

Improvisation and Creativity in Jazz Before the 1950s

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Abstract

This paper challenges the commonplace view of improvisation and composition as disparate music making procedures, whereby improvisation, unlike composition, is a free, less-rational, and creative music making procedure; here, such is contended to be the consequence of explanatory failure. This is done by examining developments in jazz in the first half of the twentieth century, suggesting that creative changes ensued from internal consistencies and inconsistencies in the rational logic of both music theory and particular jazz practices, specifically from jazz musicians' attempts to resolve such problems to expand available musical resources, thereby expressive capacities.

Key words : composition, improvisation, structure, action, creativity, jazz, diatonicism, chromaticism.

要 旨

当論文では「作曲」と「即興演奏」が相対する音楽創作手順だとする既成概念、つまり即興演奏はフリーで合理性が薄く、創造性に富んでおり、作曲はその逆であるとする見解に異議を唱え、このような誤認は解釈の間違いに所以するということを示す。具体的には20世紀前半のジャズの発展を考察し、独創性豊かな変化をもたらしたのは音楽理論およびジャズのスタイルにおける内在論理や合理的論理による整合性・不整合性であり、またミュージシャンが音楽における手法の幅を広げる上でそのような問題にどう挑戦したかである、と主張する。

キーワード：作曲、即興演奏、構造、活動、独創性、ジャズ、音楽理論、全音階主義、半音階主義

“Improvisation enjoys the curious distinction of being both the most widely practised of all musical activities and the least acknowledged and understood.... ‘It was always a powerful force in the creation of new forms and every historical study that confines itself to the practical or theoretical source... without taking into account the improvisational element in living musical practice, must of necessity present an incomplete, indeed a distorted picture.’”

(Bailey 1993, p. ix)

Introduction

Commonly, composition and improvisation are viewed as disparate, mutually antagonistic, procedures for creating music; in this perspective the former is considered accounted for theoretically, and the latter is thought only understood or, more correctly, possible in practice. This ironically conceives the failure of composition as ensuing from competence, not incompetence, and that competence is considered determining and destructive for music making in general, and for

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creativity in particular.

The processes of creativity and change in any field of human endeavours have proven to be extremely problematic to understand retrospectively, let alone to foresee. By its very nature, creativity implies going beyond current circumstances, understandings, and practices, to something hitherto undreamt of, therefore any difficulties encountered while trying to apprehend and predict it are very real. Nevertheless, such difficulties, no matter how intractable they may seem, must not, as a consequence, be assumed utterly impossible to solve. Consequently, it is argued here that description of improvisation a) as music making by practice that is impossible to understand without destroying it in the process, and b) in terms of freedom, especially in order to rescue creativity within, either generally or in specific manifestations of, music are wholly mistaken.

This paper examines the oppositional contrast described, or prescribed, between composition and improvisation, drawing comparisons with the structure and agency dualism in social theory, to illuminate errors in viewing them as polar opposites. It is argued that the resort to improvisation to answer questions of change and creativity, on the assumption that improvisation is free of constraint, unlike composition, is illusory. It does this by detailing inconsistencies in this opposition of composition and improvisation, which shows that the latter is as dependent on preceding structures and practices of music making as the former, and that both have potential to facilitate creative music making. It is contended that creativity results from logically and rationally confronting the problems, logical contradictions and apparent misunderstandings encountered in any social and natural circumstances, not inherently from specific procedures. From here, the paper traces the early structure of jazz, details some of the limitations and contradictions encountered within the rationality of the structure of early jazz, and the ways that musician strove to deal with these, in consequence creating new resources for jazz musi-

cians to experiment with and explore. The practical way musicians logically teased out and tackled these problems is argued to have led first to Big Band jazz, from the mid-1920s, whereupon similar processes led to the creation of Bebop in the early 1940s. Awareness of the limitations, contradictions, essentially problems encountered in music making and a willingness to tackle these square on led to the expansions of expressive musical capacities and resources in jazz¹.

Theoretical Impasse

Commonly, composition and improvisation are viewed as two distinct, mutually antagonistic, procedures for fashioning music; in such a view the former is considered to be accounted for theoretically, and the latter only understood, only possible in practice. Ironically, that very understanding of composition is conceived as determining and destructive for improvisation. Composition is routinely considered to be producing music in notation in accord with founded theory prior to actual performance, when musicians actualise the score in sound. Improvisation is routinely viewed as the spontaneous creation of music by performance; one dictionary of music defines it colloquially and charmingly as:

"The creation of music 'on the spot', as it is being performed - making up music as one goes along."
(Bennett 1995)

Jazz musicians can appear to concur with such a view; the trumpeter Doc Cheatham:

"When I play a solo, I never know any more about what I am going to play than you do."

(quoted in Berlin 1994, p. 2)

With composition musicians are viewed as disciplined performers of a piece already complete in notation preceding performance:

"Orchestral players are 'trained' (a significant term) in the skills of reading music from complex scores, and interpreting it according to the minute instructions of a 'conductor'; soloists are celebrated for their ability not only to perform,

but to memorise lengthy concertos provided by 'composers'. (Martin 1986, p. 1)

On the other hand, with improvisation, it is implied, when not asserted, that music is conjured out of the air, limited only by the skills and imagination of the musician(s); by those trained in the European classical lineage improvisation is thought an *ad hoc* exercise, lacking forethought and system, therefore it is insubstantial; by its theorists and practitioners the potency and creativity of improvisation is considered infinite. This viewed composition, is music written to musical theory and convention, and improvisation is hostile to both. Therefore, musicians playing classical, composed music need to reach appropriate levels of technique and circumspection to respectfully reproduce the music of the composer; whereas improvisers need the intuitive application of technique to instinctively create music and transmute performance errors into novel, creative musical sounds. One writer and prominent practising improviser wrote:

"...there is no general or widely accepted theory of improvisation and I would have thought it self-evident that improvisation has no existence outside of its practice.... 'the player performs not according to the "theory of practice", but intuitively, according to the "practice of practice", wherein the dictates of traditional procedures are integrated according to his immediate mood and emotional needs.'"

