all of his work to resemble *To Pimp a Butterfly*. He believes that jazz as a genre is changing so rapidly that he cannot afford to limit himself to one style. Instead, Martin wants to constantly move himself and the genre towards something new.<sup>127</sup>

Another active member of the LA music scene is the jazz saxophonist and composer, Kamasi Washington. In his own interview with *Down Beat* magazine, Washington spoke about a variety of subjects, including the West Coast Get Down, the idea of musical integrity, and the

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<sup>126</sup> Lutz, “No Barriers. No Limits. No Fear.” 32.

<sup>127</sup> Lutz, “No Barriers. No Limits. No Fear.” 32.

concept of jazz lineages. Additionally, Washington argued that the jazz world has historically ignored a tradition of serious jazz in his home jazz scene of inner-city Los Angeles. As with Terrace Martin and Robert Glasper, Washington really began to gain popularity after he worked on Kendrick Lamar's album *To Pimp a Butterfly*. Because of his work on Lamar's album, Washington was able to gain the respect and admiration of new audiences. His three-hour album *The Epic* has achieved more popularity than many other contemporary jazz albums, despite its clear contrast with the hip hop genre identity of Lamar's recording. According to Washington's keyboardist Brandon Coleman, the crowds Washington draws to his events are often composed of both jazz fans on the one hand, and people who have never heard of musicians such as Herbie Hancock on the other. Since the release of *The Epic*, Washington has had opportunities to play jazz at massive non-jazz music festivals such as Pitchfork, Coachella, and Bonnaroo, in addition to jazz festivals. In his own account of *To Pimp a Butterfly*, Washington describes the album's fusion of hip hop and jazz as a natural one, in that the two genres have entangled histories. Where the album sets itself apart is in its use of live jazz musicians and instruments.<sup>128</sup>

Washington notes that his album *The Epic*, and his musical work in general, makes connections to music from the past, but puts them in modern settings. He argues that while the past and the present in music are intimately connected, they are also two different entities. Washington states, "There are new experiences that people didn't have in the past, and there are old experiences in the past that we don't necessarily have now."<sup>129</sup> If Washington recognizes that the music of the past should influence music of the present, he also believes that the present has its own influences to add to music. This viewpoint informs Washington's decision to include influences from a diverse array of genres including jazz, classical music, funk, rock, and hip hop.

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<sup>128</sup> Josef Woodard, "Kamasi Washington: 'All the Doors Opened,'" *Down Beat*, July 2016, 26.

<sup>129</sup> Woodard, "Kamasi Washington," 28.

His point of view puts him directly at odds with the perspective of jazz purists in the neoclassicist vein. Washington believes that the incorporation of elements of new genres into contemporary jazz, or into contemporary music in general, is an essential part of the creative process. One of the songs on *The Epic*, “Change Of The Guard” makes a specific reference to those of the neoclassical generation. Washington recalls,

[“Change Of The Guard”] was a song I wrote a long time ago, when I was 19 years old. It was written for my dad, for the generation of musicians who didn’t necessarily make albums or get out there in a way that people would really know about them. It was almost like a generation lost, that generation of guys who graduated from high school in the ‘70s.

The generation after them, with Wynton and those guys, got the spotlight. That’s why I wrote “Change Of The Guard”—for that generation of musicians in L.A. Usually, the whole world sees this passing of the baton, but nothing like that happened here. All of us who grew up around them, we knew them and respected them.<sup>130</sup>

Elsewhere in the same interview, Washington further explains why he believes this generation was left out of the jazz boom of the 1990s. He elaborates, “I think [the time of musicians such as Wynton Marsalis] was the beginning of a homogenization of music, if you think about music coming out of New York. New York is definitely the center of jazz, but people have been doing it in other places, too.”<sup>131</sup> Washington further explains that, particularly during the 1970s, the people of Los Angeles collectively created the city’s identity.<sup>132</sup> In jazz, this identity included the avant-garde and less commercial music that did not fit the more popular narratives of jazz. In the subsequent decade, the artists behind this music were largely ignored during the neoclassical

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<sup>130</sup> Woodard, “Kamasi Washington,” 29.

<sup>131</sup> Woodard, “Kamasi Washington,” 29.

<sup>132</sup> His use of the word people is not confined to musicians.

era for not following neoclassical ideals. For Washington, these musicians deserved just as much respect as artists such as Wynton Marsalis, even as their less commercially palatable music was largely excluded from mainstream jazz during the neoclassical era. Through his music, Washington critiques those musicians he sees as having limited conceptions of jazz music.

Washington also highlights the importance of his own upbringing in South Central Los Angeles. Washington notes that, “When most people think of South Central L.A., they think of gangsta rap. That was a part of it. We heard that. That is in the music, as well, that aspect of life, for sure, but Leimert Park was a big part of it, too.” Washington describes his music as the result of a wide variety of factors, including gangsta rap and also more straight-ahead jazz. These influences are highly visible in his own work. Although Washington’s album *The Epic* is not explicitly a hip hop work, it is situated as an album closely connected to the genre of hip hop from Washington's collaboration with Lamar. Additionally, Washington released this album on the Brainfeeder label, which is owned by the hip hop producer, Flying lotus, aka Steven Ellison. When asked about *To Pimp A Butterfly* and the general connection between hip hop and jazz, Washington provided a highly revealing response:

Hip hop and jazz have a more entangled history than some people think. At one-point hip hop was dealing with jazz in terms of jazz samples of older records. The thing with *Butterfly* is that it is fused with jazz, but [with] new jazz musicians playing on the record. It’s not samples at all, but people actually playing. That’s what’s really different about it.<sup>133</sup>

According to Washington, *To Pimp a Butterfly* represents the most commercially popular work so far, in which hip hop has fully assimilated a form of hybrid live musical creation that jazz artists have practiced for at least a little while. In this hybrid creation jazz artists have performed

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<sup>133</sup> Woodard, “Kamasi Washington,” 29.



live emulations of hip hop and EDM grooves for a while, and this album was both a popularization of this approach and an example of the same hybrid approach taken up by hip hop producers themselves.

