On Intergenerational Jazz Performance

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Jazz musicians very often have a strong historical consciousness. In conversation and in writing, they often invoke aspects of their idiom from former times, even if only to acknowledge their personal influences and sources of inspiration, and their music alone often reveals their powerful awareness that their own artistic activities are woven within longer historical strands, rooted in the past and extending into the future. They can even articulate their relationship to history while performing—for instance, by playing compositions or musical figures associated with earlier eras or by quoting a particular melody or recording. What is more, since musicians instantiate genres along with their individual musical idiolects whenever they play, jazz artists inevitably invoke specific eras in their music’s history simply by virtue of whichever particular subgeneric stylistic conventions they deploy: the New Orleans jazz subgenre is associated with the 1920s, swing with the ’30s, bebop with the mid-to-late ’40s, and so forth. What happens, then, when jazz musicians whose habitual styles are grounded in different eras play together? In such cases, their musical interactions—the concurrences, discordances, and compromises arising from their individual and collective socioaesthetic decisions—inevitably involve an interplay between their historically situated subidioms as well as between their individual idiolects. Needless to say, almost all artists, one way or another, grapple with questions of how to position themselves in relation to enduring creative traditions. But in fields such as literature, visual art, and notated musical composition they usually do so as independent individuals, often confronting the aesthetic practices of an immutable past. Improvising musicians instead routinely contend with such issues collectively and find themselves having to execute musical responses in real time. Such performance interactions—between jazz musicians whose subidioms differ—engage the perennially elusive question of jazz’s definition: the points of intersection between their individual styles bespeak their implicit mutual conception of the genre.

I owe many thanks to Lewis Porter.

1 See, for example, Lock 1999; Solis 2008, 63–107; E. Porter 2002; Teal 2012; and Solis 2009, 91–92.

2 Elsdon 2013, 66–75; Murphy 1990; Gabbard 1991; Woideck 1996, 163.

3 For a discussion of musical works or recordings (and, by analogy, performances) as exemplifying genres, see Brackett 2016, 12.

4 Leonard B. Meyer uses the term “dialect” to refer to a musical subidiom, which is constituted by the work of multiple musicians/composers who share distinctive musical attributes within a broader style (1989, 23–25).

5 See, for example, Eliot 1998; Bloom 1973; Brackett 2016, 14; Crouch 2006.

Consider musical projects such as the 1957 meeting between soprano saxophonist Sidney Bechet (1897–1959) and pianist Martial Solal (b. 1927), the 1962 partnership between pianist and composer Duke Ellington (1899–1974) and tenor and soprano saxophonist John Coltrane (1926–67), and the 1963 collaboration between tenor saxophonists Coleman Hawkins (1904–69) and Sonny Rollins (b. 1930). Each of these ventures placed a musician strongly associated with jazz of the pre-World War II period alongside a younger player who was a major figure in postwar jazz—they all stylistically spanned the bebop era of the 1940s, a critical juncture marked by musical innovations that Bernard Gendron has called “that great revolution in jazz that made all subsequent jazz modernisms possible.” All three projects also involved artists with highly distinctive musical sensibilities and thoughtfully-considered conceptions of their own, and their collaborator's, place in jazz's history. And they took place during an era, the late 1950s and early '60s, when long-standing critical debates about jazz’s identity and ongoing transformation were as trenchant and contentious as ever. When examined from the perspective of the artists’ musical choices—their selections of repertoire and of additional sidemen and their treatment of rhythm, melody, harmony, and so forth—as well as their social interrelations—in terms of intersubjective communication, inferred meanings, and felt emotions—these intergenerational collaborations exemplify music’s ability to articulate ideas about its own history, not only through dialogic interpersonal exchange in the here and now, but also diachronically, with the performers positioning themselves in relation to the past and the future, as participants in an ongoing communal endeavor unfolding over the course of time.

Bechet and Solal

The only occasions when the African American saxophonist Sidney Bechet and the French Algerian pianist Martial Solal played together were at two Paris recording sessions in the spring and early summer of 1957. Along with bassist Lloyd Thompson and drummer Al Levitt at the first session, and then Pierre Michelot on bass and Kenny Clarke on drums at the second, Bechet and Solal taped fourteen tracks that

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9 See, for example, Anderson 2007, 49–92. On the critical debates over swing and bebop, see Gendron 2002, 121–57. For a discussion of the reception of free jazz/African American experimentalism, see G. Lewis 2008, 37–50.

10 Fumi Okiji has recently proposed that jazz improvisation can be understood as “re-tell[ing] the story of the jazz tradition … in one’s own voice” (2017, 73).
were released as an album on the Swing/Vogue record label. Recorded under the supervision of Vogue’s founder, the jazz critic and promoter Charles Delaunay, this musical collaboration symbolized a rapprochement of sorts in the wake of a decade-long debate in France over jazz’s history and identity.

Bechet was revered as a premier exponent of jazz as it had been played during its nascent days in his hometown of New Orleans at the dawn of the twentieth century. He had toured Britain and Belgium with Will Marion Cook’s Southern Syncopated Orchestra as early as 1919–22 and had first played in France, with Josephine Baker and La Revue Nègre, in 1925, remaining there for four years (including some excursions to other European countries and a spell in jail). After returning to Europe for a performance at the 1949 Paris jazz festival—which also featured some major American swing and bebop musicians such as Oran “Hot Lips” Page, Charlie Parker, and Miles Davis—he settled in France permanently. During his final decade he became a major celebrity in his adopted country. He also completed work on his autobiography, Treat it Gentle, published posthumously, which depicts his music as strongly rooted in his social origins—as essentially an ancestral inheritance. “I felt when I settled in France that it was nearer to Africa,” he reflected in the book’s final pages. “And I suppose too that being there is nearer to all my family and brings back something that I remember of [my grandfather] Omar and my father too.”