(Bailey 1993, p. x)

Thus, from proclaiming that improvisation is as equally widely practised as it is misunderstood, Bailey continues that it is, *a priori*, beyond human comprehension; indeed even to approach comprehension, explanatory success, threatens its death. It was comprehension of musical practice, Bailey argues, that killed improvisation within Western classical music¹¹ (a murder he attributes primarily to the application of notation, and, secondly, to the rise of the conductor, to this Martin adds specialisation, and teleological rationalisation), a music which subsequently petrified everything that it came into contact with:

"Formal, precious, self-absorbed, pompous, harbouring rigid conventions and carefully preserved hierarchical distinctions; obsessed with its geniuses and their timeless masterpieces, shunning the accidental and the unexpected: the world of classical music provides an unlikely setting for improvisation."

Later:

"The larger part of classical composition is closed to improvisation... as its antithesis..."

(Bailey 1993, pp. 19 & 59)

By implication, improvisation is not these things, it is informal, extrovert, unconventional, democratic, without master geniuses, time bound, open, and welcoming of the accidental and the unexpected. Logically, in this view, composition is the conveyance of a procedure for reproducing, not creating, music, both in its written and performance manifestations; whereas improvisation is concerned with the *ad hoc* creation of music whose creativity is inexplicable in terms of preceding patterns and practices, it is creative despite these because it allows the unexpected and the accidental to enter; thus the appearance of creativity is of the unexpected and the accidental. Bailey does not give the slightest consideration to the possibility that the problem with western classical composition may in actual fact have been a lack of, rather than of, adequate rational, coherent understanding.

That the theory of composition was in any way inadequate, and overly limited for the functions of making music and providing adequate expressive musical resources, is not considered possible or debilitating, it is composition *per se* that is at fault. Moreover, the argument throughout the book is that it is the competence that composition and its requirements of musicians that is at fault; competence not incompetence, adequacy not inadequacy are argued to be the source of failure, and that with improvisation there is no such thing as mistake; mistakes are creative. This is quite an absurd position for anyone to advance. While the criticism of institutional conservatism and dogma-

tism, as this too applies to audiences, may have purchase, wholesale condemnation of European classical music does not; after all it has far from ossified and now, in consequence, faces an identity problem. The other side of the coin is that improvisation is not intrinsically creative, there are many examples of music making without pre-composed music sheets that are not creative; furthermore while it is easy to indicate that much blues and rock improvisation are far from being creative, the distinction between idiomatic and non-idiomatic improvisation does not rescue creativity for improvisation be restricting it wholly or completely to the non-idiomatic.

While commonplace, such a contrast is ill-conceived, and founded in lack of understanding of the processes of composition, improvisation and creativity. With composed music, no two performances of a piece are entirely the same, either performed by the same or different individuals; for by circumstantial environmental factors, notation is only a more or less precise guide for performers to interpret, such will inevitably be interpreted then modified when the performance, especially practice, affects sensibilities of aspects of intonation, etc. Furthermore, a music performance is an interpretation of a piece, the conductor and/or the performer(s), depending on the music, face the necessity to interpret according to, a) how they reason the composer intended the piece to sound, be performed, and b) how they imagine it should sound, or be performed; neither are timeless as both vary with cultural sensibilities and individual, creative, initiatives to give the music life or meaning, or whatever else, over time.

As for improvisation, no musician ever completely creates music on the spot; through the considerable time invested in learning their instrument(s), they master the techniques, phrasings, harmonic and rhythmic possibilities, etc., of the instrument(s), along with the theory of music and music making; these they memorise and bring to performance. Musicians who perform with little or no written score necessarily extensively practise

and/or rehearse performances alone or in a group, prior to performing appropriate to their ambition for performance success. Acknowledging such of improvisation, Bailey proposed idiomatic and non-idiomatic improvisation; the former conducted within a style, e.g., baroque or jazz improvisation, and the latter, free of such styles, "...is most usually found in so-called 'free' improvisation and, while it can be highly stylised, is not tied to representing an idiomatic identity." (1993, pp. xi-xii) Nevertheless, this does not help matters much, for by that stylisation is admitted into the definition of non-idiomatic improvisation, implying idiomatic content if not form, the attempt to avoid idiom is itself idiomatic. ¹¹¹

In reality no actual music making accords with such conceptions of improvised or composed music, moreover while the solution may appear to be to conclude that actual music making is closer to one or other of these ideal types, this acknowledges rather than solves the problem. By defining improvised music as music fabricated in performance, it is expected that improvisation is free of conscious and/or rational constraints, creative. With any coherent style of music, its coherent resources cannot easily themselves explain the style's abandonment or transformation. Nor does a shift from production to reception aesthetics offer a solution to this problem; a coherent explanation of a style, at a minimum, implies a reception element to account for its success, even if this is only of the music's power, expressive capacities, etc.; expected even if the only audience is the musician. The difficulties impeding a continuum solution echo those encountered in the social sciences over the concepts of structure and agency. Structural theory, like compositional theory, highlights a coherence that is causal and persistent over time; structure can be understood and applied to predict outcomes, invoking constraining, necessary factors as providing good reason. Thus structure, as compositional theory, should explain the occurrence of social, musical, forms, practices and responses. Agency, like improvisation, high-

lights human freedom, freedom entails choice, whereas structure, like composition, entails guided choice. However:

“No theory of action dispenses with structure as a category, nor can theories of structure dispense with action, but each category occurs in the other as a contradictory deficiency, even in those approaches which insist that the categories are mutually meaningful and mutually necessary.” (Holmwood and Stewart 1991, p. 89)

Applying diametrically opposed categories of composition and improvisation^{1v} to music making incurs identical difficulties. With structural explanations, when actual behaviours do not conform agency is evoked to account for these, making agency incoherent and irrational respecting the structural accounts; with action explanations the movement is converse. With both approaches, action is the source of creativity and change, rendering these three categories meaningless in terms of the proffered explanations. Similarly, with composition; compositional, diatonic, theory can explain music making which accords with it, not that creative and divergent from it. Thus, it is impossible to coherently account for the formation and transformation of jazz, especially the very rapid and varied post-1940s transformation, with diatonic theory; many features of post-1940s jazz are roundly forbidden by diatonicism.