### ***Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah and his Musical Approach to “Identity Politics”***

Another interesting example of a modern jazz musician implementing both jazz and hip hop into their work can be seen in the work of Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah, who has incorporated influences from hip hop into his jazz music to explicitly express political statements and his personal conceptions of his own identity. Although Adjuah has collaborated with many of the artists from the West Coast jazz scene, he has defined himself primarily through his upbringing in New Orleans. Adjuah is a jazz trumpet player who grew up in the upper ninth ward of New Orleans in a community with an interesting musical scene and influence from Black Indian culture.<sup>134</sup> He then went on to attend Berklee College in Boston before going to New York, where he became known as a rising star in the world of jazz with his album *Rewind That* in 2006. Since this period of time, Adjuah has established himself as a jazz musician with diverse influences that range from hip hop to alternative rock. As a way to define the large variety of genres that have influenced him, Adjuah has called his music “Stretch Music.” As is the case with Robert Glasper and many other musicians playing hip hop inflected jazz, Adjuah reveals a desire to not confine himself to a single genre.<sup>135</sup> The work of these jazz musicians to use this wide range of musical influences is an act of defiance toward jazz neoclassicists and

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<sup>134</sup> Mardi Gras Indians are a subculture in New Orleans based on hierarchical territorial tribes in African-American communities. Some of these Mardi Gras Indians claim direct Native American ancestry while others believe that the tribes were formed from an intermingling of Native Americans with Creoles. Originally, these Indians would march in the street and compete for territory with violence, but now the tribes meet and have friendly competitions of performance and art that celebrate their cultural histories. See, Michael P. Smith, *Mardi Gras Indians*, (Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, 2007), 21-30.

<sup>135</sup> Evan Haga, “Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah Talks Jazz as Protest Music, Trap Influence,” *Rolling Stone*, March 30, 2017.

purists that have tried to create exclusive definitions of jazz. While these musicians' willingness to embrace all musical genres serves an important purpose in this larger musical statement, the use of hip hop in jazz is especially important because of its widespread implications for identity politics.

In his 2017 album, *Ruler Rebel*, Adjuah includes a combination of trap beats, jazz drumming, and West African drumming sensibilities. This album is the first of a trio of albums that are scheduled for release on the anniversaries of some of jazz's first recordings, and more specifically the first jazz recording of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. In his trio of albums, Adjuah grapples with topics such as social and political peril for both African Americans and general racial and political relations throughout a global community.<sup>136</sup>

In a 2017 interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine, Adjuah was given an opportunity to reflect on the modern jazz setting. In this *Rolling Stone* interview, Adjuah was asked about why he thinks jazz is experiencing a relative period of success, with many jazz artists, such as Robert Glasper, Esperanza Spalding, and Kamasi Washington receiving a greater amount of public attention than other jazz musicians in recent years. Adjuah responds that many of these younger jazz artists have "strong and palpable characters."<sup>137</sup> He then compares these contemporary jazz artists with those musicians who were emerging when he was growing up in the 80s and 90s: "you can make arguments that what was going on 25 to 35 years ago in this music wasn't really, as a concept, preoccupied with building bridges between cultures. . . but that's partly why we are."<sup>138</sup> Adjuah believes that the views of the jazz world from twenty-five to thirty-five years ago, or from the time of the neoclassical era, were too exclusive. Instead of bridging cultures together, artists in the neoclassical era often had a mission of being exclusionary towards other

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<sup>136</sup> Haga, "Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah Talks Jazz as Protest Music, Trap Influence,"

<sup>137</sup> Haga, "Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah Talks Jazz as Protest Music, Trap Influence."

<sup>138</sup> Haga, "Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah Talks Jazz as Protest Music, Trap Influence."

cultures, based on a fear that the inclusion of these other influences would ruin the perceived “prestige” of jazz. Adjuah cites these attitudes as part of the reason why he and his contemporaries (such as Glasper, Spalding, and Washington) have more open and inclusive viewpoints about the boundaries of jazz music. As a reaction to neoclassicism, these modern jazz artists have moved in the opposite direction, becoming drastically more inclusive in their conceptions of jazz. In the *Rolling Stone* interview, Adjuah explicitly states that while he was growing up in New Orleans, if jazz musicians did not play in a “neoclassical style,” their work was essentially considered invalid. Musicians that did not accept and follow the neoclassical narrative were not taken seriously as jazz musicians, and their music was dismissed as belonging to another genre. Adjuah is creating his own project in opposition to the views of the neoclassical era. As a reaction to the ideas of neoclassicism, Adjuah has tried to connect cultures and listeners instead of keeping them separate.<sup>139</sup>

Adjuah discusses similar ideas in a 2017 interview with *GQ* magazine. In this interview, Adjuah talks about the prevalence of problematic racist views in jazz history, and about jazz as a social and political movement. In reference to jazz music’s heavily racialized history, he acknowledges an early category of records called “Race Records,” which was a category created by several record labels to showcase and exoticize the music of black artists. This music was for the most part situated chronologically between the emergence of jazz and rhythm and blues.<sup>140</sup> Race records capitalized on the problematic idea that race could be a defining and almost taboo factor in music. In a similar vein of thinking, Adjuah also discusses the problematic nature of the first jazz record, which was released by The Original Dixieland Jass Band. He argues that J-A-S-S stood for jack-ass music, which was a highly offensive way to make fun of the

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<sup>139</sup> Haga, “Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah Talks Jazz as Protest Music, Trap Influence.”

<sup>140</sup> Shakeil Greely, “Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah: The Air Jordan-Wearing, Migos-Listening Future of Jazz,” *GQ*, May 31, 2017.

contribution of African Americans to the music.<sup>141</sup> A February 2018 interview of Adjuah with *Down Beat*, also discusses the problem with the word “Dixieland” being used to describe a jazz band. According to Adjuah, the use of the phrase “Dixieland” in the band’s name implicitly references the pro-slavery Confederacy. There was another added element of cultural appropriation by the leader of the group, Nick LaRocca, who would tell people that he “invented” jazz.<sup>142</sup> This assertion on the part of LaRocca demonstrates a similar type of appropriation to that of Paul Whiteman, an early white symphonic jazz musician who was given the title “King of Swing” due to his white privilege.<sup>143</sup> By capitalizing on his position as a white person with enough privilege to record an album and gain the favor of public opinion, LaRocca inaccurately declared himself the sole creator of the entire genre of jazz. In a follow up to his discussion of the word “jass,” Adjuah paraphrases a quote from Malcom X, who once stated that the only place African Americans could be free in America was on the “jazz band stand,” which implies that African Americans were unable to be completely free elsewhere in America.<sup>144</sup> Adjuah’s decision to release his trio of albums on the anniversary of these first jazz recordings draws attention to this history of inequity.

Another interesting part of the *GQ* article discusses Adjuah’s decision to wear gold chains; a practice that seems to mimic the stylistic choices of rap musicians, as I discussed in the previous chapter. While these rap musicians and producers had worn golden chains to celebrate materialism (or in the case of J Dilla, to set themselves apart from the so called “backpack

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<sup>141</sup> There have been a few other ideas concerning the problematic aspects to the words “jass” and “jazz” that scholars have cited. One of the most prevalent, was that “jass” originally referred to an erotic or sexualized subtext in the music. Also interesting, is the fact that many early artists that are now considered to be innovators of jazz tried to distance themselves and their music from this term. See, Krin Gabbard, “The Word Jazz,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, ed. Mervyn Cooke and David Horn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 1-2.