Martial Solal was born and grew up in northern Africa, where his forebears had resided for several generations as part of French colonial Algiers’s Jewish community. Relocating to France in 1950, a year after Bechet, he rapidly established himself as a strikingly original virtuoso keyboard improviser on Paris’s vibrant modern jazz scene; he remains an internationally-recognized innovator to this day. The jazz community in the French capital was, during the years after World War II, quite factionalized between musicians who played New Orleans/Dixieland jazz and practitioners of the then-new style known as bebop—Solal later described it as a “war between ‘ancients’ and ‘moderns,’” invoking the artistic “querelle” of late-seventeenth-century France. The divisions were even more polarized among critics, who were engaged in a fractious debate that paralleled the vociferous dispute between

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11 Bechet and Solal, Sidney Bechet–Martial Solal.
12 On Delaunay, see Legrand 2009; and Legrand 2013.
19 “La guerre des anciens et des modernes” (Prévost 2005, 49). Singer Annie Ross (b. 1930), a resident of Paris during the early 1950s, recalled that “at that time in Paris, there was a huge gap between Dixieland and modern jazz” (Ross 2011, 34). On the original “querelle” in France, see DeJean 1997.
“moldy figs” and modernists in the U.S. during the same period. In France, this schism was chiefly personified by two influential polemicists: Delaunay, who viewed jazz’s contemporary styles as a positive, natural evolutionary outgrowth of their musical antecedents; and Hugues Panassié, Delaunay’s fellow co-founder of France’s Hot Club organization and an ardent partisan of New Orleans jazz who denigrated swing as commodified entertainment and bebop as corrupted by European aesthetics.

It was in fact Delaunay who invited Bechet to France in 1949, signing him to play a double bill opposite Charlie Parker, the premier bebopper, at Paris’s Salle Pleyel, and thereafter serving as the older musician’s manager.

It is not clear exactly how Bechet and Solal eventually came to record together in 1957. According to the American critic Martin Williams the project had been the saxophonist’s idea, but both Solal and Delaunay separately claimed responsibility for having initially proposed it. Whatever the case, both musicians apparently took an open-minded view of jazz’s postwar stylistic pluralism. Bechet had, in early 1949, lauded bebop as “the best thing that ever happened to jazz” and Solal said, a few years after making the 1957 recording, that he had “wanted to prove that any style of jazz could be played with any other”; more recently, the pianist has declared that “when a music is played well, one can blend the styles without any problems.” They recorded the album quickly, with little rehearsal—Solal remembered completing a session of eight tracks within less than two hours—and they chose exclusively to play jazz standards such as “Exactly Like You,” “All The Things you Are,” and “It Don’t Mean a Thing.”

There is relatively little surviving record of what Bechet, who died two years later, thought of the proceedings, but Solal, when asked by Williams whether he had played “more conservatively” while accompanying the saxophonist, replied, “Oh, perhaps I tried, but I can’t even when I try.”

By and large, each musician remained true to his customary way of playing. Yet since both sessions feature a bebop-style jazz rhythm section, the musical setting is much more Solal’s home turf than Bechet’s. Whenever Bechet steps aside while Solal solos with the bassist and drummer, the tracks basically become modern jazz piano

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24 Thompson 1949. Quoted in Chilton 1996, 212–13. It is worth noting that, in the same interview with Thompson, Bechet also made clear that he did not think musicians versed in other styles ought to take up playing bebop. Elsewhere, Bechet expressed greater skepticism toward the sorts of arranged big-band music that was popular during the swing era (see Bechet 2002, 140–41; quoted in D. Lewis 1997, 172).
26 “Lorsqu’une musique est bien jouée, on peut mélanger les styles sans problème” (Prévost 2005, 49).
27 Williams 1970, 122; Chilton 1996, 278.
trio performances, with the pianist improvising in his characteristic idiosyncratically bebop-inflected manner. The saxophonist states most of the head melodies, some of which are supported with accompanimental “hits”—synchronized accents—by the rhythm section (e.g., “Jeepers Creepers”) or supplemented with pre-arranged introductory material played soli with Solal (e.g., “Pennies from Heaven”). Although listeners who are accustomed to hearing Bechet’s signature operatic vibrato, full-bodied tone, and regal phrasing in New Orleans-style settings may find it jarring to hear him playing with a postwar rhythm section, the saxophonist generally sounds at ease. As an accompanist, Solal is as individualistic as he is as a soloist, but his comping is nonetheless sensitive, adeptly supporting Bechet without being overly intrusive: on “All of Me” and “Rose Room,” he provides effective, active background textures as well as complementary fills between the saxophonist’s phrases. Even so, the pianist’s harmonic palette is markedly more chromatic than Bechet’s, sometimes incorporating quite pungent dissonances. A rubato introduction to “All The Things You Are,” with the bassist and drummer tacet, finds Solal employing a variety of complex harmonies—ninth and eleventh chords, tritone substitutions, and other harmonic alterations and displacements—while Bechet gracefully renders Jerome Kern’s melody quite faithfully, with just a few ornamental adornments and flourishes.

The two musicians occasionally exchange short improvised phrases, finding subtle ways to interact responsorially while each still remains faithful to his own characteristic way of playing. When Solal weaves several trills within an improvised four-bar phrase on Gershwin’s “The Man I Love” (1:21), Bechet echoes them with a series of double sixteenth-note pitches; the pianist follows by repeating a falling melodic leap from C to E-flat (1:40), which the saxophonist immediately elaborates with a reiterated figure descending from C through A-flat and G to F. On “These Foolish Things,” a call-and-response episode begins with two-bar exchanges: Solal initially accents pairs of eighth notes—each ornamented with a mordent prefix—on beats two and four of each bar (0:59), and Bechet echoes them. Towards the end of the tune’s bridge the saxophonist plays a virtuosic figure in sixteenth-note triplets (1:32); Solal responds with a succession of adventuresome harmonic substitutions. The pianist’s own characterization of the partnership, as one of “peaceful coexistence” (“la coexistence pacifique”29) seems apt: the musicians are unfailingly mutually sympathetic without ever attenuating their individual artistic voices.

Bechet and Solal’s collaboration was favorably received by American critics such as Williams and Whitney Balliett; the pianist recalled it as “a big success in Europe, my best selling record.”30 By presenting Bechet in a modern jazz setting, the album cast the saxophonist in a progressive mold. Williams believed that the older musician’s approach to rhythm had evolved over time, growing “less like, say, King

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29 Prévost 2005, 49.
Oliver’s and more dixielandish and more like middle swing through the years.”