Martins, approaching improvisation from a sociological perspective, makes these difficulties and the explanatory movement very apparent. Attempting to show that improvisation is a feature of everyday life, acknowledging that neither it nor creativity are satisfactorily explicable in terms of individual genius, or the psychology thereof, he properly wishes to locate both firmly within a context of music socially, and this is where the problems, which have widespread currency within social theory, are manifested:

“...there is an important element of improvisation in *all* social action.... the actions of individuals cannot be explained simply as responses to ‘external’ forces (such as social-structural

pressures) or ‘internal’ ones (such as psychological or biological drives). The point is echoed in the work of Bourdieu: ‘To consider regularity, that is, what occurs with a certain measurable *frequency*, as the product of a consciously laid-down and consciously respected *ruling*... or as the product of an unconscious *regulating* by a mysterious cerebral and/or social mechanism, is to slip from the model of reality to the reality of the model...’ However thoroughly individuals are socialised, however well they know the ‘rules of the game’, or however frequently the ‘same’ behaviour occurs, social actors always have the capacity to do something different, and, moreover, constantly face the practical problems of interpreting situations so as to formulate appropriate responses. Such responses, too, must be successfully *enacted*: there is all the difference in the world between a puppet and an actor. So from this point of view all conduct is, in an important sense, improvised.”

(Martins 1996, p. 6)

Improvisation, like most social behaviour, cannot be explained in terms of crucial social processes (e.g., musical theory, peer pressures and expectations, earlier modes of social action and reproduction), thus improvisation, as social action, is free of these social constraints. The social model for explaining the practice of improvisation, action, does not fit actual practices found in reality, thus to consider that they do is to give the model a reality it does not have in actuality. Why, the question arises but is not seriously addressed by Martins, seldom is it within social theory generally, is the evidence of social reality not brought to bear against the model such that the model is appropriately modified to fit the reality it is intended to explain, rather than locating actual behaviours in terms of their contravention of a flawed model? Indeed, to say that all social action is improvised, is to say that all social action contravenes social processes, and improvisation is determined as contrary to competent and informed music making; improvisation becomes determined by one of its

qualities; making do.

Indeed, Martins takes us on a merry-go-round of the inexplicable while asserting substantial success in clarifying improvisation:

“Viewing musical improvisation as a special case of the ordinary collaborative practice through which social order is sustained goes some way towards its demystification, and may serve to shift the focus of creativity of a few individuals (although I am not denying the importance of this) towards an understanding of improvisation as an activity which is embedded in a particular normative order and which is realised through interactional processes.”

(*ibid.* p 7)

But he has already defined improvisation, indeed all social action in terms of lack of fit with social practices, in what significant way can it be said that either are made meaningful by embedding them in social processes? Nowhere is this more apparent than in dealing with the major innovators, who by definition must transcend current practices:

“It should be said that this shift does not entail a denial of the remarkable creativity of figures such as Bechet or Armstrong, or Lester Young, Charlie Parker, or John Coltrane and the other acknowledged masters of the jazz tradition. On the contrary what is significant... is that such massively influential figures *are* generally recognised as extraordinary, and that *most* improvisation in that tradition is taken as displaying normal and recognisable competence...”

(*op cit.*)

Recognition of the ‘extraordinary’ achievements of these players is neither explanation nor proper evaluation of them, especially when that is set within widespread bafflement of what exactly is going on with improvisation; indeed when such bafflement is a requirement for improvisation and social action within the social theory purportedly explaining them; in terms of the social theory they are rendered meaningless as social practices. This social theorisation, simply makes apparent

what was at the heart of Bailey’s account of improvisation.

Further insight can be gained from this parallel with agency; conceiving improvisation as free and creative, in contrast to knowledgeable composition, confuses the distinction Weber made between value rational action and purposive rational action, to account for behaviours contrary to rational, structural, explanatory expectations, in turn making musical expression the expression of socially dislocated values. The ends of value rational action are located outside socially rational structures, being chosen to values rather than to consequences, the values have to be dislocated otherwise they would lose their value rational action identity; they are made superfluous to the rational structure of the social order otherwise they would be ends of purposive rational action. Improvisation is advanced here, like value rational action is by Weber, to account for actors’ behaviours, here of musicians and/or composers, that are non-rational within a theoretical framework of compositional, perhaps diatonic, theory, by ascribing them with ends determined by values outwith theory commensurate ends. Actors, musicians, are said to choose the value of improvisation over composition to guide their practice, indeed are required to do, because of its creative and expressive potency. Thus, improvisation, and by necessity creativity and expressiveness, become extra-theoretical values due to their having to be inexplicable by categories meaningful to the theory, consequently they are made to be meaningless for musical practice. Unfortunately, matters are not so easily dispensed with; neither a composition nor an improvised piece can simply be constructed to a personal, dislocated, and, consequently, incorrigible, value; among other matters of significance, the behaviours and their products that value rational action is being asked to explain here are the very ones leading to and constituting a new social order, a new order of music creation. Conceiving such as the result of a value rational action renders not only explanation, but also the outcome

meaningless, little more than a matter of accident.