<sup>142</sup> John McDonough, “1917: The Year that Gave Us Monk, Dizzy, Ella, Buddy, & the First Jazz Records,” *Down Beat*, January 2017, 28-29.

<sup>143</sup> Krin Gabbard, “The Word Jazz,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, ed. Mervyn Cooke and David Horn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 1-2.

<sup>144</sup> Greely, “Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah.”

rappers”), Adjuah notes that he wears these chains and jewelry for a slightly different reason. He articulates that he was raised in an “Afro-Native American culture” where many people wore golden chains to show their West African heritage. Adjuah says that he himself wears these chains to show his “identity politics” and explains that wearing the chains creates a question about his identity that does not always align with the music he plays. In his interview with *Down Beat*, Adjuah explains how he further expressed his Mardi Gras Indian identity when he added “aTunde” and “Adjuah” to “Christian Scott.” According to Adjuah, “[these names] refer to twin generals from Benin who, according to fable, helped foster a bond between West Africans in the New Orleans region and Native Americans.”<sup>145</sup> Here, Adjuah also explains that the history of intersections between African Americans and Native Americans is not a commonly taught history. He notes that ““it’s not a linear American narrative, so you’re exposed to things in this culture that you wouldn’t get in a Louisiana history course.””<sup>146</sup>

Adjuah’s views on his own identity apply directly to the context of his music: in much the same way that his own personal identity cannot be easily integrated into a conventional linear American narrative, neither can his music. Adjuah’s most recent work is a series of three albums called *The Centennial Trilogy* that were released in response to the centennial anniversary of the first jazz recording by the New Dixieland Jass Band. *The Centennial Trilogy* musically explores Adjuah’s ideas about identity, acts as a statement about both historical and modern social and political events, and musically establishes a contrast with the neoclassical era of jazz. According to Adjuah, the first of the three albums, *Ruler Rebel*, serves as an introduction to Adjuah and his views. He explains that this album covers his “identity politics” and is based on his own personal experiences and family history. The second album, *Diaspora*, establishes Adjuah’s

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<sup>145</sup> Jennifer Odell, “Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah: ‘Speaking to All Human Beings,’” *Down Beat*, February 2018, 35.

<sup>146</sup> Odell, “Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah,” 36

audience. In this context, Adjuah states, “...I am speaking to all human beings with as much love as possible.”<sup>147</sup> In this album, Adjuah tries to unite as many people and cultures as he can through music. He takes inspiration from Delta blues, world music, and from a Mardi Gras Indian-inspired vocal refrain. Finally, his album *The Emancipation Procrastination* constitutes the larger political statements Adjuah wants to make based on his conceptions of his identity and world unity. Adjuah explains the vision for his album in this way: “as a world culture we have to become hyper-vigilant in terms of the way we look at things and that we need to reevaluate. . . how we treat each other so we can figure out the best way to move forward.”<sup>148</sup> Through this description, Adjuah explains his belief that unity and empathy will help create more cohesive and productive societies around the world; both in the musical context and in a more general sense. This album in particular contains some highly politicized music. One of his compositions is entitled “Gerrymandering Game” to express Adjuah’s view that much of politics is based on the question of which party gets to draw the boundaries for their electoral constituencies. Adjuah’s trilogy is based on the premise that social progress is dependent upon whether or not we can unify with one another and come to understand different cultures. As far as his music is concerned, this means resisting a conservative understanding of jazz as a genre and adopting a wide range of influences to help create one unified genre of music.

### **The Commercial Appeal of Hip Hop-Inflected Jazz and BADBADNOTGOOD**

As a jazz musician and personality, related to the West Coast jazz scene, Robert Glasper has created his own important identity-based connections between jazz and hip hop music, but he has also adopted many more commercial-based views of how to use the two genres of music.

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<sup>147</sup> Odell, “Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah,” 35.

<sup>148</sup> Odell, “Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah,” 35.

While neoclassical musicians believed that groove-based and pop influences watered-down jazz music to a point where it could no longer be classified as jazz, Glasper chooses to use groove-based music and pop in his jazz music as much for their commercial purposes as their musical purposes.

Glasper's approach to improvisation in the genres of jazz and hip hop has garnered some commercial. He has won Grammys for his *Black Radio* albums, and as I mentioned earlier, has collaborated with Kendrick Lamar on his critically acclaimed album *To Pimp A Butterfly*. Through these successes and his commercially-minded strategies, Glasper has helped to introduce new audiences to jazz. In an interview with *Down Beat*, Glasper recalls, "When we first put out *Black Radio*, we made every one of our trio albums \$5.99. We knew people would go back and look, so we made it really cheap, so they'd just buy it. It really worked."<sup>149</sup> Glasper used his more commercially friendly and genre-crossing *Black Radio* album to help sell his earlier jazz trio work (although this trio work still contained a variety of influences from genres such as hip hop).<sup>150</sup> In one interview, Glasper explains his position as both an instrumentalist and as an artist striving for mainstream popularity at the Grammys:

What is hard also is getting the respect of the mainstream. I won two R&B Grammys. If I was a singer who won those Grammys, I'd be gracing all the magazine covers, all the urban magazine covers, something. I barely got asked to do an interview. When we won the first Grammy, and we went backstage to do all the interviews after you win, holding the award and talking, people were like looking at their sheets going, "So, do you guys...sing?" "No, we're an instrumental band." "Oh, umm..." You know, it's confusing! But if you ask people they say, "Oh! I love the music, Oh! I love that album."

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<sup>149</sup>Lutz, "No Barriers. No Limits. No Fear.," 28.

<sup>150</sup> Lutz, "No Barriers. No Limits. No Fear.," 28.