Along the same lines, Delaunay contended that Bechet’s “harmonic conceptions were bolder than those of many of his contemporaries,” making him well suited to playing with younger musicians whose style was of a more recent vintage. All in all these 1957 recordings impart a conception of jazz’s history as, to use Scott DeVeaux’s term, an entelechy—an actualization of its original latent potential. That is, the New Orleans style, here personified by Bechet, exceptional though he was, evidently possesses certain core features—duple-meter swing and tonal harmonic progressions, principles of improvisation and responsorial interaction, and so forth—that have endured within jazz as the music evolved during the first half of the twentieth century. According to this interpretation, these basic elements constitute the idiom’s stable essence, and in practical terms they provide common musical ground enabling performers of different generations whose styles otherwise greatly differ to play together with successful results. Jazz, so conceived, has reached its destiny as a universal music, not irrevocably tied to any particular historical era, geographical locale, or social community. As a preeminent figure associated with the music’s roots—its original time, place, and cultural milieu—Bechet is cast as an ancestral progenitor, a progressive forerunner of a contemporary global art form.

**Ellington and Coltrane**

By the early 1960s Duke Ellington had established himself as a totemic figure in the jazz pantheon, with an illustrious forty-year career as a composer, arranger, popular songwriter, bandleader, and pianist. As busy as ever with concert tours, major composition projects, and film score commissions, he also found time to record regularly, including several discs that teamed him with other prominent jazz artists: Louis Armstrong and Count Basie in 1961, and, in the space of a few weeks during the late summer and early fall of 1962, albums with Coleman Hawkins, Charles Mingus together with Max Roach, and saxophonist John Coltrane. Coltrane had,

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31 Williams 1958.

32 “Ses conceptions harmoniques étaient plus hardies que celles de beaucoup de ses contemporains” (Delaunay 1985, 190).


34 For a thorough discussion of the universalist conception of jazz in postwar France, see Braggs 2016, 157–200.

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during the previous half decade, been in jazz’s vanguard, pioneering modal improvisation and establishing himself as a tenor and soprano saxophone virtuoso with few peers. His working quartet of the early-to-mid 1960s remains one of the idiom’s most influential ensembles, renowned for its performances’ expansiveness, polyrhythmic complexity, energetic intensity, and sheer emotional force.  

Coltrane had also become a central focus of the latest controversy among critics over jazz’s identity and evolutionary direction. Among this debate’s most notorious salvos was a 1961 article by Down Beat magazine journalist John Tynan, who lambasted the saxophonist’s playing as “musical nonsense” and “a horrifying demonstration of what appears to be a growing anti-jazz trend.” Coltrane was nevertheless steeped in jazz of earlier eras, having grown up admiring the Ellington Orchestra of the 1930s, played in the early 1950s with bands led by Ellington’s alto saxophonist Johnny Hodges and by bebop trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, and, during the second half of that decade, been a key sideman with trumpeter Miles Davis. In his measured rebuttals to the barbed criticisms he faced, Coltrane gave a sense of how he saw his own music and its relationship to jazz’s history. Several months before the recording session with Ellington, the saxophonist questioned whether his detractors properly understood his playing, and he affirmed his music’s affiliation with the jazz tradition on the grounds that it swung—even if somewhat differently from jazz of earlier times. Above all, he sought to validate his music on account of its being a sincere expression of his genuine feelings and individual worldview. “I think the main thing a musician would like to do is to give a picture to the listener of the many wonderful things he knows of and senses in the universe,” he explained. “You just take a situation in life or an emotion you know and put it into music.”

If Coltrane tended to view his music as a medium of individual expression, Ellington regarded his own in more communal terms, as reflective of African Americans’ collective historical experience. “As far as my own music in general is concerned,” he wrote in early 1962, “I would categorize it as Negro music.” He affirmed this conviction with numerous compositions, spanning almost his entire career, that directly confronted aspects of African American history, from Creole Rhapsody (1931) through Black Brown and Beige (1943) to My People, which premiered a year after he recorded the album with Coltrane. When it came to jazz’s historical evolution, Ellington basically subscribed to the orthodox view of the music as having

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Mingus, and Max Roach, Money Jungle (United Artists UAS 15017), rec. 17 September 1962; Ellington and Coltrane, Duke Ellington and John Coltrane.

40 DeMicheal 1962, 22.
42 Lock 1999, 77–118. See also Howland 2009.
progressed through a stylistic succession, but he was steadfastly catholic in his aesthetic tastes, writing admiringly, for instance, of bebopper Dizzy Gillespie, with whom he recorded an album in 1959.\(^43\) He often insisted adamantly that he was “against any attempt to categorize or pigeonhole music,” posited aphoristic principles such as “there are simply two kinds of music, good music and the other kind,” and reasoned “let’s not worry about whether the result is jazz . . . . Let’s just say that what we’re all trying to create, in one way or another, is music.”\(^44\) As for the jazz avant-garde associated with Coltrane and, even more so, “free” players such as Cecil Taylor, the composer once characterized it in archaic terms; according to Mingus, when Ellington was asked whether he would agree to make an “avant-garde” record, he responded by quipping, “let’s not take music back that far . . . . Why not just make a modern record?”\(^45\)

Ellington was not in the least averse, then, to the prospect of recording with Coltrane when the opportunity arose. The project was initially suggested by the composer’s nephew Stephen James, who had introduced his uncle to the saxophonist’s recordings and then suggested the joint venture to Bob Thiele, Coltrane’s producer at the Impulse label (Ellington, temporarily without a long-term recording contract, had recently agreed to make two albums for Thiele—the other was the collaboration with Hawkins).\(^46\) Coltrane had at the time been issuing discs that some listeners and critics, such as Tynan, found relatively challenging and evidently Thiele, with the saxophonist’s assent, proposed that they attempt to record music that would be more accessible, with greater commercial potential.\(^47\) “Impulse was interested in having what they might call . . . a diversified sort of catalog, and I find nothing wrong with this myself,” Coltrane told journalist Frank Kofsky in August 1966.\(^48\) The outcome was two albums showcasing a mellower dimension of the saxophonist’s playing—a collection of ballads and a collaboration with the singer Johnny Hartman—plus the recording with Ellington.\(^49\) Coltrane said that he felt “honored”\(^50\) to work with the older musician, whom he had never met before, and admitted to

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\(^{44}\) Ellington 1993, 326. See also Hasse 1993, 18–19; and Dunkel 2013, 66.


\(^{47}\) L. Porter 1998, 196; Whyton 2013, 51.

