

**Body or Soul? Questioning the validity of binary interpretations of Bebop in the history of jazz criticism**

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**ABSTRACT**

 This dissertation examines the effect that two sets of binary concepts have had on the reception and categorical identity of bebop music. This work aims to show evidence of binirisms within the history of jazz and evaluates whether bebop is most accurately understood within these conceptual frameworks.

 One binary opposition used in jazz discourse that throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries shaped perceptions and expectations of bebop audiences is the trope of ‘revolution’ and ‘evolution.’ Bebop has had a profound effect on the development of modern jazz. The first chapter addresses the dilemma of how to categorise the genre or subgenre of bebop in relation to the overarching jazz genre, given that it can be found to express both traditional and new aesthetic values, aspirations, politics and musical innovations simultaneously. The second chapter examines how the concepts of ‘highbrow’ and ‘lowbrow’ are used in music historiography to classify musical traits and traditions, which also extend to the people whose music falls under these polar categories.

 Many of the texts I read throughout my research on bebop detail the changes that bebop instituted in jazz, from the discipline and sincerity of musicians to make meaningful art, to the technical musical tropes that became hugely influential. This dissertation unpacks the effect that these bebop changes had on the identity of jazz music that had been previously conceptually framed within restricting binary categories. I conclude that bebop challenged the validity of binary interpretations of jazz, by integrating and reappropriating various different influences from contrasting musical forms and by presenting their music as self-aware, contradictory, entertaining and yet serious.

**INTRODUCTION**

The aim of the research I undertook for this dissertation is to examine the ways in which bebop has been interpreted by music historians, musicians and sociologists as having a duality at the core of its identity. I have found the persistent trope in jazz writing, especially in bebop musical and historical analysis, of dividing elements of jazz and bebop into binary oppositional categories. Bebop’s characterisation and the assessment of its impact on music history has constantly vacillated between being defined as ‘revolutionary’ or ‘evolutionary’ and ‘high-’ or ‘low-brow’ in art status. In this thesis, I will question the validity of interpreting bebop within these binary oppositional categories.

**Smith’s definition of bebop**

When asked by Donald Macleod to give a ‘crisp’ definition of what the music known as ‘bebop’ is, on the BBC Radio 3 programme *Composer of the Week: Bebop* (2011), the jazz historian and critic, Geoffrey Smith, responded: ‘… a seemingly revolutionary jazz style that appeared in the mid-1940s, marked by increased complexity of melody, harmony, rhythm and virtuosity, that signified a shift in the perception of jazz from entertainment to art.’[[1]](#footnote-1)

Smith highlights the most significant musical elements (‘melody, harmony, rhythm and virtuosity’) that characterise bebop in relation to earlier sub-genres in the jazz tradition; these aspects are crucial in understanding the basic parameters of the style. Smith also frames bebop as being a transitional music, suggesting that its historical narrative and most fundamental characteristics are responsible for a change in the course of music history, and for how jazz overcame a categorical limitation, forcing its way into another musical ‘class.’ However, Smith immediately qualifies this idea with the word ‘seemingly,’ which implies that bebop is not most accurately understood as having a singular, simple identity, but a more complicated, dialectical one; *between* a binary opposition. The binaries Smith brings up here are to do with the arguments for bebop being ‘revolutionary’ as opposed to an ‘evolutionary’ phase or step in the overarching jazz genre. He also established the tropes of ‘music as art’ and ‘music as entertainment’ as being key to understanding the ideas about jazz at the time, and the ideological frameworks in which bebop is now situated.

The subject of bebop, or simply ‘bop,’ has been extensively written about since the 1940s, and its legacy has taken on more and more meanings that have shifted dramatically over time, reflecting the flux of sociopolitical discourse evinced in each jazz authors’ contribution to the historiography of jazz. I find that Geoffrey Smith’s interpretation of the most important aspects of the identity of bebop is a succinct précis of what this thesis aims to expand upon. I will use his postmodern and simple breakdown as a starting point: he presents bebop as a transitional musical style that changed ‘the perception of jazz’[[2]](#footnote-2) and he also highlights binary opposite categories that bebop negotiated.

**Origins of bebop**

Apart from the more specific facts concerning where, when and who was involved in the establishment of the style, the early narratives on the subject that jazz students and historiographers encounter do not all agree with each other. What is certain about its genesis is that it took place during the early to mid-1940s in Manhattan, New York, by a collective of touring and in-house musicians. The intentions behind the actions and decisions that led to the creation of bebop can be gleaned from the accounts of the very musicians who were at the centre and perimeter of the foundational music scene, as well as early reviewers and music historians, but not all accounts necessarily align. The definition of bebop from the start was not fixed or clearly understood, nor is there any single man or woman to whom we can point as a founding spokesperson to clarify what bebop was intended to communicate, if indeed it ‘means’ anything at all. Adding to the mythic power of bebop is the indefiniteness of its beginnings. A recording ban was put into effect by the head of the American Federation of Musicians (AFM), James C. Petrillo, announced on the 31st of July 1942 and in force until November of 1944. It is during these years that bebop quickly flourished. Only recordings of radio transmissions or illegally-recorded (usually poor quality) evidence of live performances of the New York musician’s union members’ shows can be found from this crucial early period of bebop. Music writer and biographer Ross Russell (1973) claims that the categorical change in genre occurred during this time, and consequently, the clandestine, scant recordings of this musical ‘witch’s broth’[[3]](#footnote-3) that remain present only a blurry, incomplete and much mythologised image of the origins of a style that has become so influential: ‘The winds of change sweeping the jazz community blew their hardest during the time of the AFM recording ban. Instead of a record-by-record documentation of the changes in jazz style- the result of the close supervision given by the major labels to the bands under contract- only a handful of imperfect artifacts [*sic*] survive.’[[4]](#footnote-4) *The* *Billboard* magazine reports on August 1, 1942: ‘Recording studios are expected to stop recording July 31 if they do not hear to the contrary from Petrillo, despite the [Department of Justice’s] preparing its [injunction lawsuit to restrain the ban].’[[5]](#footnote-5) The validity of our modern conception of what early bebop sounded like, before the music even went by that name, is therefore questionable for this reason also. Donald Macleod described this period as being ‘like a gap in the fossil record.’[[6]](#footnote-6)

However, bebop subsequently became highly recognisable as a specific genre, was well documented across multiple media, and the years during which the bebop sound was most prominent throughout the mid to late-1940s are sometimes dubbed ‘the bebop era’ or ‘period.’ Its style then soon broadened and became enmeshed with many different musical styles such as Afro-Cuban, gospel or orchestral music that its debuting concerts, ‘jam sessions’ or recordings could not have hinted at. The debate over how to interpret the style continues until the present, despite the fact that, as Scott Deveaux writes, ‘[i]t is part of the experience of all aspiring jazz musicians, each of whom learns bebop as the embodiment of the techniques, the aesthetic sensibilities, and ultimately the professional attitudes that define the discipline.’[[7]](#footnote-7) DeVeaux goes further, stating that ‘to understand jazz, one must understand bebop,’[[8]](#footnote-8) as bebop ‘has a more legitimate claim to being the fount of contemporary jazz than earlier jazz styles,’[[9]](#footnote-9) which corroborates Smith’s assertion that bebop indelibly changed the direction of the future of jazz.

**Bebop: A summary of the style**

The style that became known as bebop was developed from jazz but gradually became differentiated from traditional jazz due to a few significant shifts (some of which had begun to creep into a few swing bands and players’ individual styles pre-bebop). Bebop has become associated with the following elements: very fast tempi; an increased emphasis on the long virtuosic improvised instrumental solo; having fewer pieces written for voices but lead melody instruments (typically saxophones, trumpets, and piano); a more fluid and improvised drumbeat than jazz normally would; (often) asymmetrical and jaunty melodies; and technically challenging harmonic substitutions and modulations. Performers became known as composers and arrangers of their own original material, as well as instrumental players. Having creative and commercial control over their art was significant particularly as the vast majority of individuals who developed and became famous because of the style were black men - in an industry that was segregated and largely controlled by white Americans. Musicians also frequently used contrafacts in their compositions: they re-worked surprising interpretations of well-known 'jazz standards,' and popular tunes from the Great American Songbook (taken from musicals, or that were featured in films, for example) by extending and elaborating on the harmonic structure, developing the melody, or removing it entirely and replacing it with another based over the new, stranger chord changes. (‘The reference material is there but not necessarily in an instantly recognisable form,’[[10]](#footnote-10) as Donald Macleod summarised in the aforementioned 2011 BBC Radio 3 programme.) Thus, they studied the key texts of the jazz repertoire, added their developed ideas to them and by doing so, translated them into their new language. The ‘beboppers’ did this knowing that it would be hard to follow or to recognise the original theme they had re-rendered if the uninitiated audiences were not ‘hip’ to the speed of the changes. For less skilled fellow musicians to contribute similarly technically impressive or creative musical ideas into the bebopper’s performances, it was even harder to keep up. The focus of the beat shifted from an easy toe-tapping standard 'four beats to a bar' pattern to a much freer, but therefore, more volatile, implied structure. Alto saxophonist, Charlie ‘Bird’ (or ‘Yardbird’) Parker, commonly referred to as the most prominent leader of the new bebop style, described the change in rhythmic feel: 'it has no continuity of beat, no steady chug-chug. Jazz has, and that's why bop is more flexible.'[[11]](#footnote-11) In Parker's simple statement, we can see how he separated bebop from jazz music, and his own views on the binary opposition terms in which bebop is cast: bebop for Parker is not just another phase in jazz's evolution but a new mode of expression with different values and rules (that he implies he prefers).

The performers/arrangers/composers clearly differentiated themselves from mainstream jazz (despite jazz’s obvious influence on the genre). The reasons behind these rebellious musical decisions were more overtly implied to be significant in terms of their artistic merits as opposed to their entertainment value or mainstream appeal. A dimension of self-awareness and post-modernism became apparent in the style, therefore.

**Critical response**

The change bebop presented was not a welcome one for all commentators. In Amiri Baraka's (formerly LeRoi Jones) influential text, *Blues People* (1960), he states that ‘Blues is the parent of all legitimate jazz.’[[12]](#footnote-12) This belief was held by many critics, but whereas Baraka believed that bebop was (in musicologist Travis A. Jackson’s words) ‘reaffirming the centrality of blues-based practices’[[13]](#footnote-13) by re-appropriating them into the bop aesthetic, more conservative traditionalists took the view that the authenticity, depth of feeling and overall instrumental skill of great blues musicians were lacking in the new style. Critic Paul Lopez (2002) describes this critical response: ‘Jazz traditionalists who first lamented the commercialisation of jazz during the Swing Era would become the "moldy figs"[a fairly derogatory term for closed-minded traditionalist jazz fans] who saw modern jazz [bebop] as a betrayal of the true roots of this music.’[[14]](#footnote-14) Even for the relatively small group of musicians at the heart of the movement, bebop was initially alarming. Jazz pianist and contemporary of the bebop era Horace Silver recalled hearing fellow pianist, Thelonious Monk, early on in his career and thinking to himself that Monk 'was fooling everybody, and that he couldn't be serious,'[[15]](#footnote-15) due to the strangeness of the sound and the implausibility that the listeners would be able to appreciate the music. Bebop pianist Hampton Hawes explained that his was ‘the first generation to rebel […] Playing bebop, trying to be different, going through a lot of changes […] “What these crazy niggers doin’ playin’ that crazy music? Wild. Out of the jungle”.’[[16]](#footnote-16) Hawes here attests that he and his contemporaries had intended on changing the expectations for their music (or were at least aware of their impact). He alludes to the political statement they were making in terms of their race having agency in their unorthodox artistic choices, and that the music elicited a confused reaction at first (and a possibly hostile reaction, as he uses the term ‘niggers’ as opposed to a more neutral term).

However revolutionary bebop may once have sounded, it has since been integrated into the jazz canon by both musicians and critics, as DeVeaux points out (even though attempts were made by both opponents and fans of the new music to separate it from the traditional jazz narrative). Overall, it has seemingly been taken for granted that it belongs in the ‘jazz’ category. One attractive narrative that many jazz historians may use to define bebop in the wider jazz context in order to explain the difference it made to the evolution of jazz is that bebop was a purposefully liberatory artistic movement that cast the musicians as emancipated creators of their own musical aesthetic. They managed their output themselves by taking total control of the ‘scene,’ from the conception of the music, the contributors they worked with, and even the audiences they played to, so that their music could better represent their independent voices. Given that the changes bebop instituted were, in some respects, a direct denunciation of the glamorous but homogenised and highly commercialised big band swing aesthetic, one can detect here another binary opposition at play: commercialism versus artistic integrity. Bebop has also been hailed by some as the artistic embodiment of the protest against the white middle class ownership of black music (as big band swing bands were often segregated and dominated by white bandleaders), and as Ingrid Monson (1999) summarises: ‘In the context of a racially segregated society, the demand by black musicians of the 1940s to be acknowledged as artists was a rebellious political act.'[[17]](#footnote-17) This view of the music denotes that bebop had noble and clear aims, an intellectualist and African American aesthetic, and passionate political ideals.

While this view may imply that the music has a positive and inclusive essence, by the same token, bebop can be viewed as having too high-minded and anti-commercial an agenda, coming across as a wry, cool joke on the audience and musicians who try to keep abreast of musical trends. Bebop thereby is not to be understood by the working-class nightclub culture in which it was first conceived. The music was thought of by some as ‘shrill,’[[18]](#footnote-18) ‘gibberish,’[[19]](#footnote-19) sometimes ‘mystifying,’[[20]](#footnote-20) and therefore, a sudden break from what was expected of ‘popular’ music and the trajectory of jazz up until that point. Poet and jazz writer Philip Larkin spoke for many dissenters when he quipped (on the subject of the rapid developments in jazz): ‘there are different kinds of development: a hot bath can develop into a cold one.’[[21]](#footnote-21)

The argument for why bebop represented a ‘betrayal’ in jazz, and not a true representation of the ever-progressing artistic expression of the jazz tradition, is that the vehicle for this supposed message of freedom, almost paradoxically, was inaccessible to many listeners. Jazz critic Hughes Panassié was an outspoken disparager, and wrote ‘when you come to the so-called progressive jazz, nothing is left, nothing recalls the music of the blues singers; it’s a no-vibrato sound, endless runs with no sustained notes, hardly any inflection at all, to say nothing of the harmonic climate of the blues which is sadly distorted.’[[22]](#footnote-22) The leap from the lowlier position in social status jazz had generally occupied to a higher one in terms of its seriousness was a pretentious move in the binary opposition of ‘entertainment’ versus ‘art.’

An accusation that encapsulated many of the problems people had with bebop was ‘you can’t dance to it,’[[23]](#footnote-23) as the beat was no longer as clearly demarcated as it usually is in dance music. In September 1946, a *Record Changer* magazine review of Parker’s compositions ‘Ornithology’ and ‘Night in Tunisia,’ now considered amongst the most seminal bebop masterpieces, read ‘…the rhythm section is awful and has no beat at all. So there was nothing, nothing whatsoever to hold your interest.’[[24]](#footnote-24) Defenders of bebop such as Baraka naturally thought this assessment firstly as ‘irrelevant,’[[25]](#footnote-25) if not downright untrue. This criticism was levelled at the style by some who thought this was due to a failure in the musicians’ abilities to create good dance music (as jazz was supposed to be, in their minds) and that therefore, bebop was purposefully denying listeners’ desires for light entertainment and renouncing the tradition of the jazz music they were used to.