Okay, well, give me those same opportunities. I'm trying to break down that barrier. I want to get that kind of love.<sup>151</sup>

Instead of adapting a neoclassicist mentality that jazz is a form of high art that should be created for the sake of art instead of accessibility, Glasper is, at least in part, striving to create jazz music with popularity in mind. While neoclassicists such as Marsalis have criticized jazz influenced by groove-based music for being too simple and have argued that the inclusion of these influences degrades the music for the purpose of being more accessible, Glasper has chosen to include this music *precisely for the purpose* of being accessible. Glasper talks about this idea when he discusses why he decided to start taking fewer solos:

Once I started getting mainstream people to my shows, I realized we were taking too many solos, and they were too long. I started gauging when people were going on their iPhones. So we narrowed it down. Over the course of the whole night Casey Benjamin and I might only take one, maybe another in the encore. But we're improvising at the same time, we're grooving, and peoples' heads are nodding, so you leave full. It's just enough soloing for the mainstream person to be enlightened by that, but it's not beating them over the head.<sup>152</sup>

Glasper describes his focus on the groove over the solos as a way to appeal to a mainstream who he does not believe is capable of understanding jazz solos. While he is helping to make jazz more accessible, Glasper is achieving this through a neoclassical logic that groove-based music is less “enlightening” than straight-ahead jazz.<sup>153</sup> Neoclassicists such as Marsalis argued that it was their job to lift up jazz to become a culturally prestigious music, but Glasper seems to be

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<sup>151</sup> Glickstaff, “Robert Glasper.”

<sup>152</sup> Glickstaff, “Robert Glasper.”

<sup>153</sup> Again, I will discuss another gendered aspect of Glasper’s concept of groove-based music in the next chapter.



arguing that it is his job as a musician and a businessman to give audiences what they want to hear.

Another interesting musical group that is often considered in discussions of hip hop-inflected jazz and has their own unique views about jazz “purism” and neoclassicism, is the Canadian group, BADBADNOTGOOD. For some critics, the existence of the group brings up important questions about commercialization and race in hip hop-inflected jazz. A 2012 article by *NOW* magazine in Toronto, Canada, referred to BADBADNOTGOOD as a group of “jazz futurists” who are changing the “rules of jazz.” The band was originally formed as a trio of three college students from Humber College. The band recorded a video of themselves playing a collection of music covers from the hip hop collective, Odd Future, for a performance test piece in front of a panel of jazz musicians. They received comments from the judges such as, “I didn’t find anything of musical value in this performance”: this denial of musical value relates to neoclassicist conceptions of jazz that treat all popular forms of music as commercial entities instead of musically viable genres.<sup>154</sup> BADBADNOTGOOD placed this same video on Youtube with the name “Odd Future Sessions Part 1,” and it went viral, receiving over 800,000 hits. The video caught the attention of the Odd Future member Tyler the Creator, and they began to collaborate with Tyler and the rest of the Odd Future collective. Gilles Peterson, a deejay and record label owner, argued that it was a rare case of jazz musicians playing hip hop music correctly, situating them in relation to Q-Tip, Robert Glasper, Questlove, and Steve Coleman.

Despite such comparisons, the members of BADBADNOTGOOD have set themselves apart from both jazz in general and from these musicians in particular. The group has complained that in their jazz education, everyone transcribed and listened to John Coltrane and

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<sup>154</sup> Anupa Mistry, “BADBADNOTGOOD: Toronto Jazz Futurists Rewrite the Rule Book,” *Now Toronto*, March 22, 2012.

Charlie Parker as formative influences. Although they conceded that this work was important to developing the vocabulary of jazz, they also argued that it led to all of the musicians sounding similar to one another. The band has worked to set itself apart from these musicians by developing their creative aspects as a group, instead of focusing on their own individual technical abilities. BADBADNOTGOOD has asserted that people like Glasper and other musicians from the LA scene are more concerned with older jazz and hip hop from the 90s, and that they should be even more open to more contemporary styles in their conceptions of jazz. BADBADNOTGOOD prides themselves as being the only jazz group that has mosh pits at their performances, which connects the band with party atmospheres and other genres of music such as punk and grunge in addition to hip hop.<sup>155</sup>

BADBADNOTGOOD has positioned their music as a type of jazz that they believe is a contrast to what many music schools teach and this positioning has been met with both positive and negative judgements. Some, such as Anupa Mistry of NOW magazine, have treated the group as revolutionary jazz musicians, while others, such as the blogger and trombonist Alex Rodriguez, argue that BADBADNOTGOOD is a group of white musicians appropriating the styles of jazz and hip hop for their own personal gain. Rodriguez compares the group to the 1920s jazz musician Paul Whiteman, who sought to “Make a Lady” out of jazz. According to Rodriguez, while the group BADBADNOTGOOD does the opposite of Whiteman and tries to trivialize jazz, they are similar to Whiteman in that they are acting from a position of white privilege to assert their own conceptions of jazz and hip hop.<sup>156</sup> Rodriguez cites the Gang Starr song “Jazz Thing,” in which the artists rap,

The real mystery is how music history

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<sup>155</sup> Mistry, “BADBADNOTGOOD.”

<sup>156</sup> Alex W. Rodriguez, “BADBADNOTGOOD: Leave Jazz Alone,” *Lubricity* (blog), April 4, 2012, <https://lubricity.wordpress.com/2012/04/04/badbadnotgood-leave-jazz-alone/>.

Created Paul Whiteman or any other white man,  
And pretended he originated,  
And contended that he innovated  
A Jazz Thing.

Schemin' on the meanin' of a Jazz Thing<sup>157</sup>

In this song, Gang Starr problematizes Whiteman and other white jazz musicians who became famous and made a living through their appropriation of jazz. Rodriguez uses this argument against Whiteman and applies it to the group BADBADNOTGOOD.<sup>158</sup> These are some strong criticisms that bring up some important considerations regarding the role of race in jazz and hip hop, and especially in the modern movement of hip hop-based jazz. While many of the other musicians discussed in this chapter, such as Glasper, Martin, Washington, and particularly Adjuah have used hip hop as an expression of their own identities, the group BADBADNOTGOOD seems to appropriate hip hop-inflected jazz music for their own purposes of commercial appeal instead of following a precedent set by other jazz and jazz-rap artists. In the next chapter I will discuss some of the specific precedents for hip hop-inflected jazz through an analysis of recordings by Glasper and Adjuah.

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<sup>157</sup> Rodriguez, "BADBADNOTGOOD."

<sup>158</sup> Rodriguez, "BADBADNOTGOOD."

## Chapter 5: The Music of Hip Hop-Inflected Jazz

The previous chapter in this project took on many jazz musicians that have implemented influences from hip hop into their own playing. In this chapter I will analyze recordings by two of these artists—Robert Glasper and Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah—who each have their own ideologies, motivations, and aesthetic visions that they articulate both musically and in interviews. For Glasper, I will analyze his reinterpretation of the jazz standard “Stella By Starlight” that upends the listener's expectations and showcases Glasper’s views about groove-based music. In the case of Adjuah, I will be looking at his song “Diaspora” from his album of the same name, which demonstrates how he conceptually tries to integrate a wide variety of musical influences and provide a larger commentary about diverse sites of identity. Additionally, this song is part of a larger trio of albums with important political implications that rely on the use of genres such as hip hop to make larger statements about global and American societies.