Performance Jazz: Music as Practical Experimentation

"...honest efforts to discover tentative laws of art.... are necessary..... Our noblest impulse. The impulse to know and understand, makes it our duty to search. And even a false theory, if only it was found through genuine searching, is for that reason superior to the complacent certainty of those who reject it because they presume to know, although they themselves have not searched!" (Schönberg 1978 p. 8)

Until the late 19th century, the theoretical structures that underpinned the composition and performance of Western European, especially classical, music, were diatonic, which was said to be rooted by rational constraints based in natural and/or spiritual law. In creating the music of jazz, musicians marginally modified, but nevertheless made substantial use of, diatonic harmony; i.e., a tonally centred music that moves through inessential dissonance to harmonic resolution within the tempered, diatonic 7 note scale, this they supplemented by limited use of extensions, e.g., 7ths, and some microtones, flattened notes, a strong driving rhythmic regularity most commonly performed in a syncopated 2/4 time signature. Early jazz was harmonic, indeed polyphonic, in construction, the origin of which lay in the predominance of diatonic theory within American music, both secular and religious, in the musicians' musical education by which they acquired the skills to play their instrument, and in the types of music that the early bands, from which jazz bands evolved, were playing; e.g., marches, various dances e.g., waltz, schottische and polka, light classical music, opera, popular music, minstrelsy, church music, e.g., hymnals, gospels, chorales, etc., ragtime, folk music, etc., all of which were harmonic, and much in 2/4 time signatures. The origin of the flattened notes was until recently attributed to the influence of blues, itself

said to be the product of a marriage of African, especially vocal, music and European harmony, on jazz. (e.g., Schuller 1986, Stearns, 1956) However, it is more likely that the blues emerged contemporaneously with jazz, and did not precede it. (c.f., Tirro, 1993, for example) Furthermore, peculiarly the blues scale only appeared in the US, nowhere else where African and European music met. In a similar way syncopation was attributed to the polyrhythms of African music; syncopation, however, is a rather emaciated form of polyrhythm, to say the least, and is not entirely unique to jazz. Many of the early jazz musicians performed, without detailed scores, a highly energetic, if less sophisticated than Baroque manifestations of, contrapuntal polyphony; with all musicians playing voicings of equal weight, with degrees of performance democracy and cohesion.

Where did the impetus for change arise in this music? A number of sources can be cited: First, jazz, an amalgam of different types of music, was born of change through practical experimentation; second, a number of its originators (some of who came to be the major innovators) experienced extreme, employment, discrimination occluding careers in the major classical orchestras in the US, despite their being classically, conservatoire or otherwise, trained and highly skilled (Peretti, 1992, Tirro 1993), turned their aspirations to producing highly sophisticated music in jazz; third, these groups and musicians proud of their abilities and facing competition amongst themselves participated in 'cutting sessions' where groups and musicians would compete to show who was the most skilled, expressive and/or entertaining, impelling improvement; fourth, there was stress on unique individual and group voice; each musician and group was expected to find its own voice, individual expression, to be recognised as truly professional, which requires an element of innovation; fifth, diatonic theory, unique to the European musical tradition, was not completely rigorous, it suffered rational inconsistencies and relied on conventional, *ad hoc* supplementation to support it, its in-

ternal problems provided a source of instability which jazz musicians increasingly explored (Schönberg 1978, Weber, 1958, Lakatos 1980);^v sixth, the musicians held conflicting aims to produce the highest level of musical virtuosity that was expressively, rhythmically and harmonically sophisticated during ensemble performance without detailed, composed musical scores^{vii}; seventh, a social-economic and artistic environment which stressed experimentation, novelty and change; eighth, the newly emerged recording industry began to take interest in jazz from 1917^{viii}, this extended the market, quickened the spread of knowledge of innovation, a canon of tunes, and of superior players recognised as the best in jazz^{ix}; and ninth, creative developments in music other than jazz stimulated change. To deal with many of the problems they encountered, musicians spent considerable time preparing and practising as groups, observed very closely what other groups and musicians were doing, to ensure that they were as up to date in their skills, musical knowledge and expressiveness as the others were. Each factor contributed towards jazz becoming a dynamically changing, not stagnant music.

Initially, changes in jazz were simple; to tackle problems of musical achievement, expression, group concordance, and volume, slowly the number of musicians in the band and the use of notation were increased, followed by modification in the rhythm section's instrumentation. In the front line, from one of each type, numbers slowly expanded to 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 3/4 saxophones, and beyond, the rhythm section was at first piano or banjo, tuba, string bass, and drums, subsequently banjo and tuba were dropped. The altered instrumentation facilitated experimentation with richer, more multi-layered harmonics and tone colours (incorporation of mildly dissonant chords, e.g., dominant 7ths and dominant 9ths, major and minor triads with 6th extensions), based on a more elastic and agile rhythm section, and called for more notation sheets to ensure cohesion. Enhanced reliance on notated mu-

sic guaranteed concordance amongst musicians, enabled refinement of the beat from a 2/4 to 4/4 time signature, and an accelerated harmonic tempo, whereby rather than remain with a single, continuous chord over 8, 12 or 16 bars, pieces were carried through chord changes every other bar. This created the big band sound of scored ensemble choruses interspersed by passages of ensemble supported improvisation by featured soloists, featured to retain some of the excitement of the preceding jazz.