William Grossman’s 1956 article in *Jazz Review* magazine summarises one of the critical perspectives from the jazz writing world that saw bebop as a threat to the jazz tradition:

Methods, forms, and techniques are an indispensable means by which the content is communicated, but they are nothing in themselves. Their whole importance lies in what they succeed in expressing. [...] The first thing that one notes about [traditional New Orleans jazz] is its immense vigor and vitality. Some consider it a childish vitality [...] fortunately superseded by the sophistication of more recently developed types of jazz. Others welcome it as whole-souled, honest earthiness in contrast to the preciousness and emotional apathy of some modern jazz.[[26]](#footnote-26)

The denunciation was aimed at bebop by some musicians and critics alike, for alienating the jazz audience by elevating the musical ideas, valuing technique, form and ‘sophistication’ over content and likeability, beyond the boundaries of it being entertaining to listen to. Bebop was found lacking in such subjective, almost indefinable fundamentals such as ‘soul,’ and was compared to classical music for its similar (ascending) status and aspirations. Music scholar-performer David Ake (2010) wrote ‘[w]hile the ‘classical’ moniker has helped generate capital, both symbolic and real […] when [jazz] takes itself too seriously, it can be a bore.’[[27]](#footnote-27) Geoffrey Smith (2013) quoted saxophonist Johnny Griffin commenting on how jazz musicians and concert promoters showcased the music (which was more detrimental than beneficial, in his opinion): ‘[they] took jazz out of Harlem and put it in Carnegie Hall and downtown and those joints where you gotta be quiet. The black people split and went back to Harlem, back to the rhythm and blues so they could have a good time.’[[28]](#footnote-28)

**The assumption that music must express racial identity**

Claiming that bebop is not easily danced to, or that it is ‘too intellectual,’ implies that a predominantly black music *should* be a certain way: fundamentally simple, entertaining, ‘earthy,’ etc. These adjectives, whether used with prejudice or not, can be interpreted as euphemisms taken to mean that jazz and essentially black art *should be* or is fundamentally less intellectual, more sensual and bodily, and more intrinsically linked with its folk and ethnic heritage than non-black culture. The implication that because bebop does not obviously bear characteristics closely associated with the authentic roots of jazz and the blues, it is a race or class ‘betrayal,’ reveals an unsettling bias. If jazz *should* sound firmly rooted in the blues, the critic is suggesting that ‘real jazz’ and black art should always remind the listener of the musical aesthetic and traditions of a subjugated culture: the blues were borne of slavery. Whilst the blues might be aesthetically beautiful, expressive and entertaining- the music and its semiotic markers are also a symbol of the terrible history of African Americans in the United States. A critic circumscribing the limits of jazz, exacting an explicit link between jazz and its historical roots suggests black ‘authenticity’ can only be expressed if it identifies itself as lowly or ‘belonging’ to a lower social caste.

Bebop cannot be said to be entirely distinct from its preceding styles in the jazz genre or its ‘true roots’ in all aspects, however. The musical changes themselves were foreshadowed in the work of their predecessors. The leaders of bebop who became vastly influential shifted their playing styles through varying degrees of aesthetic change that cumulatively diverted the future direction of jazz evolution towards the more experimental and less commercial, informing future musicians’ doctrine, and altering jazz's function and placement in the American artistic tradition. Scott DeVeaux (1997) cites a statement made by writer Marshall Stearns in 1958 describing the force of its rapid impact: ‘“Although the beginnings of bop can be traced back quite a way [...] the new style evolved with terrifying suddenness.”’[[29]](#footnote-29)

To unpack how it is that bebop changed the future of jazz, the music historian must track the contextual forces, the narratives of the individual lives that were involved, the reception and criticism that introduced new interpretations, and the evidence within the musical material itself that proves an identifiable shift from one stylistic trend to another. This process of analysing the underlying sources of change involves examining what elements constitute the identity of bebop, and jazz music as a whole.

Social anthropologist Jack Goody wrote in 1977, in ‘binary systems [...] categorisation is often value-laden and ethnocentric.’[[30]](#footnote-30) Jazz writing and the interpretation of jazz throughout its history has shaped and codified the way we now think of jazz; exposing the ‘value-laden’ categorisations and their profound effects on our conception of bebop is a useful way to examine its controversial and changing identity. Each chapter will address a different set of binary oppositions and assumed values that bebop straddles, defies, and negotiates.From my reading about bebop, it occurred to me that by integrating apparently contradictory concepts and musical elements, bebop also asks its audience whether the binaries with which we interpret music are valid. At a time when racial segregation was the status quo, the concepts of ‘entertainment’ versus ‘art’ seemed equally as separate and different as ‘black’ from ‘white,’ but by ‘seemingly’ existing within oppositional ideological frameworks simultaneously, bebop showed what potential music has to challenge and diversify the expectations of its audience, conveying socio-political statements through its musical innovations.

Further, the contentious identity of bebop shows us the truth in the lives of communities battling against the confines of false dichotomies in society. Activist and sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in 1903 about the displacement experienced by African Americans living in a resultant ‘double-consciousness’ that bebop later went on to express in music: ‘One ever feels his two-ness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.’[[31]](#footnote-31)

**CHAPTER ONE: REVOLUTION / EVOLUTION**

**Africa/Europe**

Jazz originated within predominantly African American and international communities in the Southern United States, as music historian Paul Lopez (2002) states: ‘General histories of jazz usually locate its original home beginning at the turn of the century in the red-light district of Storyville in New Orleans.’[[32]](#footnote-32) It was preceded by American, Creole and African American musics such as ragtime, the blues, American marching band arranged music, American popular songs such as those performed in minstrel shows, ‘work songs,’ and gospel music or ‘spirituals.’ European classical and folk music further predates all these styles, and naturally, certain aspects of most jazz music such as formal structure and use of European modes are evidently at least a secondary influence on jazz. Jazz historian Martin Williams (1993) writes that two of the most influential genres on jazz were the blues and ragtime and he explains these two distinct styles embodied different aesthetics and values that in turn imbued jazz with these dual qualities. Williams states that ragtime, ‘[f]rom one viewpoint,’ is ‘the most formal, most “European,” even most “highbrow” movement associated with jazz,’[[33]](#footnote-33) and that jazz’s most ‘European’ traits such as ‘form, discipline, and order,’[[34]](#footnote-34) ‘crucially affected it indirectly through ragtime long ago.’[[35]](#footnote-35) Jazz, he says, was also influenced by the emotional expressiveness and the ‘improvisational-variational emphasis’ of the blues. Williams presents these sets of characteristics as binary opposites as a matter of course (‘ordered’ versus ‘emotional’), suggesting the identity of jazz belongs in two oppositional categories. It expresses one tradition of disciplined ‘melodic,’ ‘compositional’ emphasis, which can be attributed to Europeanness or the idea of the European canon, and the other of ‘rhythmic variety,’ ‘passion’ and ‘improvisation,’[[36]](#footnote-36) which is mostly associated with the African American musical tradition (at least when cast in terms of this dialectic).

It is important to note that towards the end of the 1910s, the proto-jazz that African American musicians and composers such as James Reese Europe performed for (mostly white) ballroom dances and social occasions, was a literal mix of ‘marches, rags, current popular tunes and musical theatre songs, and excerpts from classical pieces [...] but he increasingly featured compositions by black composers and adaptations of the traditional spirituals.’[[37]](#footnote-37) Author R. Reid Badger (1989) claims that, like the bebop musicians, Europe and fellow black composers with whom he formed a musicians union, the Clef Club, intended to ‘secure the black musician’s place in the in the forefront of the public’s mind.’[[38]](#footnote-38) James Reese Europe was a foundational figure, but also a transitional and revolutionary figure. Europe was a politically minded and talented composer, well versed in the music of several cultures and played for the purpose of predominantly white entertainment with a view to changing the way jazz was perceived. The parallels one can draw between figures such as Europe and the vanguard of the boppers in terms of their revolutionary ambitions remind the jazz historian that such revolutions and revolutionaries are recurrent in the history of jazz: revolutions constitute its constant evolution.

Bebop, when thought of as either an evolutionary stage in jazz’s development, or a revolution, is also cast within this African/European conceptual binary framework. The combination of signs and signifiers of binary cultural attributes are perhaps more overt in bebop than in previous jazz styles due to its dedication to highly *composed* arrangements of harmonic, melodic and rhythmic patterns in its particular idiosyncratic way, but an equally *unrestrained*-sounding style of seemingly boundless and energetic improvisation, harsher timbral quality and dynamic attack. That bebop oscillates between sounding both tightly regimented and wildly uninhibited is a signature of the style: embracing a duality in its formal composition is a large facet in its demonstrable ‘two-ness.’

‘We can know that ragtime has lived on in jazz and even in swing music; that our last fifty years of popular music have had a lilt and a syncopated lift that they never knew before ragtime came,’[[39]](#footnote-39) writes Rudi Blesh in 1960. To trace the evident, audible influences of ragtime onto jazz is fairly simple – the pronounced use of backbeat syncopation typified by Scott Joplin’s *Maple Leaf Rag* (published in 1899[[40]](#footnote-40))for example, remained a fixture in jazz from its beginnings and is frequently cited as an intrinsic characteristic of ‘jazz’ in the broadest definitions. Pioneering tenor saxophone player pre- and throughout the bebop era, Coleman Hawkins, answers the questions ‘what is jazz?’ simply with ‘The rhythm- the feeling.’[[41]](#footnote-41) (This quotation appears on the back cover of Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff’s 1966 text, *Hear Me Talkin’ To Ya*, which I will be citing as a key source of information throughout this essay.) Gary Giddins and Scott DeVeaux in their book, *Jazz* (2009)*,* describe syncopation in jazz as ‘not an effect - it is the very air jazz breathes.’[[42]](#footnote-42) Although the rhythmic approaches, or ‘groove,’ throughout the history of the genre and subgenres of jazz have not stayed consistent, the symbolic and literal presence of the rhythm in jazz is of utmost importance to its identity. It is predominantly the rhythmic quality, as Williams also points out, that gives originally African American styles their names,[[43]](#footnote-43) such as ‘rag*time*,’ ‘cake*walk,*’ ‘swing,’ and ‘bebop.’ (I will explain the naming of the style later in this chapter.)

Simon Frith (1988) states that the semiotic character of syncopation, intrinsically linked to Africa in heritage, culturally and conceptually, ‘supplies the symbolic means of *resistance* to bourgeois hegemony.’[[44]](#footnote-44) Therefore, the back-beat represents even more than a signifier of Africanness, rather than classical Europeanness, but is also an identifiable symbol of the popular urban culture versus the higher, educated classes whose music is not (or was not) closely associated with syncopation, and much less so with the element of ‘swing.’

Sounds and musical tropes are the means by which we interpret meaning within non-verbal music: sounds are signs to be decoded. Semiotics is a useful science for jazz writing, therefore, as jazz since its inception has been heavily codified and has absorbed shifting symbolic values from various conflicting viewpoints. The Russian semiotician Mikhail Bakhtin in 1930 explains, ‘Wherever a sign is present, ideology is present, too. *Everything ideological possesses semiotic value.’* [[45]](#footnote-45) Bebop communicates an ideology through its signs and signifiers, and the interpretations of these loud musical statements represent in themselves socio-political and musicological dilemmas that demand nuanced and contextually literate interpretation given the loaded sociohistorical circumstances and the artists’ chosen medium of expression. Bebop was headed (mostly) by the grandchildren of slaves or first-generation ‘free’ African American men and women in the United States, using the instruments of their mixed cultural heritage during the Second World War, victimised by society’s segregation and institutionalised racism, appearing as rebellious and brash musicians from an ethnic minority twenty years before the Civil Rights movement, that sounded and looked markedly different from what ‘jazz’ had come to represent before them. Consequently, the dominant bebop narrative lays out the explanation that by purposefully aesthetically separating itself from the tradition they saw as becoming ‘diluted by whites and the recording industry,’[[46]](#footnote-46) the musicians involved communicated its revolutionary ideology, that they knew would require ‘serious’ consideration in order to be reckoned with.

Frith explains that rhythm is interpreted as a powerful cultural and political signifier, or ‘tool,’ and reveals an intangible binary opposition that comes to light as a consequence of this differentiation between rhythmic characterisation that categorises ethnicity, race, class and indeed, ‘worlds’ in opposition to each other. Martin Williams identified this concept of dualism at the core of jazz and its origins, and that the significant influence of two apparently distinct cultures and traditions were key to the balance of jazz having elements of both resistance to and integration of Western musical traits. The binary categorisation of rhythmic signifiers that are then linked to ideas of ethnicity, race, or even education, has led to generalisations and biased assumptions that deeply affected the interpretation of jazz music throughout the twentieth century.

If we examine this binary at the heart of the origins of jazz, then we find this historical view of ragtime as the style predominantly through which a majorly ‘European’ influence was appropriated by jazz. However, the most influential and prolific composers of ragtime such as Scott Joplin and James Scott, were not European themselves: ragtime was established by African American, Creole and white American piano players and composers, which in turn affected the early jazz genre that was equally pioneered by predominantly African American, Creole and white American musicians. Music historians wishing only to attribute generalised stylistic traits to their geographical or cultural origins may not mean to imply musical characteristics are innate only to the people of those same origins. However, the concept of simplifying patterns of influence in this way is only relevant when in discussing the direct factors of influence, namely, the mix of people and cultures that formed the community that provided the conditions for the music. It is important to stress, therefore, that the communities that shaped ragtime were similar to the ones that shaped jazz in that the musicians involved were exposed to different kinds of music such as polkas, tango, marching-band, blues, traditional folk music, and so on, through formal musical education, traveling around the country, and through their immediate surroundings. The presence of European and African influences is not necessarily because the leaders of these styles were of European or African descent, and they were not the ambassadors of their perceived origins and cultural traits, rather, they were of mixed cultural heritage and schooled in the musical traditions of their generations’ environment. Misappropriating where jazz ‘belongs’ gives way to mythologising and stereotyping; the polarisation of jazz’s roots does not account for the idea that it was in New Orleans that myriad influences *merged together*, and a diverse community forged its own sophisticated, idiosyncratic, musical culture. Multiple complex sources of inspiration produced the new, coherent styles of ragtime and ‘ur-jazz’.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Attributing musical ‘discipline,’ and ‘order’ to notions of European music is an overly simplistic generalisation. The framework that racializes musical characteristics further posits that binary opposite traits such as ‘wildness’ and ‘emotiveness’ are inherently of predominantly African descent, stabilising the dichotomy based on essentialism.Establishing a dichotomy in the roots of jazz as being between Africa and Europe, although perhaps made in order to describe musical technicalities, can be misleading and erroneously detracts from the originality of the cultural community and the individuals whose informed artistic intentions contributed to the evolution and revolution of their music. It is a categorical error to cite ‘Africanness’ and ‘Europeanness’ as abstract sources of influence. Travis A. Jackson (2003) makes a similar critique of this tendency of some jazz writers to frame jazz as a ‘seemingly passive “mixture” of European and African elements.’[[48]](#footnote-48) In modern music historiography, he writes, ‘the scholar conducting work that tries to link the cultural practices of those in the diaspora with one another or with the Africans risks having his/her work dismissed as “essentialism or idealism or both.”’[[49]](#footnote-49) He asserts that pre-1960s jazz writing and criticism generally privileged ‘form over concept,’[[50]](#footnote-50) minimised the role of the individual music-maker, and was conducted mainly by writers more familiar with ‘Western concert music’[[51]](#footnote-51) than with jazz.

Jazz drummer Art Blakey was outspoken about this false assumption, and Ingrid Monson (2003) quotes his statement; ‘[jazz] doesn’t have a damn thing to do with Africa. [...] This is our contribution to the world, though they want to ignore it and are always trying to connect it to someone else.’[[52]](#footnote-52) (By ‘they,’ one can assume Blakey refers to reviewers and the world of jazz criticism.) Monson explains the root of the ethnocentric binarism: ‘the very idea of blackness (with its simplifying synthesis of many African ethnicities) was forged in dialectic with white supremacy, so the idea of a transformational black music has been synthesized in opposition to racial subjugation.’[[53]](#footnote-53) ‘Music,’ Monson furthers, ‘more than any other cultural discourse, has been taken as the ultimate embodiment of African and African diasporic cultural values and as prima facie evidence of deep cultural connections among all people of African descent.’[[54]](#footnote-54) The platitude that jazz is an inherently black music seems anachronistic and does not represent modern jazz, as the music has spread and diversified across different world cultures, adapted with new technologies and has become more polysemic over time, despite widespread recognition of where it started and who started it. However, the jazz historian will still encounter such interpretations as this one, found in Franck Bergerot and Arnaud Merlin’s 1993 text, *The Story of Jazz: Bop and Beyond*: ‘Evolved in part from spirituals sung by slaves, jazz is the only truly American musical form. It was created by blacks, for blacks.’[[55]](#footnote-55) The unchecked assumption that black musicians possess inherently ‘African’ traits has remained under the surface in jazz and many other art forms associated with culture in the African diaspora. Consequently, white players, using the same faulty logic, cannot ‘swing.’ Martin Williams implies he somewhat believes this, as he writes, ‘the black jazzmen in general have had fewer rhythmic problems than white jazzmen.’[[56]](#footnote-56)

The notion of a music being designed by and for one race only, while seemingly both excessive and facile, can be defended from one perspective, however. Jazz is (or certainly *was*) a music created by members of an oppressed ‘outsider,’ mostly black community that is an expression of their culture, *originally* played to an audience predominantly being of the same minority culture, at social, family or neighbourhood gatherings like funerals or other ritualistic celebrations. The name ‘jazz’ was then applied to the music that was heavily marketed to national and international audiences without carrying the context of its originators when it ‘crossed over’ by way of white musicians covering and otherwise imitating the style. The crooning white popular singer Bing Crosby, for example, introduced a vast national audience to jazz characteristics, and was closely associated with the genre particularly during 1930s until the 1950s. (An example of his use of jazz traits such as swung quavers, triplet figures and note-bending in an understated performance is his rendition of ‘Just One More Chance’ in the 1947 film *The Road to Hollywood*.) Music bearing the label ‘jazz,’ was transposed into a new, more orchestrated, larger scale, lushly arranged context and removed from the location and nuanced community that gave it its initial signification. The most popular jazz was played by whites, for white consumers. This can be legitimately seen as a ‘dilution.’ Bebop is in fact the opposite of a revolution but revivalist one according to this essentialist viewpoint of jazz, with its setting in a particular time, place, in a relatively small, close and marginalised community of mainly black musicians. The ‘by blacks, for blacks’ narrative is rather narrow, teleological, and ultimately ascribes jazz a closed meaning rooted in a reactionary, racial dialectic. However, given the constant racism that musicians of colour faced throughout their individual and collective lives, it is a valid assumption to make that by the 1940s, an artistic movement like bebop may have been fuelled by a desire to reclaim the tradition and protest against the direction jazz had taken.