### *Robert Glasper – “Stella By Starlight”*

Robert Glasper’s version of the jazz standard, “Stella By Starlight” is the only jazz standard on his live trio album, *Covered*. This album was recorded with a jazz trio consisting of Glasper on the piano, Vicente Archer on bass, and Damion Reid on drums, in order to realize a variety of hip hop, R&B, and rock covers in a jazz context. The use of popular compositions in jazz contexts has become a way of updating our body of jazz standards.<sup>159</sup> Other jazz piano trios such as the Bad Plus and the Brad Mehldau Trio have gained popularity among rock, drum and

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<sup>159</sup> Ben Finane, “Crossing Over with Robert Glasper,” *Soundboard: The Steinway and Sons Podcast*, 2017. This idea of the “reinvention of the jazz ‘standard’” has also been discussed in jazz scholarship. Dale Chapman refers to other artists such as Brad Mehldau and Herbie Hancock as artists that have implemented influences from electronic, techno, and house music to create “jazz hybrids.” See, Chapman, *The Jazz Bubble*, 136.

bass, and jazz audiences for their jazz covers of groups such as Nirvana, Radiohead, and Aphex Twin. This piano trio format allows artists to use the instrumentation and musical ideas from a jazz vocabulary and to apply them to more contemporary popular compositions.

Glasper's use of the piano trio in this form allows him to appeal to both his more mainstream music fans (such as rock and hip hop enthusiasts) through his utilization of compositions from outside of jazz (as it is commonly understood), and to appeal to his jazz fans by using a common jazz trio format. In an interview with the Steinway & Sons pianos' Soundboard podcast, Glasper cites work by artists such as Kendrick Lamar and Radiohead as new "standards." He argues that their music's chord changes, forms, and melodies lend themselves to jazz in a way similar to those of Cole Porter in the earlier days of jazz. Glasper believes that musicians should also play songs that people know, in order to cater to their audiences, and in this respect, he situates himself in relation to a legacy of artists such as Miles Davis. Glasper explains, "That's why when you hear bootlegs of Miles, he's always playing standards. It was always 'Round Midnight', 'Stella By Starlight,' and 'No Greater Love' because Miles wanted to play songs people know."<sup>160</sup> Glasper then further creates a connection between himself and Davis by saying that he put "Stella by Starlight" on the album but changed it in a way that he thought his fans would appreciate. On a jazz trio album of mostly pop and hip hop covers, Glasper reinterprets this traditional jazz standard using hip hop influences and vocabularies. The situation of a standard such as "Stella by Starlight" on a jazz trio's album of pop and hip hop covers creates a connection between new and old conceptions of the jazz standard. In this way, Glasper is helping to create a new type of jazz standard that moves away from the typical Tin Pan Alley popular song form.

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<sup>160</sup> Finane, "Crossing Over with Robert Glasper."

“Stella By Starlight” is usually performed as a thirty-two bar AABA jazz “head arrangement,” in which the melody is played at the beginning, and then the musicians cycle through the thirty-two bar chord progression and take turns soloing.<sup>161</sup> Gasper starts his rendition of “Stella By Starlight” with a solo piano playing a drastically sped up and rubato version of the original head, which goes against the commonly expected realization of a jazz head. He slows down the melody and chords as he reaches bar 17 of the original head statement (around 13” in the recording), and then creates an eight-bar vamp based upon this melodic line. He establishes the vamp as a repeated element with a new chord progression based on the melody line from measures 17-24 of the original head starting at 28". This vamp continues throughout the rest of the recording and employs a repetitive chord progression that is built in a fashion similar to the way in which a producer might create the harmonic component of a looped hip hop beat. Gasper keeps these chords mostly the same as he solos using jazz vocabulary.<sup>162</sup>

The chords in Gasper’s vamp each last one measure, with a total of eight chords comprising this main vamp. The chord voicings introduce interesting harmonic colors and movement into the recording. In the bass there is an overall feeling of descent and reharmonization, while the upper voice plays the melody, includes harmonically ambiguous tonal colors, and includes a common tone of Bb for all but one of the eight chords. The pedaled note creates consistency throughout the chords, and the descent in the bassline helps the artist to avoid approaching one particular resolution. The interesting harmonic colors highlight the influence of jazz harmony, while the looped nature demonstrates a hip hop sensibility. The song persistently loops an unstable chord progression that constantly cycles back to the top of a

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<sup>161</sup> The standard “Stella By Starlight” has been interpreted by a countless number of jazz artists in a more standard thirty-two bar form. Some of the most famous of these versions include those by Miles Davis and Ella Fitzgerald.

<sup>162</sup> Robert Gasper, “Stella By Starlight,” released June 15, 2015, track 9 from *Covered*, Blue Note Records, Apple music.

chromatically descending bassline, preventing a resolution to the bridge’s harmonic tension that would come in a more conventional AABA formal reading of the jazz standard.<sup>163</sup> The chord voicings and melodic line for Glasper’s version of “Stella by Starlight” is as follows:

## "Stella By Starlight" Robert Glasper Piano Voicings

The musical score consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with various ornaments and a triplet of eighth notes in the fifth measure. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a chromatically descending bassline. Below the bass staff, the following chords are indicated: BMaj7, Bbsus, Db6, Gm, Gsus, EbMaj7, A-7, and AbMaj.

Starting at 39”, Archer and Reid join Glasper with Archer playing a two-feel bassline (the bass player accents beats one and three of the four beat measure, which gives feeling that there are only two beats in the measure) that descends chromatically starting on an Ab, and with Reid playing an improvised hip hop groove with a sixteenth-note subdivision: Reid tends to use the bass drum on the first beat of every measure and the snare drum at the end of measures, and inserts varied fills near the end of each eight-bar reiteration of the vamp. Archer and Reid both alter their rhythms throughout the recording to complement Glasper’s soloing.<sup>164</sup>

Glasper’s reading of “Stella By Starlight” highlights a few of the main characteristics associated with the hip hop influenced jazz movement as a whole, as well as with his own personal take on it. In an interview with Ethan Iverson of the Bad Plus for his jazz blog, Do the Math, Glasper explains some of his general musical philosophies. During a discussion about younger jazz musicians adopting stylistic influence from J Dilla, Glasper cites the Marsalis brothers, noting that the Marsalis brothers and other jazz musicians of their time played their

<sup>163</sup> Glasper, “Stella By Starlight.”