Each band had a composer/arranger (e.g., Don Redman, Duke Ellington), and by the mid-1930s these bands were regularly creating music with enhanced harmonics, reminiscent of, indeed they sometimes drew on, the harmonics of French Romantic music. Duke Ellington and other band leaders and composers aspired to play music of larger forms, for concentrated listening to, in addition to music for dancing; titles including the words concerto, fantasy, suite, etc., began to appear among those they performed. Not new, this trend echoed earlier aspirations of musicians that went all the way back to Joplin's efforts at orchestral forms, (Tirro 1993) and, integral to the experimental leanings, was the origin of jazz becoming an art music^x. In the solo spots there were noted virtuosi such as saxophonists Coleman Hawkins, Johnny Hodges, Ben Webster, Lester Young, trumpeters Louis Armstrong and Roy Eldridge, for example. These instrumentalists had attained a high reputation among musicians and the public. However, to retain that respect they could not rest on their laurels, they were always in danger of being eclipsed by other, perhaps next generation of, musicians who displayed superior skills and inventiveness. Thus, they stretched their solo's potential, experimenting harmonically by sporadically incorporating 9th, 11th and 13th harmonic extensions; these extensions followed the logic of dissonance, of disruption, of the original modifications of diatonicism; if 7ths and flattened notes which were prescribed as dissonant by diatonicism, could be found to create specific ex-

pressive patterns, the question followed as to how a 9th would sound in the same or similar position, next an 11th, then a 13th. The problem that then produces is to find what is necessary to ensure that there is not complete derangement of the harmonic foundation that the solo rises from. Reaching for new harmonic patterns was true for both composers and featured soloists; it was not something unique to improvising musicians, nor was it the consequence of error; it was firmly rooted within the confines of acceptable harmonic theory of the time, even as it overstepped that theory, tentatively at first.

Simultaneously, some other instrumentalists experimented; bassist Jimmy Blanton began to explore the effect of periodically, playing notes other than the roots of the harmonies, adding non-harmonic passing notes to supplement the walking bass line technique^{x1} and take the bass into the area of creating solo lines, and the drummer Jo Jones occasionally shifted the maintenance of the pulse from the bass drum to the high-hat allowing faster, subtler rhythmic support of soloists. These changes in the rhythm section, the more refined division of the bar, the predominant 4/4 time signature, with subtle anticipation of the beat and syncopation brought considerable forward momentum, furthermore, given the experimental, ambitious inclinations of the musicians in jazz, all pointed onwards to a more virtuosi, dissonant, harmonically complex and polyrhythmic jazz. While the big bands had greatly contributed to enriching the musical resources available to jazz, to further development in the musical knowledge and skills of musicians, and had created a coherent music, with opulent, tense tone-colourings and harmonic enhancements, as Adorno pointed out, dissonance springs from consonance and big bands depended on the apparent consonance of diatonic harmony for the effectiveness of their mildly or occasionally greater dissonant intervals, for the efficacy of their enriched harmonies and for the overall integration of the musicians. Moreover they required substantial audiences to support so

many musicians on the bandstand^{x11}; to pay players' salaries, touring costs, etc., and audiences remained wedded to mildly modified diatonicism. Both aware of some of these difficulties and of the potential variety of expression that the resources of the big band afforded, leaders such as Benny Goodman and Duke Ellington deployed sub-ensembles of the total band to explore the expressive capabilities of each. Nevertheless, creative development and change came from, a) radically confronting the contradictions, limits, and problems within big band music, and b) similarly further transcending the confines of diatonicism in harmony and rhythmic patterns.

From the late 1920s until the early 1940s, big bands dominated jazz music, however their innovations provided a musical logic suggestive of future developments, at the same time as they came to feel insufficiently expressive and adventuresome to some musicians. If anything Bebop musicians heralded not art in jazz but modern art, which took a cue from experimental science and with all of its accelerated ethics of rebellion and constant change:

"There was the vision of modernism as an unending permanent revolution against the totality of modern existence: it was "a tradition of overthrowing tradition"... This obviously tells part of the truth, but it leaves... out all the affirmative and life-sustaining force that in the greatest modernists is always inter-woven with assault and revolt... the triumphant last chorus of Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*; Alyosha Karamazov, in the midst of chaos and anguish, kissing and embracing of the earth; Molly Bloom bringing the archetypal modernist book to an end with "yes I said yes I will Yes."

(Berman 1982, pp. 30-31)

Again, the future was created out of dealing with the problems inherent in the limitations and contradictions, and built on the resources and logic, of the past. Experimentation, and considerable efforts by musicians such as Charlie Parker alto saxophone; Dizzy Gillespie trumpet; Thelonious

Monk, Bud Powell, Al Haig, and Tadd Dameron piano; Charlie Christian guitar; Oscar Pettiford and Slam Stewart bass; Kenny Clark and Max Roach drums, to cite a few, created Bebop: what makes these musicians geniuses is that they were unwilling to simply accept the problems, inconsistencies and expressive limitations inherent within the music they encountered; their genius derives from their confronting and overcoming them. The music evolved over an extended period, beginning at the end of the 1930s, crystallising into a tentative structure between 1940 to 1944, when the first clearly novel recordings appeared. Here, I will focus on the logic of the music played to explain the emergence of Bebop and the visions of new lands that it laid before musicians who followed, some of which appeared filled with dangerous and uncertain terrain. A solo recording by the pianist Thelonious Monk of his piece *'Round Midnight*, reveals the steady, trial and error of an experimental approach in the six takes preceding the finished one, 21 minutes, of Monk searching out the apposite rhythmic and harmonic structure of the piece.^{x111} The major innovations of Bebop were, first, harmonic; second, rhythmic; third, virtuosic;^{x1v} and fourth, ensemble size.