**The differences between jazz and bop**

I will use Geoffrey Smith’s definition of the defining changes bebop instituted in order to characterise the differences between jazz and bebop.

 The statement that bebop melody became more ‘complex’ is accurate to an extent, as a typical bebop melody is considerably faster in tempo, primarily. The tempo disparity between swing and bop is possibly the most immediately striking difference: many bebop tunes are played at up to 300 beats per minute whereas the swing style tempo would normally stay from around 100 to 200. Drummer Kenny Clarke recounts that he first heard Dizzy Gillespie significantly accelerating the tempo, of a commonly played tune: ‘Diz, by the way, was the first one I heard play “How High the Moon” [a ‘jazz standard’ taken from a Broadway musical] in any other tempo than what had been the usual slow tempo up to then.’[[57]](#footnote-57) When Parker played in the Jay McShann big band in 1940 (and therefore before bebop had become a definitive known style) he can be heard ‘playing [as if] in two different meters at once, the implication of double-time.’[[58]](#footnote-58)

The melody is complex also due to a general increase in the lengths of phrases when soloing (unlike the lyrical, song-like trumpet phrasing as used by Louis Armstrong, for example), use of repetitive, short rhythmic motifs and cellular variation, broader intervallic range and frenetic quality. This makes bebop tunes generally far less ‘singable’ and less ‘catchy’ than swing. Many standard bebop tunes, also, include melody passages played in unison by two or more different instruments; to play completely together with such technically challenging melody lines had never been expected before in jazz. There is a tension in most bebop standards between the pre-written, pre-arranged parts of the music and the improvised sections. The release of tension, from the tight, rapid, largely unornamented unison lines that lead into the solo sections is part of the exciting contrast of bebop. Geoffrey Smith commented that although one notices how exuberant and freewheeling the music sounds, to appreciate the craft within it is part of the deeper rewarding listening experience: ‘how carefully made it all is, despite the fact that it has this wonderful dash, enthusiasm and freedom. […] They [Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie in a recording of ‘Salt Peanuts’] play these unisons. They play the melodies very beautifully, wonderfully together. It’s incredibly machined.’[[59]](#footnote-59) The importance given to the improvised solo in bebop was not a revolutionary concept in jazz; improvisation is considered one of the most fundamental elements of the genre. The decision to include ample room for improvisation in a single tune was thus noteworthy in relation to the weight of expectation placed upon a bebop soloist. A bebop performer should deliver a long, original (as in not-pre-written, and unique-sounding), sophisticated solo, whereas the tendency in a lot of big band swing music was to only use small instances of improvisation as an embellishment rather than as the focus of the song or ‘number.’

Although this particular way of arranging melody to be played in unison was not present in all bebop compositions, it was a key aspect in many of the most famous and influential compositions and performances by Charlie Parker and the (perhaps equally as prominent) trumpeter, Dizzy Gillespie. Tunes such as ‘Hot House,’ ‘Bebop,’ ‘Night in Tunisia,’ and ‘Ornithology’ are prime examples of how the unison verses and choruses were used to great dynamic and dazzling effect. The increase in complexity in harmony was typified by the complicated re-workings of well-known songs taken from musicals, such as George Gershwin’s ‘I Got Rhythm’ or from popular songs such as ‘Honeysuckle Rose’ by Fats Waller that formed the harmonic structure of Dizzy Gillespie’s piece ‘Salt Peanuts’ and Charlie Parker’s ‘Scrapple from the Apple,’ respectively. An increase in virtuosity, therefore, came with the combination of being able to play the pre-arranged melody precisely at speed, and being able to improvise effectively over the changing chord progressions.

The jazz style from New Orleans spread to Chicago during the 1920s and 1930s and morphed into a ‘hotter’ style that gave more emphasis to longer solo choruses, however, polyphony was the texture that dominated these early jazz styles. Jazz bands then became far bigger and more complex in their arrangements during the swing period, and the texture shifted towards a popular song model of homophony: the melodies were simpler, with more regularly divided phrasing, and carried by a section, solo instrument, and, often, a singer. The melody became the focus of swing music, and the harmonies were frequently lusciously scored to support it. Bebop, as it was first emerging in the Harlem nightclubs, did away with both polyphony and the tightly arranged harmonic underscoring in jazz by reducing the melody down to one unison line. Whereas former jazz styles might use banjo, tuba, and acoustic guitar to provide the 4/4 or 2/4 beat, the piano and upright bass essentially provided the harmony so that the bebop band was stripped down to its bare elements, the small combos sometimes barely fitting on the tiny bandstands in the corner by the bar. Bebop, therefore, did sound and look radically different from many previous mainstream forms of jazz.

However, there were many skilled, boundary-pushing soloists and opportunities for soloists to improvise at length before the term ‘bebop’ was ever used, and these examples were heavily influential for the pioneers of bebop. Soulful, jubilant, moving or otherwise brilliant solos and soloists were always celebrated in each stage in the short history of jazz before bebop. From the turn of the twentieth century New Orleans cornetist Buddy Bolden to the 1930s and 1940s saxophonist Chu Berry, improvisers were lauded for much the same reasons as the boppers were: for their inventiveness, versatility, expression, and technique.

**Bebop as an extension of the swing tradition**

Legendary players such as the pianists James P. Johnson, Willie ‘The Lion’ Smith and Art Tatum, tenor saxophonists Frank Trumbauer, Ben Webster, Johnny Hodges and Lester Young, trumpeters and cornetists Bix Beiderbecke, Roy Eldridge and Louis Armstrong, guitarist Charlie Christian, drummers ‘Big’ Sid Catlett and ‘Papa’ Jo Jones, and bassists Jimmy Blanton and Oscar Pettiford were direct influencers for the following generation of players. Lester Young in particular was one of Parker’s idols, and Parker imitated him to achieve Young’s idiomatic soft and soulful pure quality of tone or timbre, and for his melodic ideas and techniques that would test the robustness of the instrument. As Giddins and DeVeaux (2009) explain: ‘soloists [in swing band settings], like actors in a play, were assigned specific parts, which rarely allotted them as much as a full chorus and often no more than eight measures. As a result, they developed styles so distinct that fans turning to radio broadcasts could quickly identify them by their timbres, melodic phrases, and rhythmic attacks.’[[60]](#footnote-60) In *Bird Lives!* (first published in 1973), a biography of Parker, Ross Russell describes Parker’s zealous studying of Lester Young’s playing by listening to recordings of Young who featured in Count Basie’s band: ‘Charlie broke down Lester’s method. [...] The way Lester shaped held notes to make them “swing.” [...] Then he learned to play each in turn, note for note, experimenting with the fingering and shaping of the oral cavity until he imagined that he sounded just like Lester.’[[61]](#footnote-61)

Roy Eldridge, likewise, was important to Dizzy Gillespie for his use of the altissimo range and depth of expression even in very fast passages. The beboppers were often forthcoming about the influence certain jazz musicians had on their tastes and styles, and upon further inspection, different individual’s particular trademark sounds can be found in the solos of the later generation. Trumpeter Abram Wilson described Roy Eldridge as serving as the ‘link’ between Louis Armstrong, and Dizzy Gillespie, and retrospectively can be considered as possessing Armstrong’s ‘melodicism,’ ‘simplicity and accuracy of melody,’ with the ‘dexterity,’ ‘quick lines’ and ‘versatility’[[62]](#footnote-62) of Gillespie. Eldridge has partially been defined by not only what came before him in terms of trumpet playing, and therefore, who influenced him, but also by those he influenced. Eldridge was an emotive balladeer, but it is his virtuosity and the speedy, long melodic lines and a blasting, in contrast to Armstrong’s mellower tone, that Gillespie can be said to have emulated. Eldridge later played in the bebop style in a seamless, energetic, inventive way that sounded entirely natural as a progression for him and his particular sensibilities.

Tracing cause and effect through the lineage of jazz musicians constitutes the way jazz historiographers analyse development and construct a jazz narrative. Bassist Milt Hinton describes a trumpeter he met in the early 1930s by using famous examples as comparative similes and metaphors for how he saw this trumpet player fitting into the historical context: ‘Jabbo [Smith] was as good as Louis then. He was the Dizzy Gillespie of the era.’[[63]](#footnote-63) (Hinton suggests Smith may have been lesser known because he was not based in a major jazz hub such as New York.) Smith’s skills need contextualising by referencing how impressive they were in comparison to the ways in which Armstrong and Gillespie defined trumpet playing. The revolution/evolution trope is one that must be considered when proposing a linear narrative for this reason also, as individuals’ lives and careers and broader contextual forces often are either emphasized or over-looked in order to fit the diachronic version of events. As Scott DeVeaux (1997) writes, ‘The writing of jazz history is [...] obsessed with continuity and consensus, even- perhaps *especially-* when the historical record suggests disruption and dissent.’[[64]](#footnote-64) As a result, Eldridge, Jabbo Smith and perhaps all jazz musicians gain their stature in the jazz tradition if their contributions are recognised as surviving through the work of others, and it is in relation to each other that they and their styles of playing acquire meaning. There are in many ways, observable, smooth transitions between the personal styles of contemporary musicians, despite their careers being retrospectively labelled as belonging to disparate styles. Guitarist Charlie Christian, for example, passed away not long before bebop took prominence, but his long melodic solo guitar lines have been identified as a major source of Parker’s soloing style. Pre-bebop pianist Art Tatum’s extensive and highly original re-harmonizing of jazz standards as well as his rapid and agile right hand movements are also evident in bebop pianist Bud Powell’s manner.

Musically speaking, bebop was not absolutely revolutionary, therefore. The defining complicated ‘virtuosity,’ ‘melody’ and ‘harmony’ (to use Geoffrey Smith’s definition again) had been slowly emerging in the performances of individuals and could also be found in the music of 1930s and early 1940s big bands such as Jay McShann’s, Earl Hines’, Billy Eckstine’s, and to some extent, Count Basie’s. A style change was far more apparent after drummer Kenny Clarke made the significant contribution towards formalising bebop’s stylistic identity by changing the role of the rhythm section.

**The new role of the drummer**

As with so many origin stories one encounters in jazz literature, the origin of the name ‘bebop’ is more speculation than fact, but a possible theory is that it evolved from ‘scat’ syllables that jazz singers or songwriters used to improvise solos with (rather than pre-written words and melody, skilled vocalists would also have opportunities for solo runs). Writer Ralph Ellison called ‘bop’ a ‘most inadequate word’, and that it ‘throws up its hands in clownish self-deprecation before all the complexity of sound and rhythm and self-assertive passion which it pretends to name; [...] hiding the serious face of art.’[[65]](#footnote-65) The very name of bebop is paradoxical: the music that it names being portentous and ultimately vastly important as a genre, and yet it mocks itself with a diminutive, childish, playful and nonsensical pairing of syllables that conveys the exclamatory sound of a 2-note melodic trumpet riff. The rhythmic quality of the word itself is an indication of the rhythmic character and the peppiness in the music.

 ‘That Clarke was indeed the founder of the new percussion style is evident,’[[66]](#footnote-66) writes Ross Russell in 1996. Rudi Blesh, in 1971, also states ‘with revolutionary ideas about drum rhythm, [Clarke] held the charter at the drums.’[[67]](#footnote-67) ‘Freeing up the traditional roles of the individual drums and cymbals, Clarke often played the ride cymbal with a somewhat constant driving rhythm of:



or

Clarke changed the timbre, texture, and feeling of propulsion, filling the space with pulsing cymbal vibrations and then punctuating and responding to the musical statements of the other instrumentalists with heavier tom or snare hits followed by kick drum attacks, a feature that was appropriately named ‘dropping bombs.’ Clarke was nicknamed ‘Klook-mop,’ an onomatopoeic verbal impression of this drum kit flourish, and this may account for the name ‘bebop,’ also: the rim shot, snare or tom-tom strike being the first syllable (‘klook’ or ‘be’) and the bass drum hit is the second syllable (‘-mop!’ or ‘-bop!’). The invention of the bebop drum sound is a satisfying narrative: the jazz historian can accredit a single man with inventing arguably the most revolutionary facet of a genre or subgenre of jazz. The archetype of the outsider who faces derision from the jazz establishment is an attractive and recurrent one, and can serve to bolster the idea of revolution as we now recognise the dramatic irony and the plight of the brave, young innovator against the closed-minded authority. Russell (1996) reports that Clarke was told by his former bandleader, Teddy Hill: “Keep your beat down on the bass drum where it belongs. People don't want to hear that kind of stuff. They want music they can dance to.”[[68]](#footnote-68)

The role of the drummer shifted in the nightclubs and after-show ‘jam sessions’ as the style was only just forming. The onus of the new role meant the drummer was more of an equal improviser along with the melody instruments and not confined solely to maintain a steady, unchanging keeper of the ‘chug-chug’ beat underneath the superimposed layers of sound coming from the other instruments, leaving the upright bass often alone to reinforce a continuous, regular beat. Hence, the relationship between the drummer with the rest of the instrumentalists became more interactive, responsive and spontaneous. Clarke explains his reasons for the new approach: ‘I was trying to lay new rhythmic patterns over the regular beat. Solo lines were getting longer. Soloists needed more help from the drummer - kicks, accents, cues, all kind of little things like that.’[[69]](#footnote-69) The drums’ and rhythm sections’ departure from the typical swing and New Orleans pattern of keeping the 4/4 or 2/4 beat (commonly played on the bass drum) was key to bebop’s significant difference in sound. The change in the function of the rhythm section in relation to earlier jazz styles, therefore, is one aspect in which bebop may justifiably be called revolutionary.

Drum kit size also changed during the bebop years. Whereas swing bands and orchestras such as Duke Ellington’s many ensembles consisted of sometimes dozens of instruments, and therefore needed a large and booming drum sound to compete with the bassier-sounding instruments to be heard, bebop did not. There were practical reasons for the reduction in size, such as transportation and ease for playing in smaller ensembles, but also ‘the look’ of the kit was a large part of the reasons for the change. The image of bebop, and the aesthetic desire to appear as different as possible from the bombastic, grandiose and sometimes outrageous slapstick of Lionel Hampton’s band, for example, was essential to the suave, urbane and altogether more ‘serious’ look of bop.

**Minton’s Playhouse: the laboratory conditions**

Clarke was hired by pianist Teddy Hill, the then manager at Minton’s Playhouse, a nightclub, on Harlem’s West 118th Street. (This was quite a surprising and forward-thinking hiring decision, as Clarke had been ‘fired from his [Hill’s] band several years before because [he] was beginning to play modern drums even then.’[[70]](#footnote-70)) Harlem and midtown Manhattan’s 52nd Street, which was populated by a few jazz music bars wherein both famous and unknown local musicians would mingle, play in rotating ensembles, improvise and learn together as they toured around the country with their big bands that passed through New York. One of these prestigious bars was Monroe’s Uptown House, but Minton’s in particular became known as the locus of musical innovations. Pianist and composer Mary-Lou Williams described Minton’s as ‘the house that built bop.’[[71]](#footnote-71) Minton’s provided creatively conducive ‘laboratory conditions,’[[72]](#footnote-72) as Donald Macleod put it, due to the influx of players and audiences attracted to the atmosphere of growing intensity as musicians competed for playing time on the bandstand, leading them to scale new heights on their instruments and to sound distinct from their peers.