\(^{48}\) Kofsky 1998, 446.


\(^{50}\) Dance, Liner notes to \textit{Duke Ellington and John Coltrane}. Quoted in Kahn 2006, 79.
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being “scared to death” Ellington thought the saxophonist “a beautiful cat,” and recalled the session as “very interesting … no hassle, no sweat.”

In contrast to the Bechet–Solal collaboration, which basically transplanted the older, New Orleans-style player into the context of a postwar jazz rhythm section, the Ellington–Coltrane album saw each of the principals bring their own working band’s bassist and drummer to the session: three of the disc’s seven tracks feature Ellington’s regular partners (bassist Aaron Bell and drummer Sam Woodyard), three feature Coltrane’s (bassist Jimmy Garrison and drummer Elvin Jones), and just one performance—the opening rendition of “In a Sentimental Mood”—involves a hybrid rhythm section of Bell and Jones. We therefore have a chance to hear, at different times, both of the featured artists adapting to a very different rhythm section from that of his usual ensemble, an undertaking that would have presented Ellington with the larger range of challenges and opportunities because, as a pianist, he was expected to support an unfamiliar soloist and collaborate on a coequal basis with unfamiliar rhythm section players as well as to solo with unfamiliar accompanists. Nearly five years afterward, the pianist looked back on his experience playing with Coltrane, Garrison, and Jones, reflecting that “there wasn’t really any great difference, for it’s something we’re accustomed to. I mean, we’re accustomed to writing music and adjusting backgrounds to the soloist who’s in the foreground … You have to have unlimited scope on such occasions, because whatever the guy’s going to play, you have to fit in.” On the evidence of the album his approach was fairly judicious, and he exercised a good deal of restraint at times. But, of the two musicians, it was Coltrane rather than Ellington who seemed most decisively to modify and temper his habitual way of playing and to venture farthest beyond his usual repertoire.

Five of the album’s tracks are Ellington’s compositions, a sixth is by his longtime collaborator Billy Strayhorn, and just one (“Big Nick”) is by Coltrane. Three of them are slow or medium-paced ballads: on “In a Sentimental Mood,” the saxophonist’s role is mainly limited to playing the theme—though he improvises more freely on the final eight-bar bridge—whereas on “The Feeling of Jazz” and Strayhorn’s “My Little Brown Book” he is the lone featured soloist, accompanied in both cases by Ellington’s rhythm section. Evidently one strategy for effecting a successful collaboration was for Coltrane to adopt a relatively measured, lyrical approach at moderate tempos, and for the ensemble to use Ellington’s compositions and accompanists (except for when Jones replaces Woodyard on “In a Sentimental Mood”). On the remaining four performances Ellington is fairly circumspect as both a soloist and accompanist. On “Stevie,” a medium-tempo minor blues, he plays the

51 Gleason 1963, 39; Ratliff 2007, 80.
52 Ellington 1973, 244.
53 The first twelve measures of Ellington’s and Coltrane’s performance on this track are transcribed in Cooper 2013, 83.
theme and two more introductory choruses, supported by Bell and Woodyard; once Coltrane enters for a lengthier improvised solo, Ellington’s piano comping behind the saxophonist is quite sparse and restrained. Playing with Jones and Garrison on the other tracks, Ellington’s role is even more limited. His solo on Coltrane’s whimsical two-beat theme “Big Nick” is assured, if not especially adventuresome, and mainly chordally-based—somewhat akin to comping. He hardly solos at all on the up-tempo blues “Take the Coltrane” and the calypso “Angelica,” and in both cases drops out entirely for the saxophone solos, allowing Coltrane to “stroll” with the bassist and drummer (as the saxophonist often did with his regular quartet); at these moments Coltrane, Garrison, and Jones clearly seem less inhibited, playing with greater freedom and intensity.

In comparison to the Bechet–Solal partnership, which is clearly oriented toward a postwar, modern-jazz context that places the older musician furthest from his comfort zone, the Ellington–Coltrane album presents a more symmetrical collaboration, with each artist somewhat adapting to the other’s habitual playing environment. On balance, however, it inclines more toward an inversion of the Bechet–Solal session’s progressive slant. Coltrane compromises more than Ellington does. The collective musical context is more the older musician’s home turf—most of the tunes are his, and rather than modifying his way of playing he simply tends to show forbearance, or even fall silent, when playing with the younger musician’s rhythm section. Coltrane, by contrast, proves to be very capable, on a number of tracks, of adopting a somewhat reserved, laconic, lyrical melodic approach that integrates effectively with Ellington, Bell, and Woodyard. Overall, we are presented with the saxophonist’s conservative side—notwithstanding his characteristically incisive up-tempo solos on “Take the Coltrane” and “Angelica.” And in terms of the widespread evolutionary view of jazz’s development, we find Ellington and Coltrane occupying regions on the music’s chronological path whose principal link, much like that of Bechet and Solal, is the interwar tonal ballad style, rendered with 4/4 swing, an interactive rhythm section, and solo improvisations, at a moderate-to-slow pace. Yet we also hear the musical continuities between these two figures beginning to fray; at times, they no longer appear fully comfortable playing together. Sonically, jazz of the 1960s is beginning to become detached from its precursors. Its strongest ties with its past incarnations are less stylistic than social: for all that Ellington and Coltrane need to rein themselves in in order to collaborate effectively, their shared cultural experience as African Americans always informs their musical expression (recall that Ellington classified his music as “Negro Music”). Bechet and Solal’s 1957 encounter, by contrast, projects a conception of jazz as primarily a set of musical

55 “Stevie” is somewhat similar to another medium-tempo C-minor blues, “Very Special,” which Ellington had recorded less than two weeks earlier with Charles Mingus and Max Roach for the album Money Jungle.

56 One example of the evolutionary conception of jazz’s history is Hodeir 1956, 21–36.
techniques that remains comparatively stable over time, across the globe, and between performers of greatly differing social origins.