The experiments with the logic inherent in the initial jazz musicians' modifications to diatonic harmonies (the addition of 7th extensions, flattened notes, etc.), were carried further than the occasional additions of more distant harmonic extensions of big band composers and adventurous soloists. Once observed as possible, in their search to expand the musical resources available to jazz to make it a more flexible and expressive music, some musicians perceived the logic and effect of making use of distant intervals more fundamental to jazz. With big band jazz, these extensions occasionally employed, represented intermittent grey clouds in a blue sky, and remained anchored within diatonic harmony, even while they were pulling away from it; with Bebop their appearance more regular, the sky became more cloudy and tumultuous, and the pretence and con-

tradition of adhering closely to a supposedly natural diatonic scale and harmony abandoned.^{xv} From being dissonant pepperings within an essentially diatonic jazz, 9th, 11th and 13th extensions became integrated into the logic of dissonance and jazz chromaticism. Through chromaticism musicians experimented with; tonal ambiguity (sometimes employing the ambiguity of enharmonics^{xvi} to achieve that effect); sometimes abandoning any hint of a tonal centre whatsoever; the use of odd, for diatonic theory, intervals such as 2nds and parallel 6ths to create motifs of harmony and dissonance; introduced chords far removed from those prevailing; made sudden leaps of register in solo passages, for example. The quickening of harmonic tempo in big band jazz, accelerated even faster to the point where two or more chords to a single bar were not uncommon. The overall effect of these harmonic changes was a magnificently enhanced expressive range and potential, but especially for those embedded within the hearing experience of diatonic theory and big band jazz, the effect was of a greatly heightened dissonance^{xvii}, indeed some contended that this was not jazz music, simply not music.

The initial changes in the rhythmic pattern and the functions of different instruments found in big band jazz above were extended by the Bebop musicians to create the first truly polyrhythmic jazz; while mostly in 4/4 time signatures, syncopation could begin on the 1st and 3rd beat, the soloist shift emphasis^{xviii} to the 2nd and 4th, before returning it to the original pattern; or, alternately all notes in the bar could receive equal weight; instrumentalists experimented with varying accents on beats out with the underlying pattern in an apparently irregular manner; sometimes the instrumentalist would play slightly before or behind the fundamental beat; the pianist would play on and off-beat comping patterns, and the drummer shifted time keeping away from the bass drum completely to the high hat, using the bass and other drums to inject disruptive beats^{xix}, all of this was accompanied by accelerated tempos^{xx}. Pre-

viously responsibility for rhythmic unity fell to the ensemble playing of piano, bass and drums, with the freeing of the piano and the drums from that duty, rhythmically, responsibility for holding everything together fell to the bassist, who tended to play walking bass lines maintaining a more regular pulse than any of the other musicians.

The rapidly played, polyrhythmically shifting, chromatic lines, built on an underlying chord structure, a chord structure which even when derived from well-known popular songs of the time was embellished with distant extensions and characterised by an accelerated harmonic tempo (nothing of the extremely slow chord movement of early jazz, even the chordal changes of big band jazz supported by detailed arrangements were simple by comparison), of Bebop demanded extremely high levels of musicianship. In playing Bebop, at most hastily scribbled lead sheets with little more than the underlying chord structure, often the chord structure of a popular or some other tune, were provided; what was required was an extensive knowledge of jazz and other musical traditions, a deep knowledge of harmonics, a high level of musicianship, and an ability to empathise with and anticipate the other musicians actions.

Overall, the tone of the music was more highly dissonant to the ears than any jazz preceding it, intentionally so; however, there is no dissonance without consonance, and vice versa:

“Harmony presents something as actually reconciled which is not. In so doing it violates the postulate of appearing essence which the ideal of harmony aims at. The historical emancipation from harmony as an ideal has been an important aspect of the developments of art’s truth content.”
(Adorno, 1984 p. 161)

All of these changes in the music immediately preceded, and continued into the first few years of, the second world war, a period fraught with racial tension in the US. It may be suggested that a society at war with other nations and with itself is unlikely to produce tales of harmony in its arts, but frequently though such an explanation is ad-

vanced, seldom is it read with full conviction. Diatonic harmony carries with it the illusion of completeness, of a wholeness, that can be perceived as a journey began in search, taken through a tale of finding to the point where the treasure is brought home in the resolution of dissonance at the end. Jazz, a harmonic music of the nether world from the outset, teased its way through the underlying pretence of diatonic harmony to produce a harmony of dissonance and consonance; a music of familiarity and shock. However, it should be well known that jazz did not uniquely make this journey; 20th century European classical music followed a path similar of experimentation.

Of course, the return to music making without detailed scores, at most little more than the chord pattern scribbled down on a lead sheet, saw reductions in the average ensemble size; quintets and quartets became the norm; quintets of saxophone, trumpet, piano, bass and drums; quartets with one of either horn instrument. The jazz group provides mutual support for musicians playing similar music, which is especially important for those breaking into novel, challenging music that is met by hostile response. Similar to the interdependence of fishing crews, who venture forth into the dangerous waters of the open sea with a democratic equality of respect, intention, responsibility and reward existing amongst them, these groups ventured forth into imagined but incharted musical waters, where the winds of success could carry them forward or the storms of failure could sink them as musicians for life.^{xxi} This is precisely what Adorno spoke of when he compared the isms in modern, 20th century, art to the old craft workshops of the masters; the isms in modern art he described as secularised schools that provided individual artists with the social support and mutual respect necessary for them to venture forth to continue to create face of public, aesthetic, hostility to their work.^{xxii} (Adorno, 1984 pp.37-38) While there were notable attempts to create big band Bebop jazz, especially by Dizzy Gillespie in the late 1940s, with varying degrees of success, the

economics of jazz no longer sustained such operations.