Clarke and Monk were members of the house band (meaning they were hired by the club manager to play during the evenings), whereas on ‘Monday Celebrity Nights,’[[73]](#footnote-73) they would be often joined by Dizzy Gillespie, ‘sometimes with Joe Guy, and later, Charlie Christian and Charlie Parker,’[[74]](#footnote-74) Ralph Ellison recounts. Gillespie explains that neither he nor Parker were remunerated for their performances at Minton’s Playhouse, but would join the sessions anyway: ‘Monday nights, we used to have a ball. [...] We had a big jam session Monday night was the big night, the musician’s night off. There was always food there for you.’[[75]](#footnote-75) Parker recalled his ‘good old days,’ playing with his peers in 1942 and 1943 at Minton’s and Monroe’s, in romanticised terms, also, in a radio interview with saxophonist Paul Desmond: ‘Gay youth. Lack of funds. There was nothing to do but play and we had a lot of fun trying to play ideas. Plenty of jam sessions meant much late hours. Plenty good food, nice clean living. But basically speaking, much poverty.’[[76]](#footnote-76) Perhaps Parker recognises the cliché in his statement, for one can interpret a hint of irony when he refers to the ‘clean fun’ of those days, as it is well documented that he was often not ‘clean’ but ‘high’ on drugs and alcohol and is therefore ‘signifying’ (I will explain this practice in the second chapter), or making a joke that only ‘insiders’ would pick up on.

Legendary, well-established figures such as Benny Goodman, Roy Eldridge, Lester Young and Charlie Christian (all of whom were both widely popular and revered for their talent) frequented Minton’s during this period at the start of the 1940s, playing with and listening to the newer crowd of contemporaries that Geoffrey Smith calls ‘the Young Turks’[[77]](#footnote-77) in these scenarios. Few reliable recordings were made at these largely impromptu events that have come to light; from the evidence that exists, we can deduce that this transitional period combined many different musicians’ personal attempts at instigating more and more interesting and progressive musical directions.

The fact that Minton’s Playhouse is identified by many different sources to be the environment and catalyst of the style’s beginning lends support to the idea of bebop as a ‘revolution.’ Minton’s hosted a nucleus of activity involving specific people during a specific window of time in which a palpable and concerted (rather than purely organic, disconnected) change was brought about.

At least a decade before the advent of bebop, a combative element had existed in live jazz late-night shows called ‘cuttin’ contests,’ as soloists would perform as impressively as they could, head-to-head, before an expectant audience, and ultimately a winner and a loser would be declared after the ‘battle.’ In contrast to this ritual that favoured spontaneity over deliberation, the mainstream swing jazz genre imposed restrictions on soloists to play within a tightening range of conservative musical boundaries. The American music industry underwent extensive losses in large part due to the Great Depression, which lasted for the majority of the 1930s, and this financial imperative took precedent over creative priorities: in order to appeal to the broadest of tastes and remain commercially successful, swing was written, played and packaged for the purposes of light (and white) entertainment. This regimentation meant boredom for some players, including Parker, Gillespie and Clarke, but may have been true, too, for any performers whose tastes and abilities were more diverse than what the material they were paid to play had to offer.

 Marketing jazz to the white middle-class continued into the 1940s as America increased its role during the Second World War, with the genre now stretched to encompass or blend into popular song, and crooning star singers such as Al Jolson, Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra integrated jazz within their repertoires. Mainstream jazz became a symbol of the United States both at home and abroad, as the music was brought to the war effort as a symbol of American freedom, and as a way to raise both spirits and money. The popular bandleader, Glenn Miller proposed to ‘streamline military music and lift morale with swing,’ write Lewis Erenberg and Susan Hirsch (1996), and this was ‘met with conditional government acceptance.’[[78]](#footnote-78) The Miller version of jazz did not at all represent the jazz world outside of the military, yet this was what was being broadcast internationally as ‘American swing.’ Given that the military was highly segregated and discriminatory against ethnic minorities, bebop could also be viewed as a reaction against the misuse and mistreatment of the jazz culture in a racist institution. The 1942-1944 AFM recording strike was lifted for entertainment purposes and promoting mainstream, uncontroversial American values for the military overseas by radio or international live performances in show businesses’ contribution to the war effort: ‘union musicians were permitted to record for the sole benefit of the troops.’[[79]](#footnote-79) The blackness and apparent wildness of bebop was the antithesis of the image the American military would have wanted to project.

Therefore, ‘one way [the boppers] worked off their frustrations was in jam sessions, usually played after hours. In the 1940s, when the wartime draft depleted the ranks of virtually all major orchestras, staged jam sessions became popular with the public,’[[80]](#footnote-80) explain Giddins and DeVeaux (2009). Swing music seemed so vast a commercial enterprise that the culture of late night jazz clubs and these public demonstrations of jam sessions acted as countercultural (and hence ‘cooler’) settings for the eclectic mix of musicians attracted to the more experimental or novel musical ideas. This practice carried on well into the bebop tradition and the leaders of the ‘revolution,’ in a sense, were contrarily re-claiming, elevating and re-invigorating one of the most fundamental roots of the jazz tradition: improvisation and ‘cuttin’ contests.’ New York City bebop was born out of this same combative impulse, ‘reacting against [...] the kind of blandness and uniformity of the swing band era’[[81]](#footnote-81) and to creatively challenge their community.

Clarke reports that ‘when Teddy took over [in 1940], Minton's changed its music policy. [...] Teddy never tried to tell us how to play. We played just as we felt. [...] Monk and I wrote “Epistrophe” together, by the way. It was one of the first modern jazz originals.’[[82]](#footnote-82) Musicians such as Mary-Lou Williams, Clarke and Gillespie speak of the backstage discussions and playing sessions that led to new ideas being developed; the atmosphere at these meetings appears to have been a mix of camaraderie and gregariousness, but also of thoughtful and disciplined study. The binary opposition that the conditions of bebop’s birth may have existed in - between light-hearted and sobriety - is certainly mirrored in the tones of Parker, Monk, Gillespie and Clarke. Early bebop particularly evinces a bouncing between these states.

**Being wild**

These fruitful gatherings (especially after nightly performances in the bars and clubs), it is safe to assume, would have been influenced by some attendants’ use of alcohol, marijuana, and narcotics, barbiturates or hallucinogens. Candid photographs, films and personal accounts verify that the ambience of these assemblages seemed sociable and sometimes festive. Sadly, however, the consequences of many different musicians’ mainly nocturnal, financially unstable and unstructured lifestyles (due to the inconsistencies of employment) and their close proximity to drugs over the course of jazz history took their toll on various prominent members of the jazz communities’ lives and careers. Bix Beiderbecke, Lester Young, Billie Holiday, Bud Powell and John Coltrane, for example, all battled addiction and ill health due to their drug uses. Although jazz has historically been associated with alcohol, smoking and other drug use, bebop in particular is a period that carries an association with more powerful substances such as heroin. Charlie Parker battled with a severe heroin addiction that became as legendary as his musical abilities. Influential saxophonist Dexter Gordon remembers how this side of Parker’s personality affected the way he could play: ‘“How could this cat play so fast, at times he could be so scary,” but of course that was the drugs, you know.’[[83]](#footnote-83) Gordon adds, however, that he ‘had a very good mind. He was aware of what was going on. Well-read in music, all kinds of music. He was interested in everything. His mind was open. And very talented.’[[84]](#footnote-84) Parker’s life and health was blighted considerably from an early age due to his drug and alcohol use, and he died from drug-induced complications at the young age of 34 in 1955. There is a question as to whether Parker was entirely in control, or ‘aware’ (as he improvised at lightning speed with both delicacy and fury), in a way that aligns with a conventional understanding of what authentic authorship and the creative process is, or whether the drugs affected his mind and abilities more than his own reasoned musical decisions. Thelonious Monk also reportedly was affected by drugs, and again, whether this accounts for his reserved, eccentric nature and his unorthodox playing or not, also remains unanswerable. ‘Every day is a brand-new pharmaceutical event for Monk,’[[85]](#footnote-85) wrote journalist Barry Farrell in a November 1964 edition of *Time* magazine; a high profile article that would have influenced many readers’ perceptions of bebop.

Glamorised stories of the musical artists as outcasts, playing and working in excess and pushing themselves to physical and creative extremes, helped to create a bebop mythos that appealed to the Beat Generation of the post-war period. The freedom, hedonistic sensibility, unconventional rhythms and phrasing of the sound of bebop became emblematic of the Beat aesthetic, as did the notion of an unfiltered, overflowing ‘stream-of-consciousness,’ spirituality, and disdain for commercialism that strove for the ideal of authenticity. This seeming affinity of style or lifestyle between the two rebellious artistic forms also corroborates the validity in the idea of a bebop-oriented revolution in culture. Poets and writers such as Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs used vulgarity and themes offensive to the establishment they saw as Puritanical, such as sexuality and drug use in their work, and bebop reappropriated previously low status jazz tropes to open up a doorway to the art world. Modern American art was making a case for itself, and the rebellion it took to be heard links these two art forms further.

‘After-hours’ reunions were instructive as well as sociable, however. Milt Hinton remembers stealing away to experiment musically with Gillespie, under almost furtive conditions, whilst the two of them belonged to the regimented, populist Cab Calloway big band: ‘I’d walk him on bass [play a simple ‘walking bass line’] while he’d try different chords and progressions. At the College Club, for example, during intermissions we’d go up on the roof and practice.’[[86]](#footnote-86) The boppers may have had on the one hand a fun-loving and risk-taking mentality that displeased their elders but excited their friends, but on the other hand, they had a focused industriousness and sincere intent. This outwardly seeming contradiction in terms is central to the question of its identity: bebop, from its streamlined, cool, formal ‘look’ down to the central messages it intended for its audience, is a shuttling between the binary opposition of the wild or undisciplined, and the serious.

**Being serious**

‘The leaders of black music gathered around a turntable [at Minton’s], playing recordings of sax players Lester Young and Charlie Parker as well as such European composers as Alban Berg and Maurice Ravel,[[87]](#footnote-87)’ describe the authors of *The Story of Jazz: Bop and Beyond* (1993). Parker admitted to practicing ‘from 11 to 15 hours a day’[[88]](#footnote-88) as a teenager. In an interview with fellow saxophonist Paul Desmond, Parker explained, ‘study is absolutely necessary, in all forms. [...] It's just like a good pair of shoes when you put a shine on [them]. Schooling brings out the polish of any talent. [...] Schooling is one of the most wonderful things there's ever been.’[[89]](#footnote-89) Competitiveness, arduous study and lack of money kept the early boppers active and productive - Parker seems to have wished to present himself as scholarly, possibly in a bid to counter the falsehood that he was a ‘natural-born genius’ with all of the categorical errors that come with that assumption. Dizzy Gillespie also worked particularly hard, often not quite succeeding to physically play what he had in mind before he had refined his ‘chops.’ Hinton describes the moments of failure and uncertainty, and the effect he had on the musicians around him, when Gillespie was still trying to perfect his progressive ideas:

It was the beginnings of a new trend. Dizzy hadn’t perfected it yet. There were things he attempted to do but couldn’t. He didn’t wholly make everything he tried but he got to me, and I admired him for what he tried. Like he would try a long-range progression with a high note at the end and he missed it. Cab [Calloway] would get very angry. Some of the guys in the band would say, “Nice try, kid, try it again.” But most of them didn’t think he had anything or would amount to anything.

In some ways, during the very first stages of its birth, bebop democratised the creative act of writing music or improvising in that if any given jazz musician wanted to play or distribute the content of their compositions and take an opportunity for experimentation in live performances, they would have been free to do so. Impromptu after-hours gigs were largely controlled by the artists themselves, although often the bar or club manager would request an audition from a prospective player if he or she wanted a more than temporary playing job. Teddy Hill held auditions for hired positions, and ultimately was reluctant to hire Thelonious Monk as ‘house pianist’ because he was ‘too undependable’[[90]](#footnote-90) but Gillespie and Clarke apparently insisted, he recalled: ‘Dizzy and Kenny Clarke once said they’d assume responsibility for getting him there [to the club] on time if I’d hire him, they liked him so much.’[[91]](#footnote-91) This anecdote does somewhat suggest that this friend group pushed for each other's opportunities, and that Hill did not grant Monk this role based solely on his merit. The beginnings of bebop seem to have been conceived in a tight-knit and exclusive ring of musicians: accusations of elitism are not without substance. However, in theory, the musicians’ proven skills were all that it took to grant him or her an opportunity to contribute their own individual musical ideas and personal style into a spontaneous performance in the relatively informal jam sessions-come-gigs. Opportunities for performers to write and then play their own music in swing bands, on the other hand, were far scarcer, as the material they were expected to play was strictly pre-arranged and composed by hired writers, and the band members were conducted, normally reading from sheet music during concerts, much like classical music performances.

Part of the reason for creating such a complicated and challenging music was, in Kenny Clarke’s words, ‘to discourage the sitters-in’ at jam sessions. ‘Monk, [trumpeter] Joe Guy, Dizzy, and I would work them out. We often did it on the job, too. Even during the course of a night at Minton's. We usually did what we pleased on stand.’[[92]](#footnote-92) This indicates the musicians needed to force their ideas onto their fellow musicians and the audience in order for it to be heard as they desired it, uninterrupted and uncorrupted. Bebop, in this light, can be interpreted as a kind of musical manifesto. The manifesto was read as threatening cultural heritage by some established members of the jazz community; adding credibility to the idea of bebop as a revolt. Ted Gioia (1997) writes that bandleader ‘Cab Calloway denounced modern jazz as “Chinese music”; Louis Armstrong lambasted “all them weird chords which don’t mean nothing… you got no melody to remember and no beat to dance to”.’[[93]](#footnote-93)

As bebop became more and more influential in the jazz world, and spread as a style throughout the United States and abroad from New York City, more pluralistic, insightful analyses from sociological and musicological perspectives that addressed concept over form began to shape the academic attitudes, and consumers’ appreciation of jazz. The binary that bebop and subsequent jazz styles now were framed by was now much more between ‘African American’ versus ‘American’ than ‘African’ versus ‘European.’ By the 1960s, as Travis A. Jackson states, jazz no longer represented a music of fixed, split identity between ‘African’ and ‘European,’ but a malleable, and self-determined, autonomous art form in its own right. Perhaps it is this independence that bebop claimed from labels assigned to it from essentialist or idealist perspectives that, as DeVeaux writes, our modern understanding of jazz in toto has shifted: ‘not because bebop has satisfied some a priori claim to be called “jazz,” but because the definitions currently in circulation have been shaped in bebop’s image.’[[94]](#footnote-94)

It was not wholly due to the purity of bebop’s musical and aspirational qualities that it came to such wide national and international acceptance: there were contributing contextual factors that provided the right circumstances for bebop to rise to prominence as a genre, aside from the musical merits themselves. The conditions for this circle of peers to convene in that particular city, and particular night club are important to note, also. The Second World War drafts caused large bands and orchestras to lose many of their musicians, and this is partially why the big band model was succeeded by smaller groups; bebop was formed among a group of men who had not been recruited and this is a significant contributing factor that made bebop possible. All over the United States during the 1930s particularly, many cities could boast of their own regional style of jazz (Kansas City being a particularly prestigious jazz scene), however, it was Harlem’s brand that eventually became mainstream jazz: the densely populated nexus of writers, artists, intellectuals and musicians picked up on and disseminated it.

