

Chapter 1

The 1950s: Passive Aggressors

It was 1956. Bill Triglia, from New Jersey and 32 years old, was working at Birdland, one of the most famous jazz clubs in the world, with one of the most famous of jazz musicians, Lester Young. An accomplished and idiomatic bebop pianist, Triglia had worked, it seemed, in his relatively few years as a professional musician, with everyone. He knew and played with Miles Davis, with Sonny Rollins, and Charles Mingus, and, before the saxophonist's death in 1955, he'd had more than just a passing acquaintance with the genius who'd virtually invented modern jazz, Charlie Parker. He knew Bird, as everyone called Parker, from late-night jam sessions, from the weekly sessions at The Open Door in Greenwich Village, from that memorable night during which, as Triglia worked a wedding, Parker showed up to blow with the band ("You should have seen this old man dancing on a table as Bird played," he remembered many years later). He'd done gigs with Bird, and he'd introduced Bird to his close friend, an alto saxophonist from Brooklyn named Dave Schildkraut. Bird had been duly impressed, telling Triglia that, given Dave's talent and the fact that he was a white man, he was bound, if he pursued a jazz career aggressively, to catch some flak, to end up as part of a very racially polarized scene.

Parker had been dead about a year by the time Triglia was working at Birdland with Lester Young's group, and Schildkraut, struggling to support his wife and children, had landed a gig at a strip club nearby. Triglia had been telling Young about him, and between sets he got him to go and listen to his friend. Young was impressed. "Of course, it was only for a stripper," Schildkraut remembered twenty years later, "but he must have heard something he liked, because he came up to me afterward and asked me to come back to Birdland to sit in with him. I didn't want to, I didn't

feel like I was ready, and he said 'Come on, this isn't the Downbeat awards.' But I didn't feel like I was ready."

Schildkraut didn't play with Lester Young that night, though they continued to run into each other around town, and the young saxophonist continued to impress not only the Basie veteran but virtually everyone he encountered in the frantic New York City jazz scene. Jackie McLean, Lee Konitz, Ralph Burns, Dizzy Gillespie, Zoot Sims, Stan Getz, Bill Evans - they all heard and praised him, though he was becoming increasingly reclusive, refusing to take road gigs and turning down record dates (Dizzy Gillespie - "Dave Schildkraut was the only alto saxophonist to capture the rhythmic essence of Bird," he said many years later - called and offered him recording dates three times, which Schildkraut declined, and Dave even refused Stan Kenton's offer of a road job until his wife grabbed the phone from him and said "Mr. Kenton, he'll be there"). He did accept some gigs out of financial desperation, like the one with Buddy Rich, who heard him play clarinet and said Dave was, after Artie Shaw, the best clarinetist he'd ever heard. And one night while Dave was playing at a jam session someone handed him a note which said "Keep on going!" and when Dave looked at the signature and checked the audience he saw it was from Ben Webster. But Dave seemed to avoid recognition like it was contagious disease; he turned down even Norman Granz (who owned one of the largest and most powerful independent jazz labels, Verve Records), who offered him a tour and a possible recording date with strings. All the while Dave insisted it was because he didn't want to leave his family, though some people, like the pianist Bill Evans, thought his refusals were self destructive ("I only heard two saxophonists in those days who I didn't think copied Bird," he said in 1980. "Lee Konitz and Dave Schildkraut.")

But Dave Schildkraut, like Bill Triglia, was one of the Lost Generation of jazz musicians, one of a number of players who came of age musically in the 1950s, showed their considerable talents, and then, for one reason or another, faded from view. Dave seemed afraid of success, and ended up working a day job for Children's Services of the City of New York (he was a clerk until he

retired). Triglia kept plugging away, and many musicians admired and hired him, like Charles Mingus, with whom he recorded the legendary album *Tijuana Moods*. He developed into one of the best pianists of the decade, heavily influenced by his idol Bud Powell, but adding to Powell's approach his own lyric touch and more matter-of-fact intensity. He became something of a jazz journeyman, never really reaching the top echelon professionally, and settling, through the 1960s and afterward, into club dates and lounge jobs. He also developed a deserved reputation as a musician who would work with and help younger musicians, and he always pined for the salad days of his and Dave Schildkraut's musical youth; he also never gave up praising Schildkraut, telling people about him, offering him gigs, trying to help him out professionally and personally. "Oh, someday someone will tell Davey's story," he would sigh with frustration at what seemed like a lifetime of lost opportunities.