<sup>164</sup> Glasper, “Stella By Starlight.”

rhythms “on the grid.” He also added that older jazz musicians tended to be sloppier with their rhythms, and that he misses this sloppiness in the work of musicians such as the Marsalis brothers. In employing this vocabulary of “on the grid” and “sloppy,” Glasper is referring to the musicians’ adherence to the tempo and timing of their rhythms. “On the grid” means that musicians are metronomically accurate, and “sloppy” describes musicians that are more imprecise and varied with their rhythms and overall tempo. Iverson then adds that the sloppiness in jazz is like a “secret sauce,” or a unique aspect of the music that makes it more compelling. He adds that this secret sauce is what J Dilla gave to hip hop.<sup>165</sup>

Glasper and Iverson then transition into a discussion about tuning and metronomes, arguing that they should not be given as much importance as many jazz musicians give to them. They say that while some attention should be given to intonation and timing in musical practice and performance, the more important quality musicians should focus on is the overall *feel* of the music, which is not dependent on perfect timing or intonation.<sup>166</sup> This is similar to an idea proposed by the ethnomusicologist, Charles Keil. Keil writes about an idea he calls “participatory discrepancies,” which are basically subtle inflections or imperfections in the music. These subtleties, such as slightly imperfect timing or pitch, can enable music to be more personally connecting and involving to listeners. These discrepancies fundamentally impact the way the musicians communicate and play off one another, as well as with the ways that they engage with their audience. Participatory discrepancies include a “humanistic” and social aspect that Keil believes is essential to music. This social aspect comes from the natural tensions that occur from slight pitch and rhythm differences when a group of live musicians play together.

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<sup>165</sup> The “secret sauce” reference is Iverson’s way of referencing this project’s earlier discussion on J Dilla’s production methods that readapted the quantize feature of the MPC to create anticipations within the beat.

<sup>166</sup> Ethan Iverson, “Interview with Robert Glasper,” *Do The M@th*, 2017, <https://ethaniverson.com/glasper-interview/>



Keil also seems to consider these discrepancies to be a reason that having humans play music is superior to computer generated music.<sup>167</sup> Artists such as J Dilla were able to integrate these kinds of discrepancies into their digital creations, which involve a social interaction with the audience instead of with other musicians. This adaptation of participatory discrepancies for rap production goes against Keil's idea that these discrepancies are unique to live music. This idea of computerized discrepancy is the same idea that Glasper now tries to emulate in much of his music. Live musicians are now trying to emulate computerized discrepancies to create new types of interactions with other musicians and their audiences.

The discussion between Glasper and Iverson also touches upon the idea that groove-based music can be more enjoyable for crowds. This particular segment of the discussion between Glasper and Iverson was criticized for being sexist. In the interview, Glasper and Iverson discuss groove-based jazz and its ability to attract an audience that does not usually listen to jazz. Specifically, as part of this audience they talk about women: Iverson even states at one point that attracting women is one reason to play more groove-based jazz. A little later in the interview, Glasper specifically states, "Getting back to women: women love that. They don't love a whole lot of soloing. When you hit that one groove and stay there, it's like musical clitoris. You're there, you stay on that groove, and the women's eyes close and they start to sway, going into a trance."<sup>168</sup> Although this quote foregrounds one of Glasper's main ideas about repetition, it is also problematic for its description of women and their relation to jazz. Glasper implies that women as a gender prefer groove-based music to solo-based music, referring to it as a "musical clitoris," which is a gendered way to treat the relationship between women and music. While Glasper does express that some of his motivation and understanding

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<sup>167</sup> Charles Keil, "Participatory Discrepancies and the Power of Music," *Cultural Anthropology*, 2/3 (August 1987): 275-82.

<sup>168</sup> Iverson, "Interview with Robert Glasper."

of groove-based music and the integration of hip hop influences is spiritual, he also exhibits a deeply problematic and misogynistic analysis that is central to his own understanding of his music. Here, it is important to explain both the musical and social implications of Gasper's discussion, since they provide different contexts to understand his musical and cultural ideas.

In Gasper's reinterpretation of "Stella By Starlight," he slightly dislocates the timing of his chords over a drum beat with slight displacements. These are the participatory discrepancies that help to keep the audience engaged in the music and refer to the Dilla beat from hip hop. Gasper also references the repetition and vamp-based ideas that result from sampling in hip hop with his concept of groove-based music. His interpretation of "Stella By the Starlight" recreates the thirty-two-bar standard around the melodic line from eight of the original measures. He uses this melodic line to create a new chord progression that combines the harmonic elements of hip hop and jazz to create a groove-based form that emulates the sound of a sampled loop. Gasper creates an overall hip hop feel for a traditional jazz standard by using the ideas of participatory discrepancies and vamp-based harmonic and melodic progressions that emulate the feeling of sample-based music. Gasper describes his interpretation of "Stella by Starlight" as a success: "I think I flipped it in a way that they could appreciate it whether they know that tune or not. People are always asking me about it: 'What's that dope tune where the drummer's doing that beat? What's that groove you put together?' It made it accessible. Sometimes you've got to put a little seasoning on something for someone else to eat it."<sup>169</sup>

### *Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah- "Diaspora"*

Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah's track "Diaspora" from his album of the same name provides us with an example of Adjuah's desire to mix genres and to make political statements

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<sup>169</sup> Finane, "Crossing Over with Robert Gasper."

with his music. His use of the word “Diaspora” to name his track and album brings about obvious connotations specific to African diasporic people, who have been scattered across the globe as a consequence of the slave trade, and who here in the United States have been affected by the legacies of white supremacy throughout America’s history. Adjuah discusses the general characteristics of his album *Diaspora* in an interview with Vice Magazine’s music division, Noisey. He notes that “[t]his record has influences that come from Nordic pop music, traditional Korean music, impressionistic and Russian classical music. So, this one is stretching more in terms of the sonic terrain that shows that marriage between all of these cultures but with the similar rhythmic base.”<sup>170</sup> The word Diaspora also refers to Adjuah’s desire to highlight similarities that bind together the seemingly different cultures of the African diaspora as well as those of other musical cultures from around the world. Adjuah combines these influences to create a type of unity between these cultures.<sup>171</sup>

The title track of the album begins with an eight-bar piano vamp that switches between Bb-7 and an Eb-7 chord.<sup>172</sup> This vamp ends with an Eb-7/Ab chord. This vamp repeats twice between 0” and 10”. At 10”, the trumpet enters with a muted sound and plays a repeating melody line that lasts sixteen bars; starting at 22”, another horn voice enters that plays a melody complementing the trumpet figure. This track employs piano and trumpet vamps that reveal influences from both hip hop and West African drumming.<sup>173</sup> The vamped minor seventh chords communicate a hip hop feel, while the different layers of complexity between the trumpet lines and the sixteen-bar melodic form over an eight-bar harmonic form makes an allusion to West African drumming. In West African drumming, a common practice is to create music with

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<sup>170</sup> Pat Shahablan, “Christian Scott Continues to Stretch Jazz’s Sound with ‘Diaspora,’” *Noisey*, June 8 2017.