It can be reasonably argued that, in musicologist Andy Bennett’s (2000) words, ‘the physical fact of the music itself at least acts as a touchstone,’[[95]](#footnote-95) and provoked critics to re-examine and re-interpret the music’s ‘semantic indefiniteness’[[96]](#footnote-96) concurrent with the wider context of the era’s increasingly progressive sociological, political and musicological discourse**.** Beat writers, and writers in the Harlem Renaissance circle (which I will go on explain more about in chapter two) were particularly receptive to the messages bebop was sending. Bebop criticism became sophisticated. Travis A. Jackson paraphrases Ralph Ellison’s 1964 analysis of the act of performing jazz: he explains that by referencing each other’s musical tropes, ‘each performance helps each individual performer to negotiate his or her identity vis-à-vis other musicians, the larger community, and the history of the music.’[[97]](#footnote-97) When Monk, for example, plays a pattern of a single heavy left hand note on beat one, followed by a chord played higher up the keyboard on the second beat in the bar, it is reminiscent of the ‘stride’ piano style of previous generations of jazz and ragtime pianists such as James P. Johnson, Fats Waller and Jelly Roll Morton. Monk references the past dating back to the very early days of black American music. He re-appropriates these familiar tropes and simultaneously juxtaposes them with his own personal, modern bop-style contribution to their symbolic legacy. Past and future interact within a single dialectical musical gesture, and bebop playfully uses signification to evoke its postmodern ideology by using the symbols of the past to make strides towards a future of greater artistic freedom. Bebop, whilst using some typical jazz tropes, can be viewed as simultaneously attempting to distinguish itself from the jazz tradition, possibly to escape from the historical burden that the categorisation or label ‘jazz’ or even ‘the blues’ would entail. Although pioneers such as Parker, Monk and Gilliespie were not initially widely accepted, bebop eventually did receive the serious critical reception it was calling for.

On the one hand, bebop was a remarkably self-aware movement, and at times critical of the jazz establishment, as its originators purposefully designed their music to sound different, and wished for their legacies to prevail. At the same time, however, there is humility and respect shown for their predecessors in their spoken words and their choices of musical repertoires, also. The contrariness is evidenced by Parker’s statement that his ‘conception’ for the way alto saxophone could be played: ‘That's my first conception, man, that's the way I thought it should go. And I still do. I mean of course it could stand much improvement. Most likely in another 25, maybe 50 years some youngster will come along and take the style and really do something with it, yknow?’[[98]](#footnote-98) This statement is both grandiose and humble: Parker believes his ‘conception’ will be the most dominant influence on saxophone playing for the following half a century, yet he does not consider it flawless. Parker when describing his aesthetic ideal uses unassuming and simple language, even though his aims were ambitious: ‘Ever since I ever heard music I thought it should be very clean, very precise. As clean as possible, anyway yknow? And more or less to the people. Something they could understand, something that was beautiful.’ Clarke, likewise, wanted a change in reception ideology, and justified his musical decisions plainly, as a message to other drummers that a new conception ought to be followed: ‘In 1937 I'd gotten tired of playing like [influential drummer] Jo Jones. It was time for jazz drummers to move ahead.’[[99]](#footnote-99) This statement at once celebrates the achievements of past jazz innovators and in a self-aware fashion, rejects the tradition. This self-awareness is a novel, modernist attitude that had not been heard in jazz before.

The direction the ‘bebop revolution’ was aiming for, was upwards. Whether bebop was musically a totally revolutionary style is debatable in that it seems that most of the elements that characterise bebop from jazz as a whole were already extant and the so-called ‘movement’ could hardly be called musically unified: most classic bebop texts include individual performances, individual performers, or even individual solos. For example, one of Parker’s earliest and most ‘classic’ solos appears in the song ‘Hootie Blues’ recorded with the Jay McShann big band in 1941. Ross Russell names this piece of improvisation, spanning only twelve bars, as ‘a sermon from the mount. The sinuous line and the stark, pristine architecture of sound revealed a totally new jazz concept.’[[100]](#footnote-100) Alto saxophonist Sonny Criss reportedly recalled Parker’s playing in this one recording as a revolutionary experience for him personally: ‘That solo on “Hootie Blues” started me in a completely new direction.’[[101]](#footnote-101) However, the revolutionary *conceptual* aspect that bebop embodied was concerted and shared by the music emerging from this era.

**CHAPTER TWO: HIGHBROW / LOWBROW**

**Rise of the jazz art world**

Martin Williams, in his influential text, *The Jazz Tradition* (first published in 1970), writes ‘[jazz’s] functions have broadened; its prestige has risen; and it has inspired a growing variety of literature.’[[102]](#footnote-102) Jazz, since the 1940s and 1950s, now seems to occupy a more elevated social and musical status than at other times in its history, however unpopular it appears to be in comparison to other current musical styles. Overall consumption of jazz albums, tracks and streamings in the U.S. in the 2014 Nielson Music U.S. Report represented 1.4% in the breakdown of music categories, with rock topping the table of genres, representing 29%.[[103]](#footnote-103) Due to the style’s apparent lack in mass appeal, jazz aficionados and players find themselves within a subculture apart from the mainstream. Not only is it a statistical outlier, but characterisations in the media can suggest or perpetuate an association of jazz lovers as apart from the mainstream, sometimes represented as being older or mature people (and potentially fusty), or a with a superior worldliness, intellectual affect, and sophistication. These kinds of stereotypes of jazz fans can be said to propagate the notion that the genre is niche or even elitist. Jazz seems to be labelled ‘highbrow’ and is no longer ‘hip.’ Modern statistics suggest that it is not accessible enough to be strictly entertainment: it is more serious high art than it is fun. The second binary opposition that we will investigate is the ‘lowbrow’ versus ‘highbrow’ divide that bebop addresses.

The heyday of jazz in terms of its mass appeal is often perceived to have belonged to earlier decades in the twentieth century, the 1920s sometimes dubbed ‘The Jazz Age,’[[104]](#footnote-104) and jazz fans into the twenty first century consequently may be understood to have nostalgic, anachronistic, ‘out-of-touch’ tastes. Jazz was once essentially a mainstream music, when principally American swing in the 1930s was abundant popular music to dance to (although it was very popular outside of the States, with foreign swing bands gaining their own successes after American music was broadcast and spread during and after the Second World War). Well-known styles of dance such as the jitterbug or lindy hop were birthed and a subculture with the music at its centre formed. With the popularity and wide acceptance of swing music - as we fully consider the style belonging to the encompassing jazz tradition - jazz as the wider genre also garnered some negative criticism and connotations for the values it was deemed to embody since it first came to be known by social critics of the early twentieth century. A trend in the reception and criticism of modern popular music has repeated ad infinitum: the more broadly popular the music, the more vapid, degenerate, corrupting or ill-conceived it is often perceived to be by intellectuals believing that ‘the masses’ cannot discern quality, or that the values within the music are antithetical to the values of a ‘good’ society.

**Race and stigma**

David Ake (2010) writes that because ‘the most influential and well-known performers have been African Americans, racial identity often factors into how people will understand and appraise the music.’[[105]](#footnote-105) Since its inception at the beginning of the twentieth century, the musical styles identified as jazz throughout jazz’s history have been deeply associated with Africanness, and African Americans, and therefore, ‘other,’ to the white majority. The far-reaching influences of the musical innovations to originally come from African American traditions have dramatically impacted the popular and classical musical landscape and features of those styles have been continually present in many styles of popular music since. The signature call-and-response of African American church music, which was in itself influenced by the folk music of many African countries, can be found in pre-jazz blues music and is also fundamental in more modern genres such as hip-hop, for example. The contributions of black musicians arguably have resulted in the what popular arts critic Gilbert Seldes in 1924 (quoted by Michael Kammen) claimed: that jazz is ‘our [i.e. American] characteristic expression,’ and ‘the normal development of our resources,’ marking the ‘arrival of America at a point of creative intensity.’ [[106]](#footnote-106)

However deeply African American musical and culture in general enriched the arts and society in the U.S. particularly, throughout black and white’s continued interaction, there was evident suspicion, hatred, and discrimination that went along simultaneously with its acceptance into the roots of the culture. The establishment of binary oppositions between the races (with all things associated with the stereotyped ‘Negro race’ as ‘other’ and inherently negative by white social commentators) served to conceptually fortify and separate the perceived ‘opposite’ values represented by the ‘opposite’ race. In the attempt to pit ‘us’ versus ‘them,’ in this false dichotomy skin colour, hair texture, rhythmic patterns, language, or any perceived markers of race in themselves become symbols of allegiance with negative ideological and moral values, and the visible differences become hallmarks of ideological and moral opposition. The African American culture was at once mocked and looked down upon (the hugely popular minstrel shows and ‘coon songs’ of the early 1900s are prime examples), yet was appropriated incredibly successfully by white bandleaders and big bands (before desegregation was even believed possible within bands). Paul Whiteman, taking his cue from the ‘single most important figure in the development of jazz,’[[107]](#footnote-107) Louis Armstrong, became a vastly successful white big band-leader during the 1920s, for example. Whiteman became known, paradoxically, as the ‘King of Jazz’ soon after making the remark that the foundational New Orleans style, (that during the 1910s and early 1920s was ‘generally perceived as an urban folk music that had more in common with ragtime and military bands,’[[108]](#footnote-108)) ‘was so outrageous that most musicians were nauseated at the very thought.’[[109]](#footnote-109)

Codifying and stigmatizing the semiotic identity of musical tropes belonging to the style of music propagated by a culture foreign to the oppressors’ then limits the expression of the oppressed to only one separate and unequal kind of discourse. According to many white writers in the early twentieth century, the most identifiable features of the ‘Negro music’ are labelled ‘immoral,’ ‘savage,’ and ‘evil’: it seems little attempt was made to disguise the true subjects and targets of some white authors’ critiques. Such propaganda was ‘not about jazz, but a call to arms for white men to rise up against the black race and black soldiers returning from World War I,’[[110]](#footnote-110)critic Maureen Anderson (2004) states. Musical tropes became symbols of savagery, and the ideological associations lingered with perception of styles that incorporated them. As the Jazz Age swept through the U.S.A., the criticisms against it mounted. Syncopated rhythm, call-and-response, and the participatory nature of any types of jazz performance, and devices such as ‘blue’ or ‘dirty’ notes, for example, were held in very low regard by the establishment and thought of at the very least as ‘mere entertainment.’

With Jim Crow laws instituted throughout the South (and illegally in effect beyond it), the racism that remained in the long aftermath of slavery was a heavy presence in many popular magazine publications that commented on cultural issues, such as the emergence and growing popularity of jazz in the 1920s. Anderson writes in her 2004 article ‘The White Reception of Jazz in America,’ ‘many jazz critics during the Harlem Renaissance publicized their dislike of jazz music in order to express their dislike of African Americans.’[[111]](#footnote-111)

 A powerful example of such an article is one written in *Ladies Home Journal* in 1921. The title of the article announces how literally the author understands the dichotomy: ‘Does Jazz put the “Sin” in “Syncopation?”’ The writer explicitly incites a hatred for jazz for its ‘sinful,’ ‘demoralizing,’ ‘barbaric’ impact on society and her phobia apparently concerns the spreading popularity and its effect on the young:

Jazz originally was the accompaniment of the voodoo dancer, stimulating the half-crazed barbarian to the vilest deeds. The weird chant, accompanied by the syncopated rhythm of the voodoo invokers, has also been employed by other barbaric people to stimulate brutality and sensuality. That it has a demoralizing effect upon the human brain has been demonstrated by many scientists.[[112]](#footnote-112)

 The aggressive fear and suspicion of jazz (a symbol of African American presence infiltrating into white America) due to the ignorant linking of Africanness with a primitive, ‘base’ culture was to linger on in the way jazz was understood for decades.

 Hand-in-hand with the simply racist overtones in columnists’ articles was the association of jazz with debauchery, crime and sex partially due to the context in which the music was often played. The early 1900s New Orleans red-light district, or Storyville, as it was nicknamed, was famous for its abundant music (‘the city was full of music,’[[113]](#footnote-113) remembers musician Danny Barker), alcohol, drugs, gambling, jazz bars and clubs, and the many prostitutes working in brothels, where early jazz was sung or played on pianos, primarily.[[114]](#footnote-114) The earliest style of music that was to retrospectively be called ‘jazz’ was more likely closer to sounding like other genres such as ragtime or the blues, before composers and players such as Jelly Roll Morton arranged and began to formalise jazz into a more established New Orleans style. Musician Spencer Williams recalled that pimps often played the piano in whorehouses in order to ‘be close to their girls - play while the girls worked.’[[115]](#footnote-115) The original meaning of word ‘jazz’ itself demonstrates its close associations with sex: first spelled ‘jas’ or ‘jass,’ it is often attributed to the shortening of the term ‘orgasm.’ Jazz did not manage to escape its seedy reputation, as ‘the very language of the brothels and speakeasies where it was played, [that] constituted a direct incitement to immorality, so menacing the entire fabric of society,’[[116]](#footnote-116) as Philip Larkin (1963) put it, arguably until the advent of bebop, before it rose in estimation to ‘art’ status. Swing music, although not at all like New Orleans or Chicago jazz in sound or appearance, was directly associated with youth, sensual dancing and romance (as were the musicals and Hollywood movies that featured swing numbers written by composers such as Cole Porter whose songs typically centred on the subject of falling in love). Its reputation not only for being commercialised and ‘diluted’ made it a lowbrow form, but its sexualised aspect also. Bebop became a turning point for the tradition, when jazz musicians became understood as autonomous artists and the music itself grew to be appreciated not for purely for ‘sensuality,’ as the *Ladies Home Journal* author wrote. Bebop was ‘*not* of the body (as black music is often stereotypically portrayed in American culture), but [...] of the mind- both a product of great intellect, and a music to be enjoyed through contemplation, not dancing,’[[117]](#footnote-117) as musicologist Gabriel Solis (2008) writes.

Jazz music was certainly by the 1930s considered a ‘lowbrow’ music by much of the critical establishment, not only due to racism and sleazy connotations, and its mass popular appeal, but also through some more insipid, academic arguments. As Alex Ross (2007) wrote, in modern music, 'two distinct repertoires have formed, one intellectual and one popular.[[118]](#footnote-118)' In the so-called 'roaring twenties,' soon after the First World War, and before the despair of the Great Depression of the following decade, Americans used, produced and, crucially, paid for live jazz and shellac recordings (new technology at the time) to celebrate, dance to and sing along to. In terms of the division between 'popular' (hence, ‘entertainment’) and 'intellectual’ (hence, ‘art’), swing belonged to the former.

There are a few significant exceptions that convey attempts to overcome the pigeonholing of jazz music’s imposed limitations during the Swing Era, such as Duke Ellington’s and his collaborating composer and arranger Billy Strayhorn’s larger orchestral works. *Black, Brown and Beige* (1943), a programmatic jazz symphony, was written as ‘a tone parallel to the history of the Negro in America.’[[119]](#footnote-119) Ellington was influenced by Western classical, gospel and Latin American music, but it was rooted firmly in the big band swing style also. *Black, Brown and Beige* was, by and large, critically ‘panned’ by the ‘regular critics of all the New York papers,’[[120]](#footnote-120) (Scott DeVeaux’s 1993 article in the *Black Music Research Journal* cites this statement from a review of a subsequent 1958 album release). Ellington’s intentions were clearly to bridge the conceptual gap like composers such as George Gershwin had between modern classical and jazz, but perhaps the early 1940s American society was not able to accept the synthesis of the classical and jazz idioms in Ellington’s case, despite his prestige. Scott Joplin’s opera, *Treemonsisha,* composed in 1910 was similarly largely ignored until after his death.[[121]](#footnote-121) Preconceptions about the fundamental identity of jazz being a lowbrow music may have impeded these black composers to ‘successfully’ operate within the more formal concert setting and overtly integrate musical elements from outside their designation. DeVeaux cites a 1943 review for the *Daily News* by Douglas Watt:

It hardly ever succeeds… because such a form of composition is entirely out of Ellington’s ken. [...] Ellington has had the profoundest effect of his generation on dance music [...] but none of it, or very little of it, is concert stuff. It’s an exciting form of sophistication and primal urges, but it has little emotional variety.[[122]](#footnote-122)

Bebop helped to challenge the categorisation of musical genres, as the style overtly blended the distinction between what was perceived as African and European, hence, traditionally white traits versus black forms of music, and hence, ‘art’ versus ‘entertainment.’ The backlash the bebop musicians encountered has ultimately made way for respect, and the jazz genre is revered for its contributions towards the prestige of African American, and American art in general. Although what bebop did by assimilating influences from other genres of music, in this and some other respects, is more of a traditional practice than a revolutionary one in jazz history, it did lead to it making a stark contrast in tone and the obvious resultant ‘un-danceability’ was a departure from the preceding big band style. Bebop, in this regard, could be considered a revisionist movement in that, like traditional jazz, it was an expression of a relatively wide variety of musical and cultural influences that placed prominence on the live performance, with improvisation being key to its style. Big band swing, on the other hand, was more homogenous in its scope (Ellington’s classical-inflected work and George Gershwin’s ‘Rhapsody in Blue’are examples of a small number of obvious ‘fusion’). By contrast, also, the recordings produced by record labels or radio studios were the artefacts that reached the huge listenership rather than live concerts, and swing at its most popular was written in a popular music arena where the commercial forces that shaped it were confining it to stay within the mandated popular and generally ‘white’ remit.