Bebop unleashed, as did the undermining of diatonic theory in European classical music, a rapid wave of musical experimentation resulting in further musical explorations, each one taking facets of Bebop, exploring the logic consequences of focusing on these often to great effect. As in European classical music and many other arts in the 20th century, there was an unprecedented series of waves of ever changing creativity that heralded new procedures of making and assessing art, so too in jazz after the 1940s. These, in jazz, were manifested as Cool Jazz, Hard Bop, Third Stream, Modal Jazz, Free Jazz, Experimental Jazz, Fusion Jazz, and numerous others. While, to anyone approaching many of these for the first time, they would seem frighteningly unconnected with earlier music, let alone preceding jazz music, it is very possible to follow an underlying logic, in positive and negative aspects of preceding music, leading to these styles. An example of the way that some of these derived can be provided by free jazz, especially apt as on the surface it is apparently the least subject to logical explanation, given the general view of there being an inherent contradiction between freedom and rational logic, and its supposed defiance of conventional musical practices.

The explanation of the connection between free jazz and Bebop can be found in a number of strands, some inherently musical others social, here I will sketch some of the musical connections. For jazz, Bebop represented the dethronement of diatonicism, with its tonally centred and conventional harmonic, melodic and rhythmic logic. The possibility of creating music without a clear tonal centre, either by making the tonal anchor ambiguous or by doing without it completely and the preference for chromaticism, implied that jazz music could be produced successfully free of a tonal centre and without regard to harmonic progressions, especially those of inessential dissonance and its resolution; free jazz in fact most frequently attempts to avoid these. Second, the

polyrhythmic pattern of Bebop, the way that it shifted the beat and accents around the notes within the bar, at times ignoring the 4/4, or whatever signature, opened the logical possibility of music creating rhythmic patterns that ignored the conventional tonal centre, harmonic movements, and bar lines. One of the earliest examples of this, preceding the free jazz movement by a good many years, can be found in the music of Lennie Tristano, with titles *Intuition* and *Digression*, recorded in 1949, and the appropriately titled *Descent into the Maelstrom*,^{x x i i i} recorded in 1953; here the bar lines are frequently ignored, extended use of the chromatic scale, and, especially with the last, a heady lack of clear underlying harmonic logic, indeed a very apparent strong dissonance is employed. The underlying logic of it owes much to the freedom wrested from music theory for jazz by Bebop musicians, and many of the other jazz explorations also owed a similar debt to Bebop, however, investigation of these will need to be left for later.

Conclusion

This paper challenged the commonly held view that composition and improvisation are disparate, mutually antagonistic, procedures for creating music where the former is considered accounted for theoretically, and the latter only possible in practice. Furthermore, it was argued this ironically conceives the failure of composition as ensuing from competence, not incompetence, and that such is determining and destructive for music making in general, and for creativity in particular. It was argued that while creativity, by its very nature, requires transcendence of current to novel circumstances, understandings, and practices, the very real difficulties this presents, no matter how intractable they may seem, must not be assumed utterly impossible to solve. The same follows for improvisation, any description of improvisation as music making by practice that is impossible to understand fully without destroying it in the proc-

ess, and in terms of freedom, especially in order to rescue creativity within music, either generally or in specific manifestations of music simply because it is difficult to apprehend, are wholly mistaken. The oppositional contrast described, or prescribed, between composition and improvisation, was illuminated by drawing comparisons with the structure and agency dualism found in social theory. The comparison showed that the resort to improvisation to search for answers to questions of change and creativity, on the assumption that improvisation is free of the constraint apparent in composition is illusory. It does this by detailing inconsistencies in this opposition of composition and improvisation, which shows that the latter is no less dependent on preceding forms and practices of music making than the former, and that both have equal potential to facilitate creative music making. It is argued that creativity is the product of logically and rationally confronting the problems, logical contradictions and apparent misunderstandings encountered in any social and natural circumstances, not inherently from specific procedures. The paper traced aspects of the early structure of jazz, detailed some of the limitations and contradictions encountered within the rationality of that structure, and the ways that musician strove to deal with these and, in consequence, created new musical resources for jazz musicians to experiment with and explore. Musicians, by gradually and logically teasing out the means to tackle these problems created, first, Big Band jazz from the mid-1920s, whereupon similar processes brought the creation of Bebop in the early 1940s; at each point awareness of the limitations, contradictions and problems encountered in music making and a willingness to tackle these square on led to the expansion of expressive musical capacities and resources in jazz

Footnotes

¹ This is also true of music generally, as jazz influenced composers and musicians outside itself.

¹¹ Writing this, he is converting practical necessity into necessary procedure.

¹¹¹ Just relates the following anecdote in this respect in his study of free jazz: "A saxophonist was asked to take part in a 'free' jazz session.... he was told to feel free to express himself... he played 'I do Like to be Beside the Seaside' throughout the entire session. Apparently, his associates were extremely angry about this and told him not to come back." (1974 p.8) Playing free jazz does not admit free playing by musicians.

^{1v} In respect of the confining character of composition, in the realm of European classical compositional theory the criticism is entailed by the musical theory of the likes of Schönberg, Boulez, Messiaen, Feldman, Cage, Stockhausen, etc., and is especially trenchantly argued in aleatory compositional procedures, as well as in written justifications of them. A succinct discussion of these matters can be found in Griffiths, 1994.

^v In the early days of jazz, musical education came from schools, churches, professional, semi- and non-professional musicians who gave lessons, students and teachers at musical conservatoires supplementing their incomes by teaching, conservatoire training itself, listening to and copying other musicians, new young members of a band learning from older musicians, and from copying styles and solos heard on recordings, a method that increased in importance as recorded music did. Charlie Parker related that he learned by copying the solos of Lester Young from records and by transposing these into all of the keys on the scale; Dean Benedetti attempted to learn from Charlie Parker by recording him in live performance, afterwards copying and analysing what he recorded on his saxophone. (Most of these have been issued by Mosaic records as, *The Complete Dean Benedetti Recordings*, Mosaic MD7-129 7CD.)