<sup>171</sup> Shahablan, “Christian Scott Continues to Stretch Jazz’s Sound with ‘Diaspora.’”

<sup>172</sup> Although the melodic line switches the Bb-7 between a Bb-6 and a Bb-7

<sup>173</sup> Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah, “Diaspora (featuring Elena Pinderhughes),” released on June 22, 2017, track 1 from *Diaspora*, *Stretch Music, LLC./Ropedope LLC*, Apple Music.

repeated but different overlapping voices that last for different periods of time. This creates a polyphonic and polyrhythmic layering of sounds, which can be heard in Adjuah's track.<sup>174</sup> In West African drumming, there is a master drummer or lead player that plays a changing line over repeated ideas in the other instruments.<sup>175</sup> The layer of the changing trumpet solo over the repetitive drums and piano might be an allusion to this practice. These concepts are also similar to those described in an essay written by Amiri Baraka (previously named Leroy Jones) that introduces a concept called "the changing same." Essentially, Baraka claimed that contemporary African American music was based on structures and cultures of African religious music.<sup>176</sup>

At the 10" mark in the track, the drummer enters with a beat made up of an electronic snare backbeat and straight eighth notes on an acoustic ride cymbal, which in combination create a hip hop feel. The drum beat's straight eighth note pattern on the cymbal and the snare backbeat are stylistically similar to a trap beat. Trap beats usually include a heavy kick at the beginning of the drum pattern, employ consistent eighth notes on the cymbal (usually high-hat but can be substituted with the ride), and a synthesized snare pattern that accents beat three of a four-beat measure.<sup>177</sup> Additionally, the drums here set up an interesting contrast between electronic and acoustic timbres. The drummer uses an electronic snare on the backbeat to provide a trap sound but keeps the rest of his drum set and cymbals acoustic, which provides a live acoustic jazz quality to the music.<sup>178</sup> The trap sound Adjuah creates with the drums provides an interesting deviation from the combination of jazz and hip hop styles employed by artists such as Robert Glasper, which tend to consist of a sloppier-sounding "Dilla beat." While the Dilla beat

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<sup>174</sup> Adjuah, "Diaspora."

<sup>175</sup> Willie Anku, "Principles of Rhythm Integration in African Drumming," *Black Music Research Journal* 17/2, (Autumn, 1997): 214-224.

<sup>176</sup> Nathaniel Mackey. "The Changing Same: Black Music in the Poetry of Amiri Baraka." *Boundary 2* 6/2, (Winter 1978): 355-86.

<sup>177</sup> "Top 5 Elements of Every Trap Beat," *Production Music Live* (blog), August 5, 2016, <https://www.productionmusiclive.com/blogs/news/top-5-elements-of-every-trap-beat>.

<sup>178</sup> Adjuah, "Diaspora."

quantizes the drums in such a way as to fall slightly off the beat, a trap beat—such as what the drummer emulates in this track— uses quantization to create drums that fall precisely on the beat.

At 54”, a bass line enters with a repetitive but melodic line that complements the piano and trumpet lines.<sup>179</sup> This melodic line in the bass is reminiscent of Afrobeat music such as that of Fela Kuti; whose music is also known for its repeated melodic basslines. The bass player who played on this album, Kris Funn, offers an interesting reason for his use of melodic basslines. Funn believes one of the stylistic choices that has done the most to differentiate the music on Adjuah’s trio of albums is the choice to use the Roland TR-808 Rhythm Composer. The 808 was a drum machine developed in the early 1980s that became a staple in hip hop productions.<sup>180</sup> Funn says, “I can’t even explain what it is like to play an acoustic bass next to an 808. . . you listen to trap music, most of the time the 808 is the bass line and kick drum at the same time So you have to kind of do the opposite and play in the spaces where the 808 isn’t. The 808 takes up so much space sonically that you won’t be heard if you don’t.”<sup>181</sup> At 1’13”, the trumpet, drums, and bass cut out and the piano plays a more rhythmically simple jazz inflected chord progression. At 1’23”, the drums and multiple melodic trumpet lines reenter and a trumpet solo starts at 1’36”. At 1’50”, the drums, piano, and bassline transition back into the original beat and the trumpet continues to solo. Throughout the rest of this track, the trumpet and flute play solo melodic lines with varying degrees of polyphonic complexity. The trumpet and flute solos use jazz inspired vocabulary and set up a polyphony between the voices, which provides a reference to early forms of jazz from New Orleans. During the first portion of the flute solo, the piano

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<sup>179</sup> Adjuah, “Diaspora.”

<sup>180</sup> Tricia Rose, “Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America,” (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 75-76.

<sup>181</sup> Odell, “Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah,” 36.

plays its vamp in the upper register of the instrument.<sup>182</sup> The percussion also utilizes a shaker starting at 2'37", which could be a reference to West African Shekere.<sup>183</sup>

The overall purpose of this track seems to be to combine seemingly disparate musical aspects of the African American diaspora to create a sense of unity. Specifically, Adjuah combines ideas from West African drumming, hip hop (specifically trap music), Afrobeat, and jazz. In the context of an album entitled *Diaspora*, Adjuah's decision to include such a wide variety of musical influences indicates that he is trying to speak to multiple audiences and treat them as part of the same family. Adjuah is able to establish this album and song as a political statement without using any lyrics. He conveys his message simply through the album's stylistic characteristics and through the titles of its tracks and his diverse array of influences speak to his own musical development in a musically diverse New Orleans culture, in addition to referencing musical and intellectual ideas from an African American history. Track names such as "Diaspora," understood in the context of the musically diverse influences of this album, establish the record as a political statement of unity and helps to define Adjuah's own musical and racial identities.

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<sup>182</sup> Adjuah, "Diaspora."

<sup>183</sup> Willie Anku. "Principles of Rhythm Integration in African Drumming," 214-224 and Adjuah, "Diaspora."