**The African American practice of ‘Signification’**

Like jazz, bebop’s fundamental characteristics being conceived of as polar is a commonly found interpretation, also. An important difference I have found between bebop and the broader category of jazz (that the New Orleans and Chicago styles came to represent) is that bebop took on these conceptually ‘binary’ influences as signs and signifiers in a postmodern, self-conscious and trickster-ish way to communicate a new pluralistic ideology.

The embedded meanings that Parker sometimes hides or makes obvious in his playing was a way to communicate to whomever could decode his literary allusions: fellow ‘hip cats.’ When he plays the clarinet descant of ‘High Society’ in ‘Ko-Ko,’ he enables the listener to make an ‘intertextual relation’[[123]](#footnote-123), and engage in an ‘intertextual bouncing.’[[124]](#footnote-124) ‘Signifying’ on the jazz tradition itself through ‘repetition and reversal’[[125]](#footnote-125) of recognizable tropes is how many boppers invited an ironic interpretation, as a critical distance emerges between the ‘backgrounded text’[[126]](#footnote-126) and ‘the new incorporating work.’[[127]](#footnote-127) The reward or satisfaction derived from recognising Parker’s troping depends on the listener’s engagement in this dialogism. Likewise, when trombonist J.J. Johnson, in a version of the Parker composition ‘Buzzy*,’* quotes from the introductory bassoon line from ‘The Rite of Spring’in a 1964 Berlin concert,[[128]](#footnote-128) or when tenor saxophonist Dexter Gordon quotes Gershwin’s ‘Summertime’in a 1963 recording of the Gillespie tune ‘Night in Tunisia,’[[129]](#footnote-129) they are ‘signifying,’ or using ‘repetition with a signal difference,’ in the words of Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

Gates’s 1988 essay ‘The Signifying Monkey,’ writes Tony Whyton (2013), explains a typically African American tradition of ‘signifying’ in such a way that allows for bebop to be interpreted as comprising ironic, postmodern and humorous layers of meaning within it. Whyton writes, ‘By aligning African American cultural practice with that of the trickster, signifyin(g) serves to subvert white norms by using parody, wit and vernacular language to resist straightforward representations of black artists.’[[130]](#footnote-130) Using skilful imitation, juxtaposition, and subverting expectations, the boppers were able to literally play jokes either on, or to, their audiences with music alone. Musicologist Gary Tomlinson claims ‘repetition and revision are fundamental to black artistic forms, from painting and sculpture to music and language use.’[[131]](#footnote-131) The way in which bebop musicians, like the blues musicians before them had done with the blues musical form, used the inherited cultural texts their community had used to tell their own stories of survival and ‘signified’ upon them to bring new, personalised, present meanings about their relationship to the world. The crossing of the African American/European dichotomy or the ‘American’/ ‘Negro’ dichotomy W.E.B. Du Bois spoke of, and hence, the ‘lowbrow/highbrow’ divide with their art allowed the boppers to introduce themselves as self-aware revolutionaries. Appreciation of this sophisticated layer of signification ultimately meant that without some prerequisite knowledge of a rather wide range of music, or the desire to indulge the intellectual concepts, the musical jokes or historical references may sound disconnected and strange to the listener. The decision to potentially alienate an audience was, as Ellison states, not enough reason for bebop players to compromise their conceptions: this prioritising of ideals is a hallmark of any highbrow art form.

By purposefully making allusions to classical music and speaking in the media about their interest in ‘serious’ musical forms, the bebop musicians tackled any false assumptions about their backgrounds or the kind of music they could play that they might have inherited by virtue of their race. According to the partially obscured bias in society, jazz musicians demonstrating knowledge of a traditionally white art forms like classical music would imply serious studying, and possibly an advanced education (which has implications about their class or even their intelligence) as opposed to more predisposed ‘natural’ ‘inherent’ musical development that it would take to perform with Africanised musical characteristics such as, for example, playing ‘funky.’ In the face of the criticism that bebop favoured style over substance that led to a deficit of feeling (typified by the aforementioned William Grossman *Esquire* article cited in this introduction), fellow musicians countered that players like Parker were moving as well as technically impressive. Bebop saxophonist Red Rodney combines adjectives that would normally be considered binary opposites in his testimony that praises Parker for playing ‘beautifully, intellectually, low-down, dirty, funky old Blues.[[132]](#footnote-132)’ Parker’s later musical projects, such as his 1950 recordings in the album *Charlie Parker with Strings*, went on to show his versatility, desires to diversify the scope of his music, and the depth of expression that the new style could attain. Jazz critic and composer Gunther Schuller found it necessary to make it clear that one could satisfyingly combine apparently contradictory elements in jazz music, and in 1958, wrote that tenor saxophonist Sonny Rollins managed this, producing ‘important’ and enjoyable jazz: ‘discipline and thought do not necessarily result in cold or unswinging music.’[[133]](#footnote-133) Even after bebop and the largely West coast-based style named ‘hard bop’ had significantly impacted the expectations for jazz (as by 1958 the aesthetics and aspirations of the 1940s new cohort had affected mainstream jazz trends), Schuller writes, ‘purists or anti-intellectuals [...] deplore the inroads made into jazz by intellectual processes.’[[134]](#footnote-134) Schuller almost defensively stipulates that this ‘renewal through tradition’[[135]](#footnote-135) is jazz’s essence, its revolutionary achievement and earns jazz its artistic stature: ‘the great masterpieces of art – any art – are those in which emotional *and* intellectual qualities are well balanced and completely integrate.’[[136]](#footnote-136)

The use, for example, of complex and rich tonal palette both harmonically and melodically by Parker or bop pianist Bud Powell for example, calls to mind composers of the Romantic and twentieth century canon such as Stravinsky, Webern, Berg and Bartok. (Parker’s composition ‘Ko-Ko’, for example, re-versioned the jazz standard ‘Cherokee’ by inventing a new, wandering, higher melodic improvisation with adding 9ths, 11ths, and 13ths over the complex chord progression, and Bud Powell’s ‘Dusk in Sandi’ is similarly harmonically complex.) Alex Ross quotes Dizzy Gillespie’s assertion concerning his and his contemporaries’ inspirations in his 2008 text *The Rest Is Noise*: ‘We had some fundamental background training in European harmony and music theory superimposed on our own knowledge from the Afro-American musical tradition [...] We invented our own way of getting from one place to the next.’[[137]](#footnote-137) Bebop’s integration of Western classical music tropes may have been perceived as ‘revolutionary’ in some aspects, but as we have seen, appropriation is a fundamentally traditional jazz practice.

Ross’s assessment of how the West understands modern music (in terms of ‘intellectual’ *versus* ‘popular’) is historically founded- such an analysis of musical form, culture and the ways we listen to music has existed since the nineteenth century and has dominated ways of thinking about music until the present. Perhaps the most academically renowned music critic who spoke of the two ‘spheres’ was German musicologist Theodor Adorno. In 1941, he wrote on the seeming diverging values systems that separated ‘popular’ music versus the canon of Euro-centric Classical or ‘serious’ music of the twentieth century:

Popular music [...] is usually characterized by its difference from serious music. This difference is generally taken for granted and is looked upon as a difference of levels considered so well defined that most people regard the values within them as totally independent of one another. [[138]](#footnote-138)

He then explains, ‘American music from its inception accepted the division as something pre-given, and therefore the historical background of the division applies to it only indirectly.’[[139]](#footnote-139)Adorno claims that it is not his chief complaint that popular music and jazz (he mentions swing musicians and bandleaders Benny Goodman and Guy Lombardo as examples of the kind of jazz he is making his broad criticisms of) are designed and used for dancing and whatever other light-hearted, and therefore *unserious* activities. Rather, his criticism is that these styles are void of individuality and thoughtful, emotional nuance within any given tune. The ‘fundamental characteristic’ of popular music, including jazz, is ‘standardisation,’ he writes. ‘Popular’ music is written for the hit parade, with one song not intended to be basically different from the previous, so that ‘the masses’ ‘consume’ these ‘substitutable’ hits without risk of arousing feelings outside of a comforting pre-designed ‘response mechanism,’ and therefore is ‘wholly antagonistic to the ideal of individuality in a free, liberal society.’[[140]](#footnote-140) Here we have encountered implicitly assigned values due to their perceived conceptually binary opposite: popular is brainwashing, lowest-common denominator, and mass-produced but ‘pseudo-individualised,’ whereas art must be the freeing, enriching, uncommercial opposite. As Adorno sets up this ‘serious/popular’ binary from the start as ‘pre-given’ and ‘taken for granted,’ is it evident that his definitions and value-judgements of the spheres are equally staunchly oppositional and that his viewpoint does not account for any kind of music that blurs these conceptual boundaries as he frames them.

Much has been made of bebop’s re-appropriation of classical and twentieth century European composers’ work in jazz criticism over the decades, however, to stress the European influences and the highbrow qualities that these traits imbued can lead to an overlooking of the intellectual and artistic achievements of bebop regardless of their troping of traditionally highbrow musical elements. Utilising the art-world associations of classical music within their work was a deliberate technique to reinforce the connections between bebop and highbrow music: the musicians literally demonstrate the redundancy of the supposedly binary opposite relationship. The sense of polarity between being an African American *and* an artist, would have been palpable for these musicians: many suffered from racially-motivated abuse (sometimes with permanently devastating consequences, such as Bud Powell’s being repeatedly detained in hospitals and undergoing forced electroconvulsive therapy), and were unable to safely play in some Southern cities for fear of attacks. Writer James Baldwin illustrates this binarism (and the binarism that Du Bois speaks of) that he himself feels, naming the sense as ‘a state of rage.’[[141]](#footnote-141)

**Changing the shape of jazz to come**

Adorno’s idea of jazz music may have been guilty of being repetitive and formally uninventive. His criticism of ‘sweet’ or ‘hot’ swing, at times, is not without substance. For example, he berates the typically Tin Pan Alley-style song structure: ‘very few possibilities for actual improvisation remain, due to the necessity of merely melodically circumscribing the same underlying harmonic functions.’[[142]](#footnote-142) Bebop was a break away from not only the crowd-pleasing incentive that ‘popular music’ would follow, but also the safety and derivative confines of swing and ‘traditional jazz.’ Several compelling arguments have been made that Adorno was uninformed about jazz, and thus his criticism is factually unfounded, however, the argument that the jazz *as he knew it* was ‘standardised’ can be defended satisfactorily, but is not applicable to bebop.

The new pioneers of bebop began their musical careers often by playing in these big bands the likes of which Adorno criticised. Gillespie, even as a young man who had not played professionally for very long was highly aware of the changes he wanted to instigate as a bebop trumpet player; his adventurousness even led to clashes with bandleader Cab Calloway (Hinton relates how they once physically brawled during a rehearsal due to mutual frustration in his autobiography).[[143]](#footnote-143) In a 1957 *Esquire* article titles ‘Jazz Is Too Good for Americans,’ Gillespie comments on the stature of his music in his own country: ‘I believe that the great mass of the American people still consider jazz as lowbrow music... To them, jazz is music for kids and dope addicts. Music to get high to. Music to take a fling to. Music to rub bodies to. Not "serious" music.’[[144]](#footnote-144) The way in which Gillespie sought to change this trajectory and overcome the problem was by changing the way in which his music was received, and the expectations not only of his audience, but of his fellow players.

 In an interview transcribed in *Hear Me Talkin’ to Ya*, Gillespie corroborates Kenny Clarke’s statements and explains that one of the reasons for his frenetic, fast-tempo, high-register playing style was to literally force the gigging musicians, or ‘sitters in,’ around him to either join him and Thelonious Monk in their more advanced, challenging playing, or get off stage (following the tradition of the ‘cuttin’ contests’). An intellectual gauntlet was thrown, on the stage of late-night after-hours jazz bars in Harlem, where he knew he would be listened to as a young black artist:

No one man or group of men started modern jazz, but one of the ways it happened was this: some of us began to jam at Minton's in Harlem in the early 'forties. But there was always some cats showing up there who couldn't blow at all but would take six or seven choruses to prove it. So on afternoons before a session, Thelonious Monk and I began to work out some complex variations on chords and the like, and we used them at night to scare away the no-talent guys.[[145]](#footnote-145)

The attitude Gillespie displays here does support the theory that he and his peers wilfully forced a more intellectual vision on their community, however Gillespie did not always cut a simply ‘serious’ figure, particularly with his trademark upwardly bent trumpet bell and his ballooned cheeks as he blew. Indeed, from some live concert footage, his affect on stage appears to be relaxed and jovial in his communications with the audience in contrast to Charlie Parker, who appears more sombre and can sometimes be heard affecting a ‘posh’ accent when he addresses his audiences. The layers of signification he brought to his performances extended to his speech as well as his playing: Parker might not have wanted to appear as relatable and as joking as his peer, but communicated most sincerely through his musical performance.

Critic Robert Witkin writes (as summarised by Paul Hegarty) ‘that Adorno feels obliged to take on jazz because unlike other forms of the culture industry (like Hollywood films), there are many who defend jazz as a legitimate type of avant-gardism.’[[146]](#footnote-146)Literary author Ralph Ellison, writing for *Esquire* in 1959 (quoted in Robert Gottlieb’s in 1997 text *Reading Jazz* ) certainly defended bebop’s aspirations and inventive musical ideas, and observed the growing interest it, writing that bebop ‘reshaped the world, a momentous modulation into a new key of musical sensibility; in brief, a revolution in culture.’[[147]](#footnote-147) Ellison notes that ‘Stravinsky, Webern, and Berg [...], or more recently, Boulez or Stockhausen [...] find in the music made articulate at Minton’s some key to a fuller freedom of self-realization.’[[148]](#footnote-148) Ellison, with W.E.B. Du Bois and other intellectuals, was a figure of the Harlem Renaissance- a period that refers to a political, literary, scholarly, artistic and scientific preponderance of African American cultural accomplishment between the years directly after the First World War and the 1930s that centred in Harlem, New York. Ellison describes the avant-garde properties of bebop by stating the aims of the bop musician. He writes that under the demanding standards of the art form, the player ‘must achieve, in short, his self-determined identity,’[[149]](#footnote-149) through his craft, ‘absolutely free of the obligations of the entertainer.’[[150]](#footnote-150) Not unlike the canon of European classical music into the twentieth century, he writes, the boppers ‘were concerned [...] with art, not entertainment.’[[151]](#footnote-151)In the context of Ellison’s concerns (namely, the liberation of the black artist from ‘what white people might believe, rightly or wrongly, a Negro to be’[[152]](#footnote-152)), the criticism bebop faced for betraying its roots patronise the art which bebop may have pretended to embody. Supporters of bebop often draw comparisons to the ideals and musical material of genres outside the popular sphere, and they therefore, see bebop as the bridge connecting the conceptual gap between binaries, or to have departed to the art ‘sphere’ altogether. By the late 1950s, magazine articles written for *Esquire* or *Downbeat* for example, commentators started to treat jazz as a ‘serious’ art. Using new guidelines, jazz would be analysed and critiqued in accordance with criteria such as the ‘cohesiveness and direction’[[153]](#footnote-153) in the structural integrity of a given jazz piece, or the thematic variation and progression. Jazz reviews of live shows and shellac album and (later) LP releases were available after bebop’s nascent years, with *Downbeat*, *Metronome* and *Esquire* regularly polling critics’ and readers’ opinions on the ‘best’ in categories such as ‘drummer,’ ‘girl singer (with band)’ or ‘tenor saxophonist of the year,’ etcetera.

The almost redemptive narrative has been embraced by the dominant accounts of jazz history, and as a consequence, jazz in toto has gained the reputation of an 'avant-garde subculture that, in its separation from mainstream popular culture [...] synthesized a modern, urban, African American aesthetic,'[[154]](#footnote-154) as claims Ingrid Monson (1995). Indeed, in 1987, Congress passed a historic bill designating that jazz is ‘a rare and valuable national American treasure to which we should devote [...] attention, support and resources to make certain it is preserved, understood and promulgated’ and was officially recognised as ‘an American National Treasure.’[[155]](#footnote-155) The government of the United States’ embracing of this art form necessitates that jazz conforms to the ‘quintessentially romantic concept of art,’[[156]](#footnote-156) and therefore enters the ‘highbrow’ category officially, and is taught in nation-wide curricula as a ‘serious’ art form. ‘Bebop musicians in the 1940s demanded that their music be taken seriously,’[[157]](#footnote-157) states Monson (1999), and it is arguable that jazz had not been recognised as such beforehand.