Hawkins and Rollins

*Sonny Meets Hawk!,* an LP featuring tenor saxophonists Coleman Hawkins and Sonny Rollins, involved another pair of imposing jazz artists who were a generation apart in age. Like Bechet and Solal, the two horn players were supported by a rhythm section that was stylistically more attuned to the younger musician—Rollins’s working band of the time (pianist Paul Bley, bassists Henry Grimes or Bob Cranshaw, and drummer Roy McCurdy). And as with Ellington and Coltrane’s album, recorded less than a year earlier, Hawkins’s and Rollins’s individual musical languages did not always interface in obvious, self-evidently congruent ways. In other respects, though, the meeting between these two major saxophonists was quite different. Their collaboration was more than a one-off recording project between musicians who had never met before; Hawkins and Rollins had a long personal relationship, and a few days before the album’s 1963 studio sessions they also played live together at the annual Newport Jazz Festival.

Widely esteemed as a seminal figure who played a key role in establishing the saxophone as a jazz instrument, Coleman Hawkins began recording in 1922 and joined the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra a year later. In late 1939, not long after returning to the U.S. after a five-year sojourn in Europe, he recorded an improvisation on “Body and Soul” that soon became regarded as a classic, exceptional during the swing era for its melodic complexity and harmonic chromaticism. Rollins, who was born and grew up in New York, recalls first hearing the disc at the age of ten while standing on the sidewalk outside a bar where it was playing. Around that time, his family moved uptown from central Harlem to Sugar Hill, the neighborhood where Hawkins lived, and by the age of around thirteen or fourteen he had plucked up the nerve to ask the older musician for an autograph. Before

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57 Rollins and Hawkins, *Sonny Meets Hawk!* Two recent academic publications dealing with *Sonny Meets Hawk!* are Rusch, Salley, and Stover 2016; and Davidson 2016.
58 Chilton 1990, 10–20; Magee 2005, 30–33, 140, and passim.
59 Coleman Hawkins, “Body and Soul” (Bluebird B-10523), rec. 11 October 1939.
61 Myers 2014.
62 Ratliff 2008, 34. The Rollins family moved from 69 West 135th Street to 377 Edgecombe Avenue. According to the annual directories of the American Federation of Musicians, Local 802, Hawkins initially lived at 80 St. Nicholas Place, then moved to an apartment at 555 Edgecombe Avenue for around two years and by 1944 had settled at 445 West 153rd Street, on the corner of St. Nicholas Avenue, where Rollins remembers him residing. Myers, 2010. See also Washington, 2013. Rollins discusses his early interactions with Hawkins in the documentary film *A Great Day in Harlem.* See also Rollins 2004.
long, Rollins started regularly stopping by his hero’s nearby apartment to seek out wisdom and playing tips. Eventually, while still underage, he began making his way to New York’s midtown clubs on 52nd Street, where he finally had his first opportunity to hear Hawkins play live, and by the late 1940s he was himself performing and recording professionally. Over the next decade, Rollins emerged as a dominant presence on the postwar jazz scene, one of the foremost practitioners of the virtuosic jazz style that became known as hard bop.

Well after they both had attained international prominence, Hawkins and Rollins each remained highly attuned to new trends in the jazz world. In the 1940s Hawkins had eagerly hired younger, bebop players for his band and by the early '60s he was still often recording with musicians who were decades his junior, including Thelonious Monk (for an album that also featured John Coltrane), Max Roach, and Randy Weston. “I’ve got all that current scene,” he told the critic Stanley Dance in 1962. “If I play with you, I’ve got you. Coltrane, [Eddie] Lockjaw [Davis], Charlie Rouse, Paul Gonsalves, Johnny Griffin—I hear what they’re doing, and I’ve played with all of them. And... I nearly forgot Sonny Rollins. He’s a favorite of mine.”

Rollins, meanwhile, had recently resumed performing after a two-year hiatus and was increasingly exploring the sorts of comparatively latitudinous improvisation that were then being spearheaded by musicians such as alto saxophonist and composer Ornette Coleman, with whom he had played informally in Los Angeles in 1957. He had even hired several of Coleman’s sidemen: drummer Billy Higgins, trumpeter Don Cherry, and pianist Paul Bley. Yet however forward-thinking, Rollins always remained very much aware of the musical continuities linking jazz styles of different eras, commenting in 1959 that “jazz is a thing which is built on what has happened before.”

He felt an especially strong indebtedness to Hawkins, expressing his admiration directly in an October 1962 letter to the older saxophonist. “You have ‘lit the flame’ of aspiration within so many of us,” Rollins wrote. “And you have epitomized the superiority of ‘excellence of endeavor’ and you stand today as a clear living example.”

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63 Ratliff 2008, 37; Valdemar Rollins, Interview in the television documentary Sonny Rollins: Morgen Speel Ik Beter; Davis 1986, 131; Rollins 2004.
64 Rollins 2004; Primack 1994, 35.
67 Dance 1962, 16. See also Hentoff 1956.
69 Strictly speaking, Coleman had been Bley’s sideman in Los Angeles before the saxophonist moved to New York in 1959.
70 Gleason 2016, 173.
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picture and example for us to learn from.”

The following summer, Hawkins and Rollins were both independently engaged by the impresario George Wein to appear at the Newport Jazz Festival. While drawing up the 1963 roster of performers, Wein asked Rollins’s producer at RCA Records, George Avakian, whether the saxophonist might consider appearing alongside a guest artist. Avakian put the question to Rollins, who immediately proposed extending an invitation to his childhood idol, who was scheduled to play on July 4. At Rollins’s July 6 set, battling an erratic outdoor amplification system, the two horn players shared the stage without any rehearsal, accompanied by the younger musician’s regular rhythm section of Bley, Grimes, and McCurdy. A bootleg recording released many years afterward documents the saxophonists playing just two tunes together, Jerome Kern’s “All The Things You Are” and “The Way You Look Tonight.” On the former song, at a moderately brisk tempo, Hawkins plays the theme and takes the first solo, a four-chorus statement in his characteristically dense melodic language, with dramatic forays into the horn’s upper register at the top of each of his final three choruses. After Bley solos, Rollins improvises another four choruses, mainly employing a post-bop style that veers between passages of staccato slap-tonguing and fluidly slurred lines, as well as occasionally venturing into the more rhythmically and harmonically complex territory that he was exploring at the time. The saxophonists then trade four-and-eight-bar phrases for another three choruses, in the course of which Hawkins, evidently determined not to be one-upped by the younger musician’s dissonant, rapid tremolo effects and, at times, intense vibrato, makes a few forays into musical terrain that was, for him, relatively experimental, occasionally braying coarsely in his instrument’s upper register.