^{v1} Weber most clearly details the rational inconsistencies within the theory and how it evolved over time to patch over some of these; Schönberg through teaching diatonic harmony is equally

pointed in his critique. One interesting point is in the tritone which came to be seen as the worst possible dissonance, also called *diabolus in musica*: Bennett speculates, "As a melodic interval it is very difficult to sing in tune, and was therefore banned by medieval theorists." (1995 p.84) (Presumably, such could have been interpreted as the manifestation of God in music as easily as of the devil.)

^{viii} To avoid clashes the rhythmic and harmonic progression of the music was slowed to a snail's pace and the number of musicians in the band curtailed; constraints such as these undermined their musical ambitions; the honest attempts to overcome them lead to further musical development within jazz.

^{ix} The first jazz recording was of The Original Dixieland jazz band, this can be heard on CD: *The Original Dixieland Jazz Band 1917-1921*. Timeless CBC 1-009. Other examples of early jazz styles are: *Louis Armstrong 1923-1931*. Jazz Classics in Digital Stereo RPCD 618; and *King Oliver Volume One 1923 to 1929*. Jazz Classics in Digital Stereo RPCD 607.

^x Peretti (1992), speaks of players categorising each other according to skills in playing and reading abilities, calling the best musicians professor, and appropriate sub-categories.

^x This is the true source, not the radical transformations of the Bebop musicians, as some contend, if not charge, Gendron argued: "The historical transformation of jazz from an entertainment music to an art music, initiated by the Bebop revolution in the mid-1940s, represents arguably one of the most significant cultural shifts of this century." (Gendron, 1995, p.31) Gendron's view is supportive, others are more hostile, suggesting that Bebop killed jazz, references to some of these can be found in Gendron's article.

^{xi} "Walking bass A purposefully moving bass-line (e.g., *pizzicato* on double bass), pressing forward steadily and continuously, often in notes of equal value (e.g., crochets)." (Bennett 1995, p. 376) Of course, the developments found in big

band jazz of playing passing notes continued in Bebop, with a strong underlying pulse.

^{xii} This audience requirement became more acute with the labour shortages of the war raising musician's salaries and limiting the mobility of bands due to fuel and other shortages. (De Veaux 1997, pp. 240-47)

^{xiii} Orin Keepnews, the session producer, noted that Monk was a perfectionist concerning his music, and that the preceding 6 takes revealed Monk's common procedure for creating a piece. Other accounts of Monk's approach can be found in Ponzio & Postif 1995, Gourse 1997. These recordings can be found on *Thelonious Monk. The Complete Riverside Recordings*, Riverside CD, VICJ-60110-60124.

^{xiv} The best recordings to hear these changes in jazz are, for example: *Charlie Parker on Dial Vol. 1 - Vol. 4*, Toshiba-EMI TOCJ-6201-6204; *The Immortal Charlie Parker*, Savoy SV 0102; *The Charlie Parker Story*, Savoy SV 0105; *The Complete Blue Note and Roost Recordings of Bud Powell*, Blue Note CDP 7243 8 30083 2 2; *Thelonious Monk The Complete Blue Note Recordings*, Blue Note CDP 7243 8 30363 2 5.

^{xv} It is possible to track the gradual experimental development of the music by listening to the way that tunes evolved from one recording to another, either as different takes within the same session, or as separate performances of the same piece over a number of years; a classic example of this is the evolution of the popular song *Cherokee* into what became Parker's piece *Koko* (the earliest recordings of *Cherokee*, one recorded at a jam session in a Harlem club early 1942, the next recorded in September of 1942 can be heard on *Young Bird, Volumes One and Two*, Masters of Jazz, Media 7, MJCD 78/79, France, and the first of *Koko* on *The Complete Charlie Parker on Savoy Years*, Nippon Columbia COCY-7579/8, where the first take reveals the origin in *Cherokee*, and the subsequent takes are wholly different.

^{xvi} Enharmonics make use of the fact that the flat of one note is also the sharp of the one beneath it;

in harmonic terms, playing the semi-tone between two notes implies both notes and can be used to ease the music away from the one initially implied as the tonal centre to another, implied as a possible new tonal centre.

^{xvii} The careful experimental, thoughtfulness that went into following the logic, questioning existing logic, can be heard on Thelonious Monk's recording of *'Round Midnight* for the Riverside label in the mid-1950s; here unknown to him his carefully teasing out of the harmonics of the piece undertaken before recording the finished version were being recorded: *'Round Midnight - in progress*, is on disc 3 of *Thelonious Monk, The Complete Riverside Recordings*, VICJ-60110-601124.

^{xviii} Emphasis was varied either by increasing or decreasing the volume of a note, the notes length, the amount of vibrato it received, the timbre, etc.

^{xix} So disruptive were the beats on the bass drum, that when first employed by Kenny Clark, in a big band setting, they became known as 'bombs.'

^{xx} One version Parker played of his piece *Koko*, he played at a metronome marking of 355; a marking of 120 gives 120 beats per minute, two per second; at 355, this represents just under 6 notes per second! This can be heard on *Birds Eyes, the Last Unissued Vol. 17*, Philology CD W 847.2. Later, 7 November, 1955, near his death in a car accident, the trumpeter Clifford Brown played the same piece at a tempo of 410; or one note every 6.8 seconds. This was a private recording, not commercially available at present, although at one time it was issued by Columbia, catalogue number, 35965.

^{xxi} For more in depth discussion of the fishing crew as a successful social and economic unit due to their adventurousness derived from their sharing responsibilities, rewards, and democratic decision making, etc., see Sutherland, 1993.

^{xxii} "It is by no means true that isms have shackled the productivity of the individual. On the contrary, they have augmented it, not the least through collective co-operation." (Adorno, 1984 p. 38)

^{xxiii} The pieces *Intuition* and *Digression*, can be

found on Capitol Jazz CDP 7243 8 52771 2 2, *Descent into the Maelstrom* has long been out of print but was issued on West Wind 8040.

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