**Art and commerce**

Adorno’s criticism, however, makes interesting points about the commercialization of music and commodity that popular output was increasingly becoming. ‘King of Swing’ Benny Goodman, one of the most popular and influential bandleaders of the 1930s noted a clear distinction he felt of how his own music was received; ‘...something happens when you find out what you're doing is no longer music- that it's become entertainment. It's a subtle thing and affects what you're playing. Your whole attitude changes.’[[158]](#footnote-158) Goodman here displays awareness of the context and reception ideology of the time, how great a conceptual chasm lay between the two ‘spheres’ or ‘repertoires,’ and self-reflection and interpretation of where his own music fitted into the musical scene. Goodman said this fairly revealing statement, possibly as much of an assessment on his personal output, or the supply and demand of the music industry, in an intimate interview setting that was then transcribed in Shapiro and Hentoff’s *Hear Me Talkin’ to Ya* (1966). Here, Goodman contributes to the notion that jazz musicians keep with them artistic ideals that they aspire to, other than making good money. A similarly insight-filled book, *Swing to Bop*, edited by Ira Gitler, quotes saxophonist Gerry Mulligan as saying of Charlie ‘Bird’ Parker:

There was a different kind of presence to Bird’s music. When Bird played, it achieved some kind of response, and *everybody* responded to it. [...] It was just another element. It wasn’t contained in anybody else’s music. You run into that *damn* seldom in popular music. And yet there are a number of times that I have experience that but I don’t think, *ever*, as strongly as with Charlie Parker. [...] He’d play a bloody *melody* and would elevate it into something that was *art*.[[159]](#footnote-159)

 Alex Ross argues that the players of bebop were fully aware and intended to subvert the stereotype of the black entertainer, the minstrel, the subservient smiling caricature, by designing an art form that conveyed intelligence and will to power: ‘Jazz had entered its high-modern era, and assumed a modernist contempt for convention. Monk set the tone: “You play what you want, and let the public pick up what *you* are doing- even if it does take them fifteen, twenty years”.’[[160]](#footnote-160) Although misunderstood throughout the first era of his career as a professional bebop pianist, Monk eventually came to be known as the ‘high priest of bebop,’ and a founding member of the style due his unusual, original harmonic writing and unorthodox playing techniques. The figure of Monk is symbolic of the quintessential bebopper; a reputation for having a mysterious temperament, eccentrically but sharply dressed, musically studious and inventive, and whose music displayed an ‘imperturbable cool,[[161]](#footnote-161)’ with influences that appeared to come from both a blues and gospel background and the classical ‘art music world.’ Gunther Schuller (1958) likened Monk’s use of chord spacing as having an ‘almost Webern-like manner,’ as ‘he spreads the pattern of sevenths used earlier over two or three octaves.’[[162]](#footnote-162) Conflating apparently high art elements within the perceived low art form, and therefore, integrating more ‘serious’ ideological substance in his music, was a monumental gesture of defiance.

**The lasting image of bebop**

Oddly, however, as Ted Gioia states, ‘Despite the Minton’s connection, Monk’s mature music bore little resemblance to bebop.’[[163]](#footnote-163) Despite his eventual placement firmly within the bebop tradition, Monk did not usually play at the typical ‘double-time’ speed, or use particularly long phrases (in fact, his melodic lines were typically short, consisted of motific themes that stopped and started as they do in his composition ‘Straight No Chaser’). Likewise, his agile chromatic ascending and descending runs on the keyboard were more for propulsive effect rather than a major feature of his own writing (although he could play incredibly quickly with his right hand particularly when it was required of him). Monk often used pregnant pauses, would linger on and build themes with single notes and minimise his texture, whereas the quintessential bebop sound is usually characterised by Parker and Gillespie’s trademark almost impossibly fast, maximal cascading lines. Far more representative of bebop pianism was Bud Powell, whose Tatum-esque fast chromaticism and elongated phrasing could more easily be categorised as ‘bebop’ as it has been framed. However, as Benjamin Givan (2009) writes, ‘beboppers were often stereotyped as hip Bohemian intellectuals, and it was Monk above all who came to personify this image both within and beyond the jazz community.’[[164]](#footnote-164)

The image was a fairly consistent one despite the music itself being far from uniform. Because of the discrepancies between individual performers and bebop bands, it is not accurate to describe bebop as a musically-unified category. Gillespie’s work with arrangers such as Gil Fuller and Cuban musicians such as Chano Pozo set bebop aesthetics with Afro-Cuban rhythms (this collaboration includes the song ‘Manteca,’ based on a *clave* rhythm), and a great part of Gillespie’s later works included his inclusion and studies of other African diasporic musical traits. Parker’s work with lavish strings and typically classical instruments arrangements also expanded the genre musically as well as conceptually. The Modern Jazz Quartet comprising pianist John Lewis, double bassist Percy Heath, vibraphonist Milt Jackson and drummer Connie Kay (Clarke and bassist Ray Brown had also belonged to the outfit during their long career) was formed as a side-project by members of Gillespie’s bebop-style big band, inventively fused influences including Bach-like fugues with swinging improvisations and raw blues.

Monk becaming an unlikely symbol of bebop has far more to do with the *idea* of bebop rather than the musical character of his oeuvre. This may be due to the trend of music historians’ to view the story of jazz in ‘endless concatenation.’[[165]](#footnote-165) As musicologist Carl Dahlhaus (1983) writes: ‘Music history fails either as *history* by being a collection of structural analyses of separate works, or as a history of *art* by reverting from musical works to occurrences in social or intellectual history cobbled together in order to impart cohesion to an historical narrative.’[[166]](#footnote-166) Monk’s hipness and ‘anti-assimilationist attitude,’ Ingrid Monson (1999) writes, was ‘marked through modes of symbolic display associated initially with bebop: beret, goatee, "ridiculously draped suits in the manner of the zoot suit," horn-rimmed glasses, heroin addiction, [and] bop talk.’[[167]](#footnote-167) The image of the somewhat eccentric intellectual also played with the highbrow/lowbrow binary opposition of ‘artist’ versus ‘entertainer:’ something that Gillespie particularly embraced. Saxophonist Billy Mitchell recounts speaking with a member of Dizzy Gillespie’s band who was complaining about his experiences working with Gillespie:

So I told him, "Man, at least you're with Dizzy, with that hip music." I would say, "I was with [bandleader] Lucky Millinder and Lucky Millinder wants you to dance." But he said, "Shit, Dizzy wants you to dance, too."[[168]](#footnote-168)

Whereas he was passionately concerned with creating ‘serious’ music, presumably hoping to, as Monson (1999) writes, ‘overturn the legacy of minstrelsy and its demands for smiling buffoonery,’[[169]](#footnote-169) Gillespie evidently saw the need to use the trope of the entertainer to deliver his message. The image was heavily caricatured in the media, which jazz musician and journalist Leonard Feather bemoaned in an interview for Gary Giddins’ TV documentary *Celebrating Bird: The Triumph of Charlie Parker:*

These write-ups in Time magazine and in Life and so forth, all they concentrated on was Dizzy’s beret and the horn-rimmed glasses and the goatees and everything but the music itself. There was no serious attention paid to Charlie Parker as a great creative musician in the general national press, in […] any of the media. It was just horrifying how really miserably he was treated and this goes for the way Dizzy Gillespie was treated...[[170]](#footnote-170)

 However much Gillespie and others may have been sneered at for their appearance and antics, Feather’s concerns are no longer prevalent. Bebop and, ultimately, jazz, has gone so far as to be widely perceived as quite the opposite of ridiculous.

**Small leap/giant step**

In Ted Gioia’s 1997 book The *History of Jazz*, he makes the claim that bebop was the ‘extension of jazz’s inherent tendency to mutate, to change, to grow.’[[171]](#footnote-171) Gioia here favours the approach to jazz writing that, in DeVeaux’s (1997) words ‘continually [affirms] the integrity of the whole,’[[172]](#footnote-172) meaning that the combination of ‘higher’ status elements into their music during the bebop years was a step in a predictable, linear progression. Gioia writes, ‘Jazz had already revealed its ability to swallow other musical idioms [...] and make them a part of itself. To do the same with Stravinsky and Hindemith, Schoenberg and Ravel presented, no doubt, an extraordinary challenge, but also an inevitable one.’[[173]](#footnote-173) Whereas it cannot be denied that jazz has integrated and continues to integrate and assimilate different music in its evolving style, this theory somewhat narrows the jazz narrative into one cohesive, teleological story of phase-by-phase logical progression. The identity of jazz is hotly debated at each major turning point in its history, as are the faults and merits of one performer after another, because jazz represents many differing values to different people: it is not one thing, and therefore, does not move in one single direction. Gioia’s conclusion also minimises the pragmatic obstacles the bebop musicians faced. Given the abject mistreatment and disrespect aimed at (especially poor) African Americans, whether accomplished musicians or not, it might in fact have taken a giant conceptual leap to suggest that in the 1940s, a largely black-led musical style could be awarded the United States’ highest praises for showing itself to be ‘serious’ or ‘highbrow.’

Bebop was the dominant sound of jazz throughout much of the 1950s, predominantly because of individuals such as Parker and his aspirations to estrange himself from the jazz that was inadequate for expressing his ideas. In an aforementioned 1949 interview with *Downbeat*, the magazine journalists write that Parker, apart from extolling his enthusiasm for classical twentieth century composition, such Paul Hindemith’s, ‘reiterates constantly that bop is only just beginning to form as a school, that it can barely label its present trends, much less make prognostications about the future.’[[174]](#footnote-174) Possibly trying to avoid yet another absolute categorisation of his art which could be then ridiculed, misunderstood and railed against (which he had had enough experience of), Parker leaves the interpretation of bebop relatively open: only categorically stating that is ‘no love child of jazz.’[[175]](#footnote-175) Clearly wishing to leave the lowbrow associations of jazz behind, Parker’s ‘revolution’ never did manage a complete disjuncture from its roots, but bebop was eventually received as an exceptionally sophisticated art form whilst simultaneously being appreciated as (in his words) ‘rice-and-beans music.’[[176]](#footnote-176) In the same interview, Parker concludes ‘But, man, there’s no boundary line to art.’[[177]](#footnote-177)

**CONCLUSION**

Bebop was not a particularly cohesive musical style, and there is no definitive list of essential characteristics present in all its manifestations as it broadened radically within a short space of time. For example, not all bebop bands were small, fast-tempo or difficult to listen to. Bebop could be bluesy, romantic, funny, and so on. However, the bebop *period* of the early to mid-1940s had a definitive effect on the jazz genre that can be singled out: it eradicated binary thinking in jazz discourse that had previously narrowed perceptions of what jazz could and could not be.

I conclude that much of bebop was intentionally revolutionary, with a view to separate away from the jazz tradition, and that it integrated ‘highbrow’ elements knowingly in order to signify ‘a shift in the perception of jazz from entertainment to art,’[[178]](#footnote-178) as Geoffrey Smith stated. As a result of this new direction bebop carved out, bebop has come to exemplify our modern concept of ‘jazz.’ Jazz criticism and discourse has since expanded outside of binary categorical thinking: jazz now carries with it the values and techniques that bebop instituted, causing a fundamental transformation in jazz development in line with its ideals. However, it also means that bebop has been fully subsumed into the jazz tradition, and that bebop will never be considered a distinct genre unto itself.

The history of jazz consists of different-sounding eras, periods and trends: each phase in its evolution is marked by revolutionary figures, such as W.C. Handy, Buddy Bolden, Joe Oliver, Sidney Bechet, Coleman Hawkins, Ella Fitzgerald, and many others. These figures recur time after time, defining styles or the eras in which they were most prominent (and their influences do not disappear completely under a new revolutionary direction but live on through permutations); this is a constant feature of an inconstant genre. Bebop was a disjunction from the previous era’s jazz, but as Scott DeVeaux (1997) writes, ‘disjunction may be accounted for by the rhetoric of modernism, [...] the necessity of ongoing, radical innovation suggests that the process of growth in an artistic tradition is likely to be punctuated by many such “revolutions.”’[[179]](#footnote-179)

Examining the ‘two-ness’ of bebop shows that this transitional music defied simple polar categorisation, and ultimately belonged exclusively to neither end of the spectrum, changing the conventions that ‘jazz’ had once been defined by. Bebop exposed and disturbed black-and-white thinking by celebrating, as Ted Gioia (1997) puts it, ‘the clash and fusion - of African and European, composition and improvisation, spontaneity and deliberation, the popular and the serious, high and low.’[[180]](#footnote-180)

Bebop, therefore, brought ‘highbrow’ musical elements and ‘highbrow’ perceptions to jazz. Whereas jazz has always contained musical components of other traditions within it (some considered ‘highbrow’ and some not), bebop successfully embodied the notion that ‘art’ and ‘popular’ need not be considered opposites and broke out of the preconceived categorical identity their musical tradition had been conditioned by. Boppers introduced a plurality of meanings simultaneously embedded within their performances, and demanded sophisticated, jazz-literate, and culturally aware appraisal. Initial attempts to dismiss it have been proved failures; bebop did not need approval from the music industry establishment, although it did gain it, as well as worldwide recognition.

Race, class, gender, ethnicity, and geography imposed limitations on their art form, so perhaps bebop needed the trope of revolution in order to be taken seriously. It did not use overt political language (at least not at first), but the language of humour, the language of the blues, jazz, spirituals, and Latin American, African, and European modern classical music to reflect concepts of integration, plurality and freedom. The beboppers may have been forced to exist between two worlds, as W.E.B. Du Bois poignantly described, but through their art, expressed the full range between both.

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**COMPOSITION PORTFOLIO INFORMATION**

The portfolio of original composition and accompanying information is presented on a website. Please access the portfolio by visiting:

<http://sheffieldissound.weebly.com>

(The following pages are physical copies of the text written in the various pages of the website, for reference only.)

This is the text from the ‘Context and Influences’ page at the following address:

<http://sheffieldissound.weebly.com/context--influences.html>

## About this Portfolio

'Sheffield Is Sound' is an electroacoustic album of electronically produced and edited sound recordings showcasing specific locations and everyday travel around Sheffield.

The 'Portfolio' page (found in the navigation bar at the top of the website pages) presents the album track-by-track, alongside some track information and interactive maps showing the corresponding areas.

## The Composition process

Using a Zoom H6 handy recorder, I walked and rode through the centre, countryside, parks and outskirts of Sheffield, curating an album of soundscapes that would reflect the unique character of these places or people, and present a personal interpretation of how it feels to spend time around them.

Using electroacoustic compositional techniques in Cubase and Audacity, these pieces are studies of the acoustics of certain areas or voices that I find significant to the Sheffield community, but also that are meaningful to me because of their beauty, strangeness, or diversity. All pieces feature a person or subject through whom we, the listener, experience the sounds; whether this subject acts as merely an observer, passenger, traveler, tourist, or shopper, the theme of walking or moving is present in the album. Some pieces explore a more internal, subjective experience of passing through these spaces, and the sounds are overtly composed and heavily altered to convey the subject's emotional experience and perception of the space and its soundscape. Others are more objective aural representations of the locations, with little editing to alter the sounds, in order to convey the reality of the soundscapes and landscapes. The arrangement of edited and unedited sounds brings narrative to each piece.

I have composed each one in order to draw attention to special areas or aspects of Sheffield that I think deserve appreciation. In this way, my intentions for this work are similar to those of [Chris Watson's](http://www.chriswatson.net/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) in his 2013 sound composition project based on Sheffield, 'Inside the Circle of Fire - A Sheffield Sound Map.' Watson wished for his audience to carefully listen and engage with the regional and community sounds that signify, for example, Sheffield's steel industry and specific natural assets (rivers, in particular), and to recreate and reframe the essence of the spaces. Watson's project is incredibly well-designed, immersive and thought-provoking. Throughout the making of my project, however, I did not listen to 'Inside the Circle of Fire' in any great detail as I did not wish to be influenced by his choice and use of locations, recording techniques, or any compositional ideas as they were so close to my own sources of inspiration.