Rollins takes primary responsibility for the theme on “The Way You Look Tonight,” with Hawkins stating the bridge and then playing the first solo, again in his customary style, for three choruses, at a pace just slightly brisker than that of “All The Things You Are.” Rollins’s solo, also three choruses long, is more quixotically adventurous, juxtaposing fragmentary paraphrases of the composed tune with elaborate melodic excursions, coruscating “sheets of sound,” a few honking multiphonics, and occasional quotations (e.g., Edward MacDowell’s “To a Wild Rose,” at 6:34). The rest of the performance appears to unfold quite spontaneously: when Hawkins returns with the theme, Bley almost

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71 Sonny Rollins, Letter [photocopy] to Coleman Hawkins, 13 October 1962, George Avakian and Anahid Ajemian Papers (hereafter GAAAP), New York Public Library, Box 57, Folder 15. A copy of this letter was posted on Rollins’s official website, sonnyrollins.com, on 7 September 2008.

72 Wein 2004, 238; Avakian 1963, 17.


74 Sonny Rollins and Coleman Hawkins, Together at Newport 1963 (Jazz on Jazz 244552, 2011), rec. 6 July 1963. One additional number, played by Rollins’s Quartet without Hawkins, was also taped.
simultaneously hints at starting a piano solo before reverting to comping and Rollins soon re-enters as well, playing a free countermelody. At the end of the chorus the rhythm section appears ready to begin a closing vamp on the dominant harmony (8:50) but, as both saxophonists continue improvising, the band soon collectively moves into a new chorus.75 Two additional full choruses ensue, initially dominated by Rollins and then with both saxophonists improvising concurrently. In general, the un-rehearsed concert appearance at Newport found both horn players remaining true to their markedly different individual personal styles, with the straight-ahead accompanying rhythm section and standard repertoire functioning as a shared point of reference. When it was over Avakian felt dissatisfied that “the session did not come up to potential, simply because they had no opportunity to blow together before they went on-stage,”76 He promptly arranged for the musicians to reconvene in a New York recording studio the following week.77

Some years afterward, Rollins recalled that “I was trying to do some abstract things with that band,”78 and his other recordings of the same period verify that he was indeed at times pursuing some fairly idiosyncratic improvisational approaches, although he generally continued to play jazz standards or tonal original compositions and his rhythm section usually maintained a strict meter and articulated predefined harmonic and formal structures.79 Rollins also remembered that “to play with Coleman Hawkins was no small thing for me,” and yet, “I wanted him to relate to what we were doing, which was completely legitimate. A lot of younger guys—Miles Davis, Monk—had come up playing with Coleman. It was nothing he couldn’t handle.”80 To that end, when he arrived at the recording studio the younger saxophonist consciously set out “to sound different from Coleman.”81 He felt that “I could not sound like him anyway. It’s pretty hard to sound like Coleman. A lot of people played that style, but I wanted to make a contrast. I thought it would make a more striking record.”82

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75 It appears that some momentary confusion arises, and in particular that drummer McCurdy may have not been able to hear some of the other band members very well, perhaps due to the amplification problems.
76 Avakian 1963, 17.
77 Although Paul Bley later recalled that the first studio session was scheduled for a Monday but had to be postponed until the following Friday, the documented recording dates indicate that the two sessions were held on a Monday (15 July 1963) and a Thursday (18 July 1963). See Bley 1999, 83.
78 Rollins 2004.
79 Sonny Rollins, Our Man in Jazz (RCA Victor LSP 2612), rec. 27–30 July 1962. See also idem, Complete Live at the Village Gate (Solar 4569959), rec. 27–30 July 1962; discussed in Irabagon 2016.
80 Rollins 2004.
81 Sonny Rollins, Our Man in Jazz (RCA Victor LSP 2612), rec. 27–30 July 1962. See also idem, Complete Live at the Village Gate (Solar 4569959), rec. 27–30 July 1962; discussed in Irabagon 2016.
82 Quoted in Nisenson 2000, 167.
Rollins undoubtedly succeeded. *Sonny Meets Hawk!* comprises five jazz standards, mainly taken at medium or slow tempos, plus an up-tempo original blues by Rollins (“At McKie’s”). Hawkins, just as at Newport, mainly stays true to his accustomed improvisational voice, with the relatively chromatic harmonic vocabulary that he had pioneered several decades earlier. Rollins, however, takes an experimental approach whose scope is as audacious and extreme as anything in his recorded legacy. In response to Hawkins’s concluding a solo on Kern’s “Yesterdays” with a soft middle-register trill, Rollins plays an extended passage that very loosely paraphrases the song’s original melody with breathy, wide, indistinctly pitched tremolos (2:30–3:20). On “All The Things You Are,” reprising the Newport performance, Rollins plays tonally ambiguous countermelodies around Hawkins’s thematic exposition and subsequently delivers a pointillistic solo that, at its outset, appears almost ametrical and atonal (5:31). And on the slow ballad “Lover Man,” Rollins ends his final solo passage with a series of sustained altissimo squeaks that continues, as a sort of whistling obbligato, while Hawkins re-enters for the track’s closing eight measures and coda.

Truth be told, the older saxophonist was not unreservedly enthusiastic about the jazz avant-garde, which he regarded as “guys … looking for a gimmick.”83 Bley recalled that Hawkins “came to me after the first tune and said, ‘Paul, do me a favor. For the chorus, when it’s my turn to play, lead me in. Give me a nod of your head.’ Sonny was never where you thought he was going to be.”84 Still, the pianist found that once he “gave [Hawkins] the cue, [he] hit as if he knew exactly what was happening and had been in total command all along.”85 Not only that, but Hawkins, even if only at brief, sporadic moments, stepped markedly outside his usual comfort zone, actively taking up Rollins’s challenge by adapting to and engaging with his younger colleagues. Some of Hawkins’s boldest playing was captured on rehearsal out-takes from the session.86 As the saxophonists trade eight-bar statements on a trial rendition of “The Way You Look Tonight,” Hawkins responds to a quixotic, disjunct phrase from Rollins with a series of uncharacteristically irregular melodic fragments; when the younger player counters with a hyper-virtuosic flurry of indistinct pitches, Hawkins answers with an aggressive sustained note in his upper register. The older musician is even more intrepid on an out-take of “Three Little Words,” gamely parrying Rollins’s wry off-kilter lines with a variety of fluid arabesques and frenetic shrieks and at one point playing incessant ametrical low-register blats for almost two minutes. Although never quite so brash on any of the released album tracks, Hawkins can be heard playing ornamental motivic sequences with uncharacteristically extreme rubato on a stately performance of Gershwin’s

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84 Bley 1999, 84.
85 Ibid.
86 I had an opportunity to listen to some out-takes that, as of this writing, have not been commercially issued.
“Summertime,” and the above mentioned version of “Lover Man” contains a passage, on the song’s bridge, where he delivers a vertiginous cascade of irregular darting phrases traversing a large span of his instrument’s registral range (1:26–2:00).