## Conclusion

Hip hop-inflected jazz has become a new and revolutionary sub-genre of jazz that has important political implications and is vital to modern efforts towards musical democratization. This movement in jazz is also situated as an important reaction to conservative ideologies towards jazz historiography, and more specifically to those ideologies popularized by 1980s and 90s jazz neoclassicists. Politically, the 1980s and 90s in the United States was a time period defined by conservatism. For many African Americans, there was an emphasis on a type of “politics of respectability” and on the existence of a cultural hierarchy in which some cultural values were placed over others.<sup>184</sup> Additionally, many politicians based their ideologies on the so-called Moynihan Report, a 1965 document that identified the problem behind racial inequality as being a lack of family structure for African Americans with lower socioeconomic statuses. Instead of blaming inequality on institutional racism or economic trends, many politicians began to “pathologize” race. In response to this document, both liberals and conservatives in political and intellectual circles began to argue that the only way for African Americans to improve their standings socioeconomically (and in relation to constructions of cultural hierarchy) was to conform to the societal expectations for middle class respectability. It was believed that only by conforming to these expectations, could African Americans improve their status in society.<sup>185</sup>

It was in the context of this conservative political climate that jazz neoclassicism rose to prominence in American culture. Musicians such as Wynton Marsalis and Stanley Crouch argued both politically and musically for a “politics of respectability.” As a reasoning behind their neoclassicist ideology, Marsalis and Crouch were trying to counter racial stereotypes about African Americans by conforming to white middle-class ideas about high culture and

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<sup>184</sup> Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 186-191

<sup>185</sup> Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 317-318

intellectualism. These neoclassicists created an exclusive narrative that left genres such as fusion and more experimental jazz out of the canon. They believed these genres of music did not fit their narrow definition of jazz or fit in with the prestigious cultural legacy they had established for jazz as a genre. While Marsalis and Crouch did help establish jazz as a culturally prestigious music, they also criticized many African American artists for adopting influences from cultural or political movements that did not fit with their ideas of respectability. They specifically criticized African Americans who were involved in black cultural nationalism and those who engaged with pop culture.<sup>186</sup> Some of their most vehement disparagements were directed toward rap music. Marsalis and Crouch spoke strongly against hip hop as part of a larger degradation of values in American culture. They made overgeneralized statements that treated all rap as overly hedonistic and misogynistic.<sup>187</sup> In this way, neoclassicists such as Marsalis and Crouch situated their own genre of neoclassicist jazz as one that was class-obsessed.

In the world of rap, there was also a type of classicist separation between music such as gangsta rap and more “underground” types of rap. While gangsta rap often gave important insights into socioeconomic, racial, and power relations in the United States, the genre was also criticized for lyrics that seemed to glorify violence and hedonism. Other rap musicians, such as those in the Native Tongues, took it upon themselves to “elevate” rap as a genre and to create a type of “underground” music that could only be understood by those that were knowledgeable about the culture. These rap groups often had lyrical elements that focused on culturally and politically relevant themes, or that included interesting word-play and messages of positivity. Many of the Native Tongues also used samples and influences from jazz, which they believed

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<sup>186</sup> Szwed, *So What*, 378.

<sup>187</sup> Milkowski, “Wynton Marsalis.”



would help to both emphasize the underground nature of their music and help to create a culturally prestigious intergenerational connection between bebop and hip hop artists.<sup>188</sup> Additionally, some jazz artists began to collaborate with hip hop artists. The neoclassical jazz musician Branford Marsalis was one such artist, who created his own hip hop group under the name Buckshot LeFonque.<sup>189</sup> With this group, Marsalis essentially applied neoclassical values to hip hop.

J Dilla was one of the main innovators of hip hop production, and also one of the best examples of a producer that emphasized jazz samples and influences, while also providing his own unique and innovative sounds. One of the most recognizable aspects of Dilla's production was the way in which he included "human-like" aspects in electronic recordings. Through his equalization, use of effects, and through his editing of samples and drums to include anticipations that did not occur on metronomically precise beats, Dilla created a unique sound that electronically emulated the rhythmic and sonic discrepancies that can be found in music of live music groups and performances. Many contemporary jazz musicians now try to emulate the discrepancies Dilla electronically created with live instruments. The work and influence of Dilla has been immortalized both by other producers and live musicians that seek to emulate his unique rhythmic anticipations and treatments of instrument tones and effects.<sup>190</sup>

Now, as part of a larger reaction against neoclassicism and as an effort to democratize jazz, many modern jazz musicians are using influences from hip hop in a jazz setting. Some of the most commonly used of these influences come from early hip hop DJ techniques such as scratching and the innovations from producers such as Dilla. Herbie Hancock helped set a precedent for this democratization effort in both his creative process and in his general

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<sup>188</sup> Williams, "The Construction of Jazz-rap as High Art in Hip-Hop Music," 442

<sup>189</sup> "Buckshot LeFonque," Branford Marsalis.

<sup>190</sup> "Producers – Get Your Rhythms to Swing like Dilla's." *FACT Magazine*.

understanding of music. Musically, Hancock set precedents for fusion music and even released “Rock It,” which became one of the most influential early instrumental hip hop tracks for its popularization of record scratching.<sup>191</sup> In interviews, Hancock challenged neoclassical views that treated pop music as lesser music than jazz, and instead proposed that musical genres should not be judged in competition with each other, since all genres of music are created for different, but still equally viable reasons.<sup>192</sup> In more recent years, Hancock has aligned himself with musicians such as Robert Glasper and Terrace Martin to help further integrate hip hop influences into jazz and make jazz a more accessible genre.<sup>193</sup>

I have highlighted the degree to which many musicians using hip hop influences were placed more prominently in the public spotlight after the release of Kendrick Lamar’s *To Pimp a Butterfly*. I noted from the outset of this discussion the galvanizing impact of the music in my own life, but this music has also had a similar impact on the larger audiences of hip hop and jazz fans. The music on Lamar’s album gives an example of the exciting way in which jazz and hip hop resonate with each other to create a cohesive musical experience. Although Lamar’s album may not be the first of its type, it has helped to bring a more widespread sense of unity between the audiences of jazz and hip hop and has helped position itself in the larger musical movements of jazz-rap and jazz democratization.

Lamar’s album has helped to increase the public’s interest for contemporary jazz artists such as Robert Glasper, Terrace Martin, Kamasi Washington, Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah, and many others that have created music blending the genres of jazz and hip hop. One commonality among all of these contemporary jazz artists is in their desire to create music that is more inclusive than a previous generation of “jazz purists” or neoclassical artists. Although the

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<sup>191</sup> *Scratch*, directed by Doug Pray

<sup>192</sup> Zabor and Garbarini, “Wynton Vs. Herbie.” 343-350.

<sup>193</sup> Lutz, “No Barriers. No Limits. No Fear.” 26-31.

viewpoints of each of these artists differs in how they treat aspects of commercialism, identity, innovation, cultural and political intentions, and musical unity, these musicians all strive to make jazz a more democratic and inclusive music that thrives on the use of vocabulary from hip hop.

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