## The Soundscape Genre

I composed 9 pieces using electroacoustic music principles and ideas as the ‘soundscape’ genre is one that I felt could best represent and convey my intentions for my compositions. [R. Murray Schafer's](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R._Murray_Schafer%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)1977 text The Soundscape: our sonic environment and the tuning of the world defines many concepts and approaches to sound design that I use in my album. Schafer writes, 'the soundscape analyst must [...] discover the significant features of the soundscape, those sounds which are important either because of their individuality, their numerousness or their domination.'[[1]](https://64663709-528580040286911240.preview.editmysite.com/editor/main.php#_ftn1) I used this principle when choosing which landscapes or environments I would base a composition on: all sounds I use in my album are, in my view, important. To use Schafer's terminology, the 'keynotes'[[2]](https://64663709-528580040286911240.preview.editmysite.com/editor/main.php#_ftn2) (or background, unconsciously perceived sounds) of the landscape, to me, are as fundamental to the locations as the 'soundmarks' (a 'community sound [...]specially regarded or noticed by the people in that community').[[3]](https://64663709-528580040286911240.preview.editmysite.com/editor/main.php#_ftn3)

The composition process, however, did involve eliminating 'unimportant' sounds that I recorded live from the acoustic environment. Selecting (and sometimes, digitally re-creating) sounds that I wanted to use generally meant filtering out ‘ambient noise background’[[4]](http://sheffieldissound.weebly.com/context--influences.html#_ftn4) in order to achieve ‘good definition.’ Electroacoustic composer [Barry Truax](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barry_Truax%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) defines ‘good definition’ as sounds that are ‘easily recognized and identified, and the subtleties of meaning they convey are readily available to the listener.’[[5]](http://sheffieldissound.weebly.com/context--influences.html#_ftn5) The ambient ‘low-level sounds heard as a background texture and not as distinct, individual components,’[[6]](http://sheffieldissound.weebly.com/context--influences.html#_ftn6) in the case throughout this album, tended to be the interference of wind, given that most pieces were recorded in an outside environment. Wind sounds are important features of certain locations, and, as Sheffield is a very hilly (and therefore, exposed) region, were often a constant presence in many recordings. The reason I chose to manipulate the recordings to sometimes lessen the dominance of these wind noises was to preserve the integrity of the more prominent, distinct, referential foreground sounds.

The listening experience I intend to present should encourage a heightened awareness of the subtleties and musical qualities of the live environments, and a critical reflection in order to distinguish between the found sounds and the composer’s influence on these sounds. This critical analysis of the interplay of natural and intentional sounds in the pieces mirrors the interplay of the natural and the manmade sounds within the environments on which the pieces are based. My intention is summarised by Truax: ‘It is the interplay between the two extremes that gives vitality to works of [the electroacoustic] genre.’[[7]](http://sheffieldissound.weebly.com/context--influences.html#_ftn7) As a consequence of this active, reflexive listening experience, I want the listener to appreciate the innate human tendency to create compositions of the sound world that surrounds us all, at every moment.

[[1]](http://sheffieldissound.weebly.com/context--influences.html#_ftnref1) **Schafer, R. (1993). The soundscape: our sonic environment and the tuning of the world.** Rochester, Vt. United States: Destiny Books Distributed to the Book trade in the United States by American International Distribution Corp. p9
[[2]](http://sheffieldissound.weebly.com/context--influences.html#_ftnref2) Ibid: p272
[[3]](http://sheffieldissound.weebly.com/context--influences.html#_ftnref3) Ibid: p274
[[4]](http://sheffieldissound.weebly.com/context--influences.html#_ftnref4) **Truax, B. (1984). Acoustic communication.** Norwood, N.J: Ablex Pub. Corp. p57
[[5]](http://sheffieldissound.weebly.com/context--influences.html#_ftnref5) Ibid
[[6]](http://sheffieldissound.weebly.com/context--influences.html#_ftnref6) Ibid
[[7]](http://sheffieldissound.weebly.com/context--influences.html#_ftnref7) Ibid: p207

## 3 Electroacoustic composers and their influences on my work



The composers: (from left to right) Hildegard Westerkamp, Luc Ferrari and Annea Lockwood

**Hildegard Westerkamp** views her work as ecological studies of places, hoping to convey to her listeners great sensitivity to the environment and promote awareness about environmental issues that affect those places. In her 2002 album 'Into India,' the listener is confronted by great cascading walls of sound and also minutia of sound. In my tracks 'Tram' and 'Moor Market,' I am most influenced her piece ['Into the Labyrinth' (2000)](http://www.electrocd.com/en/cat/es_02002/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), as I blend the sounds of internal experience and external reality together, which she does, to explore the experience of parts of her journey in India. Some of my own pieces are also concerned with bringing awareness to the importance of public parks, conservation of natural habitats (as in the track 'Hillsborough Birds') and local independent markets.

**Luc Ferrari's** piece 1970 ['Presque Rien n1 Lever du jour au bord de la mer'](http://lucferrari.org/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) is a primary influence on all of my tracks. His composition gently constructs the unfolding scenes of dawn activities at the seaside. Some of the sounds are completely unexpected and strange at first, but the slow and flowing pace of the piece allows the listener to simply wait for the origins of the sounds to reveal themselves and imagine what peoples' daily lives are like during the waking hours at this seaside. The soundscape texture is not thick as the background noises of cicadas or waves are not too loud in the mix or overly busy, so each sound that is introduced is very economical and unfiltered-sounding. My tracks 'Station' and 'Cathedral' are attempts to use 'almost nothing,' in a similar manner to Ferrari, to depict these locations.

**Annea Lockwood**'s ['A Sound Map of the Hudson River'](http://www.lovely.com/titles/cd2081.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) released in 1989 was an influence on my compositional techniques as its focus is so specific on capturing the range of acoustic qualities of a single body of water, at various different points in space and time: this simplicity and singularity of purpose was interesting to me. Commissioned as a museum installation piece, the sounds serve to both catalogue the river and to immerse the listener into the textures and changing rhythms of the water as it moves. The focus on locations at different times to experience multiple aspects of the environment was an inspiration, especially for my tracks 'Long Bar Treatment' (I follow a stretch of the river Don) and 'Endcliffe Park.'

This is the text from the ‘Portfolio’ page at the following address:

<http://sheffieldissound.weebly.com/portfolio.html>

## Hillsborough Birds

This track is a study of bird calls, sounds created by rain at different wind speeds, and the sound a stream makes at different points throughout its course.

The album opens with a gentle, minimal track. I edited the raw sound recordings I took on a day out in Hillsborough, but only enough to present them in a naturalistic way. The sounds are simple and the overall communication should be equally simple. The birds, rain and stream were recorded at different locations around Wadsley and Loxley fields and woods during the quiet hours of between two and six in the early evening, just as it was growing dark, and I collated and condensed them into one 3-minute composition to give a snapshot impression of the natural sounds I found that afternoon.

This commons, right beside the edges of the Peak District, features an array of landscapes. There are huge rock boulders, silver birch scrubs, heather and bilberry bushes, open meadows with grazing horses and sheep, steep hills, and winding flat mud paths. The birds sang in the high tree tops immediately overhead, in a dense wooded patch.
​
The editing process mainly involved manipulating the EQ settings to achieve good definition of bird calls and delicate water sounds against the ambient airplane and traffic noises.
​
Location: Wadsley and Loxley Commons, January 2016

## ​​2. Long bar treatment

This piece is designed to sound overtly 'composed:' it comprises contrasting live recordings with completely digitally-created sounds to imitate those I heard while walking past Salmon Pastures, to a metal works with a sign that read 'Long Bar Treatment,' along the river Don.

The walking subject of this piece passes a number of jarring industrial screeches, sirens and clatters, as well as hearing the natural leafy sounds underfoot, the river, and birds. In the distance there is a strange drone and a melodic hum, the origins of which are mysterious. This piece is a recreation of a soundwalk, but with augmented surreal elements embedded within the more natural sonic environment. I wanted to compose using both real and synthetic sounds to match the mix of natural and man-made acoustics of this trail. I designed a very busy, wide stereo image as the environment I listened to as I walked along seemed rich with many different noises and I was fascinated by their interplay and the strange sensation of being amongst incongruous sound worlds.

This close interaction between the industrial and the natural is an interesting feature of Sheffield. I wanted to explore this theme throughout the album.

For most of the industrial sounds, I used midi recordings and samples to re-create the sound of trucks and cranes reversing, for example, and processes such as pitch shifting to re-create faint rumbling. The live recordings (footsteps, water, birds etc) were edited in order to build the structure of the piece, also.
​
Location: River Don, November 2015

## 3. Moor Market

The Moor Market is a lively indoor market filled with international food stalls, nail salons, key-cutters, butchers, fishmongers, noodle bars, discount clothes, expensive beer, fresh coffee and lots of shouting.

Unfortunately, it has seen more prosperous times; more and more stalls are shutting down, leaving empty spaces in between packed pockets of activity. The Moor Market is a special place for the city centre; it would be a loss to myself, personally, and the local area, if it had to close down.

I wanted to document the market as it is important for these reasons, and because it is a hotspot of different sounds due to the variety of languages and the whirl of activity inside. This was recorded at neither a particularly busy nor quiet time during the day (a Monday at 4 PM) so that the recording was filled with sounds but not too jumbled. The recording session lasted about an hour, so this brief piece aims to present a series of memorable images from that hour.

This piece features snippets of passing conversation, vendors throwing ice over their fish, cobblers manning their machines, shutters being pulled down, and echoey empty spaces. The experience of walking around the market can be slightly overwhelming with noise, smells and moving people, so I wanted to create a hallucinatory effect that matches the feeling of momentum in this environment with reverb, decaying sounds, and exaggerated dynamic contrast.

​Location: Moor Market, The Moor, December 2015

## 4. Station

Sheffield train station is unlike many others. The inside of the buildings are unremarkable, but travellers stepping outside are struck by huge metallic shining water features directly in front of them, that call to mind Sheffield's steel manufacturing heritage. The subject of the piece walks from the inside of the building, hearing the next train announcements, the café workers, and the footsteps of travellers passing by, to the outside where water runs on both sides of a sloped walkway (with rushing luggage-ridden people pushing by) that leads upwards to the busy road.

Sheaf Square is the train traveller's first sight of Sheffield: quite an impressive way to welcome newcomers. This piece captures the journey out of the station, to the road. A short walk from a station to a road might be unremarkable to listen to if it was recorded anywhere else, but it is one that most Sheffield inhabitants will recognize.

I consider this short track as an interstitial piece, acting as a quiet, minimal break from the surreality of the previous and following tracks. No major rearrangements were done here; the concept of the track is simple and the changes in aural environment construct a vivid image without much need for the composer's intervention to convey this simplicity.
​
Location: Sheffield train station, March 2016​

## ​5. Tram

The tram is an important means of transportation in Sheffield, especially useful due to the several hills all over the city. This piece is an evocation of a late night tram ride on the Yellow line, ending at the University of Sheffield station stop. The time-stretched 'next stop' announcements, tram rattling and speech that gradually underscore the foreground sounds of overlapping semi-intelligible conversation and repetitive bleeping, are used to invoke a feeling of tiredness, isolation, and disconnection from fellow passengers that a commuter may feel after a long day.

The editing in this piece shows the perception of the traveller. The use of filtering and drawn out, hypnotic drones and crackles lend a sense of slow motion to the composition, which adds further surreality, as the speed of the accelerating tram is at odds with these sounds, and the listener is being led further out of the reality of the scene.

In contrast to the previous track, which is an aural exposition of the physical surroundings, this piece explores what the subject is hearing and feeling internally: the sound is warped to show the subjective mental experience rather than an objective representation of a tram ride.

Location: University of Sheffield, January 2015

## 6. Cathedral

Sheffield Cathedral is an iconic piece of architecture, and on a busy Sunday morning, voices ring through the high spaces, bouncing from the stone floors to all its corners. This, like the 'Station' piece, also functions as a short moment of repose in this album, with only minor alterations made to the recordings, to preserve the acoustic properties of the Cathedral itself.

The subject walks around the pews and statues, past the congregation, then steps out onto Church street, continuing a theme of walking in this album.

Location: Sheffield Cathedral​

## 7[. SheffieldLive](https://soundcloud.com/lauraskully/sheffieldlive?in=lauraskully/sets/mmus-portfolio-sheffield-is" \t "_blank)

[SheffieldLive](http://web.sheffieldlive.org/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) is a unique local radio station that features quirky, diverse, enthusiastic presenters and utterly different-sounding shows. The wide array of music the station plays offers a refreshing and exciting view of the city: multicultural, but integrated.

The spirit of the station is captured in these recordings, as the various presenters speak idiosyncratically, with contrasting approaches to conventional radio presenting (and microphone technique). It is always a surprise to find out what is happening on the station, and is a happy alternative to otherwise predictable and mundane radio news or popular music chart shows.

The different presenters are recorded straight from car radio tinny speakers and flit between one other throughout the track. The quiet sounds from inside the moving car can also be heard underneath as the chatter comes in and out of focus. The listener can 'tune in and out' of the different threads of conversation depending on what catches their attention; mimicking the way one usually listens to the radio while driving. The content of the conversations (some incomprehensible) is not the most important aspect of these recordings, but the upbeat attitudes and juxtaposition of the different voices is where the interest lies.

This track partially demonstrates a vibrant and unexpected picture of Sheffield that one can discover by randomly searching around on a dial.

## 8. Endcliffe Park

Recorded over two separate outings, this piece shows how the same park sounds entirely different depending on the time of day, weather and season.

The first section of the piece was recorded at lunchtime on a February afternoon. The sound of a distant football game and bicycles are heard. The light footsteps, stream trickles, birdcalls, and the presence of people in the background bring a light and relaxed feeling to the first half of the piece. As the footsteps become more heavy from mud and leaves, a nocturnal mood starts the second section.
The second section of the piece was recorded on Bonfire Night at approximately 10 PM. The sound of distant fireworks bounce off nearby buildings, and in the foreground of the track are the loud and thick footfalls in bracken, the wind in the trees and rushing water close by.
Night and day in Endcliffe Park are radically different. This park is heavily wooded in places, is covered in thorny blackberry bushes, and can seem quite desolate and ominous in the dark. However, children, young families and teenagers enjoy the playgrounds, climbing trees and football fields during the day, showing the different ways in which natural spaces can be sources of fear or conviviality.

Sheffield has 80 public parks and 650 green spaces, according to the Sheffield City Council website. The volume and variety of parks makes a huge difference in terms of my own enjoyment of the city, and I needed to document an urban park for this reason as well.

Location: Endcliffe Park, February 2016 & November 2015

## ​9. It ain’t what you do, it’s what it does to you

Poetry, literally, is all around in Sheffield. Jarvis Cocker, Roger McGough, Andrew Motion and Simon Armitage poems are transcribed on buildings, graffiti, portraits and political slogans are painted in abandoned alleys and canal banks, and the chatter of locals can sometimes also imbue a bus ride with moments of profundity and reflection.

For the final composition in the album, I wanted to exhibit the poem 'It Ain't What You Do, It's What It Does To You' by Professor of Poetry at the University of Sheffield, Simon Armitage, as it expresses the sentiment that awe and wonder are possible if one fully embraces all of life's experiences, no matter how small or mundane. The capturing of a conversation between an elderly man and woman on a bus journey on Whitham Road, through Broomhill, then Manchester Road, juxtaposed with the recitation, shows the spontaneous, funny, personal back-and-forth as they comment on what they see as they ride past. Their conversation, too, is full of meanings and worth appreciating, despite the fact of it being in passing.

This track also gave me an opportunity to clearly showcase warm, round-toned Sheffield accents that are aural signifiers of the region. A friend, Bob Reville, performed this poem in one take at his massage spa on London Road, with a ticking clock in the background. I edited his voice primarily to add space (between words, and in terms of implying space with RoomWorks reverb), and make evident that his voice is not placed within the bus scene, but acts as a kind of omnipresent, voice-over device.

Appreciating the tiny moments as well as the grand is another theme of this album, and a desire to examine musical potential in everyday surroundings is partly why I chose to work on this project.

​Location: 51 bus route & London Road

1. Barstow, C. (Producer). (2011, November 18). *Composer of the week: Bebop* [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Russell, R. (1996). *Bird lives: the high life and hard times of Charlie (Yardbird) Parker*. New York: Da Capo Press. p136 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
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