The issued album’s six tracks were drawn from many alternate and incomplete renditions that the musicians taped in the studio, some of which were spliced together to create composite masters.\(^87\) Avakian, the disc’s producer, clearly believed that a substantial degree of editorial intervention was necessary before the tracks could be made available for public consumption. Many years later, in 2004, he even told an acquaintance, the recording engineer Doug Pomeroy, that he believed the session had been “a disaster,’ and that Rollins intentionally played badly … and that, eventually, Hawk intentionally started playing badly in response.”\(^88\) He also claimed, in an email message to Pomeroy and others, that “Sonny and I, along with Hawk, thoroughly recognized what happened at the time and none of us ever talked about it to each other or to anyone else.”\(^89\) Avakian surmised that “Sonny … evidently gave in to his confused feelings of the moment, and Hawk … retaliated musically in kind— but almost entirely, let it be noted, in rehearsals.”\(^89\)

Avakian’s version of events ought not necessarily be taken at face value; even if there may be some truth to his account, there is reason to suppose that Rollins’s intent would have at the very least been far more ambivalent than his producer inferred. The saxophonist has always been vigilant in refusing to approve the issue of recordings he considers subpar and has never given even the slightest hint that any such shenanigans occurred.\(^90\) He also has no recollection of Hawkins having any apparent difficulty adjusting to the unfamiliar musical setting, insisting simply that

\(^87\) Avakian’s handwritten session notes (presumably intended for recording engineers Paul Goodman and Mickey Crofford) contain directions such as, for the blues head “At McKie’s,” “CUT START OF HAWK (begin around 4th or 5th chorus?) CUT start of Sonny’s solo? CUT some 4’s? Get it down to 7 minutes if possible.” The released version of “Summertime” intercuts two separate takes: Avakian wrote, “[Take] 2 to [take] 1 in 1st chorus. Stay thru bass solo. Go to Sonny’s solo of [take] 2. Remove H[wakins]’s first (following Sonny’s) solo of [take] 2.” And the issued performance of “Just Friends” likewise alternates between two versions: at one point Avakian’s notes indicate “try to cut one chorus by going from 2nd chorus of [take] #2 to 3rd of [take] #3.” George Avakian, Notes on Sonny Meets Hawk! sessions, GAAAP, Box 57, Folder 25.

\(^88\) Doug Pomeroy, Email to Barry Feldman, George Avakian, and Dan Morgenstern, 31 July 2004, GAAAP, Box 57, Folder 16.

\(^89\) George Avakian, Email to Doug Pomeroy, Barry Feldman, and Dan Morgenstern, 1 August 2004, GAAAP, Box 57, Folder 16.

\(^90\) In 1982, Rollins filed a lawsuit seeking an injunction against RCA Records to prevent the release, without his authorization, of recordings made while he was under contract to the label during the early 1960s. Avakian submitted an affidavit in which he asserted that “it was always the understanding between myself and the Plaintiff [i.e. Rollins] that only those renditions or edited versions which we both felt were artistically satisfactory and represented a definitive interpretation by the Plaintiff of each of the musical compositions would be released to the public.” George Avakian, “Affidavit in Support of Motion for Temporary Injunction,” 12 July 1982, GAAAP, Box 57, Folder 23.
“Coleman Hawkins was comfortable with all periods of music.” His written correspondence with Avakian during the months immediately following the July 1963 recording sessions gave no indication that relations between the two men remained anything but warmly cordial.

When the album was first released, in early 1964, press reviewers expressed a good deal of skepticism, reacting with mystification to Rollins’s playing in particular. In *Down Beat* magazine Don DeMicheal called the LP “stimulating” but overall deemed it a “mixed bag” and wrote that the younger saxophonist “play[ed] erratically.” Bob Dawbarn, in the British magazine *Melody Maker*, contrasted Hawkins’s “confident” performance with Rollins’s occasional “strangled ugliness”; characterizing the partnership as “uneasy,” he conceded that “in isolation, each plays very well” but objected that “the contrast is, at times, almost ludicrous.” In the decades since, assessments have grown somewhat more favorable. Although Hawkins’s biographer, John Chilton, finds that “the effect is that of two Harold Pinter characters talking earnestly and simultaneously on two different subjects,” he nonetheless regards both saxophonists’ playing as independently praiseworthy. Philosopher Arnold I. Davidson not only extols Rollins for transcending his habitual range of expression but also commends Hawkins for doing the same. Rollins’s bassist Henry Grimes, who was recording prolifically at the time, ranks the session as a personal favorite among all his studio dates. And journalist Eric Nisenson glowingly lauds the disc, writing that, “we can hear the entirety of jazz history captured in one session. This album is not just a signpost along the way of the jazz tradition. It is the jazz tradition.”

As represented by *Sonny Meets Hawk!*, the jazz tradition appears, in the view of at least some listeners, to be straining almost to its breaking point. Like the Bechet–Solal collaboration, the recording places the older jazz musician in a contemporary accompanimental setting—though in this instance the senior player adapts, in some respects, to the postwar stylistic environment rather than remaining imperturbably wedded to his habitual style. Yet the gulf between the principal artists’ individual

91 Sonny Rollins, telephone interview with the author, 2 June 2016.
92 Several weeks later Rollins opened a letter to the producer with the words “My dear friend, congratulations and greetings to the Avakian clan,” and signed off with “Adios amigo.” Sonny Rollins, Letter to George Avakian, August 1963, GAAAP, Box 57, Folder 15. A few days after U.S. President John F. Kennedy’s assassination that November the saxophonist sent Avakian a heartfelt meditation on the tragedy, writing that “we all grieve at the sense of personal loss of a loved one.” Sonny Rollins, Letter to George Avakian, November 1963, GAAAP, Box 57, Folder 17.
93 DeMicheal 1963, 31–32.
94 Dawbarn 1964.
95 Chilton 1990, 351.
96 Davidson 2016, 530.
97 Marotte 2003, 47. Quoted in Frenz 2015, 64.
98 Nisenson 2000, 169.
99 Years later, fellow saxophonist Lee Konitz even called Rollins’s playing on the album “disrespectful” of Hawkins. Hamilton 2007, 93. Quoted in Davidson 2016, 532.
musical languages is even wider than on the Ellington–Coltrane album. While the repertoire of standard tunes and the 4/4 swinging rhythm section remain a common point of reference, the partnership between Rollins and Hawkins is one of contrasts more than of continuities: the younger saxophonist appears to be actively problematizing the notion that a clear, coherent jazz tradition links him to his self-acknowledged early musical idol.

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A multifarious idiom from its inception, jazz has only become increasingly heterogeneous with the passage of time; the music’s history is best understood as an accretive process of stylistic diversification rather than as a rapidly evolving succession of subidioms. New trends emerge while old ones endure, yielding a state of stylistic coexistence comparable to the linguistic “heteroglossia” that Mikhail Bakhtin famously identified in literary discourse, wherein “at any given moment, languages of various epochs and periods of socio-ideological life cohabit with one another.” In the same way that novelistic prose, according to Bakhtin’s theory, places present and past language variants “in unresolvable dialogues,” collaborative jazz performances, particularly intergenerational ones, represent heteroglossial musical conversations without resolution. Just as “a dialogue of languages,” for Bakhtin, is “a dialogue of different times, epochs and days,” the intergenerational musical dialogues considered here convey meanings via a confluence of jazz subidioms rooted in separate eras. Their expressive power is a function of their splintered historicity.

Yet jazz ensemble performances consist not of imaginary conversational exchanges entextualized by a single author but of literal social interactions between two or more musicians; when such collaborations span generations, they involve confrontations between present and past subidioms in the person of living human

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100 On jazz historiography, see Szwed 2000, 79–86; Prouty 2010; and Bakkum 2015. For a general discussion of the historiographical issues surrounding periodized histories of music, see Webster 2004. For a broad critique of periodized history in general, see Le Goff 2015.

101 Bakhtin 1981, 291. Jazz’s pluralism is somewhat comparable to the general condition of contemporary artistic culture described by Leonard B. Meyer some decades ago: “new methods and directions may be developed … [but] these will not displace existing styles. The new will simply be additions to the already existing spectrum of styles” (1994, 172). See also Morgan 1992, 56.


103 Musical-linguistic parallels of this sort have of course been previously drawn by Ingrid Monson, whose influential theory of jazz ensemble aesthetics invokes not only the relatively straightforward dialogic metaphor of responsorial interaction between individual performers but also Bakhtin’s more abstract, allusive mode of “internal dialogism,” whereby even independent single-authored musical utterances can potentially convey multiple meanings (a mode of communication redolent of the African American vernacular speech practice known as “signifying”) (1996, 87 and 98–99). See also Mitchell-Kernan 1972, 161–79; Gates 1988; and Walser 1993.

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actors. Their participants’ stylistic commonalities implicitly represent the genre’s stable norms—be they duple-meter swing rhythms, the tonal jazz standard repertory, or aesthetics of improvisation and spontaneous interaction. Meanwhile, concomitant performance dynamics of tension and incongruity need not always be aesthetically detrimental, and may even energize the genre in much the same way that, as Joti Rockwell has recently noted, musical idioms are fueled by their practitioners’, critics’, and listeners’ verbal debates about their generic ontology.106

If, as James Baldwin famously claimed, history is something that African Americans “carry within us, are unconsciously controlled by … and [that] is literally present in all that we do,”107 it stands to reason that jazz improvisers should convey concepts and attitudes about their black American art form’s history—what it is, has been, and could be—through the medium of musical sound, and that they should do so not solely as individuals but also together, pondering and debating such ideas in ensembles. At the end of the day, the creative partnerships between Bechet and Solal, Ellington and Coltrane, and Hawkins and Rollins all involve far more than just an older performer striving to stay au courant or a younger one laying claim to a cultural lineage. Each consists of a constellation of collectively negotiated decisions—which repertoire to play, with whom to play it, and how to execute each performance collaboratively from moment to moment—that in toto evince the musicians’ various implicit convictions as to which elements of jazz, however artistically potent, are impermanent, inessential, or subject to compromise, and which have endured, a treasured communal legacy, passed down from one generation to the next.

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105 Whereas Okiji perceives a “coming together of … temporally dispersed collaborators” in the relationship between certain separate jazz performances occurring at different times (e.g. Coleman Hawkins’s and John Coltrane’s renditions of “Body and Soul”), intergenerational jazz collaborations instead clearly involve a literally concurrent, rather than temporally dispersed, coming together. See Okiji 2017, 79.

106 Rockwell 2012, 378. Eric Porter notes that “an investment in creating something called jazz has often gone hand in hand with an equally generative process of troubling the practice of and the very category of jazz” (2012, p. 21). For another case in point, see Givan 2018.

Books and Articles


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Hennessey, Mike. “‘Father’ of the Tenor Sax.” *Melody Maker*, 10 October 1964, 8.


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Media


Interview
Rollins, Sonny. Telephone interview with the author. 2 June 2016.

Abstract
When exponents of distinct jazz subidioms play together, they inevitably have to negotiate, in the course of performance, much more than the idiom’s characteristic tension between personal self-expression and dialogic, collective action; they must also navigate the opposition between their own original innovations and communal artistic practices that have endured over time. This article explores how collaborations between jazz players of different generations engage questions of jazz’s history and identity. Three musical pairings are considered: New Orleans saxophonist Sidney Bechet with post-bop pianist Martial Solal (1957), swing-era pianist/composer Duke Ellington with postwar saxophonist John Coltrane (1962), and swing saxophonist Coleman Hawkins with post-bop saxophonist Sonny Rollins (1963). Close examination of recordings of these collaborations, as well as the protagonists’ views and the performances’ critical reception, reveals a great deal about which aspects of jazz these musicians regarded as inessential or subject to compromise and which of its elements they considered to be immutable verities.