But with Schildkraut, as with Triglia, certain things were never to be. The jazz audience is a fickle one, as faddish as any other, and as the years passed the chances of either of them achieving any kind of comeback became slimmer and slimmer. Even if Schildkraut had made the effort, it's unlikely, after a certain point, that he would have succeeded. The jazz world is small, and the jazz media are inclined to focus on only a chosen few, to be constantly in search of the next "big" thing, which was never going to be two aging white guys from Brooklyn and New Jersey. Dave and Bill, like more than a few others in jazz, had to be content with a narrow range of professional choices and acceptance, and though this was never a source of (admitted) problems for Schildkraut, Triglia must have felt some frustration at seeing the jazz world pass him by. He never lost his natural ability to *play*, the taste and chops that attracted Lester Young and Charles Mingus, yet he never found any consistent way to fit in with a changing jazz crowd.

The decade in which he learned his craft - the 1950s - was one of the most complex and musically fertile in the history of jazz. It was a time during which the music co-existed with forces both historical and artistic, of change and stasis, of generous tolerance

and vicious reaction. It was the age of both McCarthyism and Mingus, Eisenhower and Jackson Pollack, of sociological and artistic juxtapositions of bewildering contradiction. While George Russell was developing his theories of Lydian composition and improvisation, Joe McCarthy was waving lists of communists before Congressional audiences, and while Teo Macero was devising increasingly more dissonant ways to write for jazz ensemble, to subvert the so-called natural laws of music, the Central Intelligence Agency was subverting democratic regimes in South and Central America.

1950s jazz modernism was truly a wondrous and complicated thing. It was in that decade that, musically speaking, John Coltrane and Cecil Taylor and Ornette Coleman were born, devising increasingly radical means of improvisation in the shadow of a system of growing political and sexual conformity. Though, unlike Triglia and Schildkraut, they succeeded beyond that decade, many of their specific methods of innovation and modes of performance were somehow very *Fifties* (or, in other words, charged less by race and nationalism than by contemporary modernist platforms), very much a part of a larger and multi-racial movement of jazz modernism (and one that changed radically in nature in the 1960s).

1950s jazz came from many things, most particularly from the innovations of figures like Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, and Lenny Tristano, and it morphed, in the next decade, into different strains of a new modernism, from the relatively academic approach of people like Hall Overton and Teddy Charles to the more organic methods of Gil Evans and Johnny Carisi. It was the source for Charles Mingus and his early musical experiments, and it led to some of his most powerfully expressive music. And it oversaw the informal organization of musical camps, of West Coast and East Coast movements, the fitful early modernism of Dave Brubeck and that of lesser-knowns like Dave Van Kriedt and Richard Twardzik. It was also a time for redefinition in a radically changing musical world, for musicians like the trombonist Jack Teagarden or the New Orleans clarinetist George Lewis (not to mention Louis Armstrong), all of whom were struggling, with sometimes actual success, to

place themselves within a changing jazz universe. Though Armstrong, for one, as an international star, stood somewhat apart from the work-a-day problems of the jazz world, his music still reflected internal and personal issues of regeneration and form, and his playing, though largely above the socio-artistic maelstrom, veered from the comfortably quaint to the brilliantly inventive.

Some of the (now) more obscure jazz musicians of the decade - like Tony Fruscella, Barbara Carroll, Tony Scott, Dick Katz, Triglia, Schildkraut, Buddy Collette, Jack Sheldon - stand, from our latter-day perspective, musically in the silhouettes of the more famous of those years, like Coltrane and Ornette Coleman, Mingus and Miles Davis. And figures like Pete Rugolo, the brilliantly innovative composer and arranger for Stan Kenton, who ended up writing for *Leave It To Beaver*, had their own convoluted career paths to follow.

From a sociological standpoint, the 1950s are fraught with dramatic and radical contrasts. Though it hasn't gone unnoticed that the sexual tensions of the age were wound up with bohemian violations of the sexual norms that produced these tensions, it's also helpful to visualize the 1950s, with all its legendary repression and sublimation, as a dry run for the sexual revolution of the 1960s - and jazz, with its aura of libertine license, certainly played a part in promoting and encouraging specific ideas of both promiscuity and just plain sexual freedom. And though there was, outside of the more liberated and rarefied confines of socially anarchistic professions like jazz, enough lasciviousness to go around, it generally remained confined, in isolation and away from the mainstream, locked into realms of exposure and influence that permitted middle class avoidance. Sure, Milton Berle engaged in a bit of nationally televised cross dressing, but it was a safe kind of gender bend, lacking even the eyebrow-raising directness of the double entendre that overhung so much black blues and pop of the 1920s and 1930s. Uncle Miltie was a refugee from the old vaudeville days, and he knew not only how to walk the fine line

between “dirty” and just a little bit of leering fun but also how to keep comedy safe for network television (and, hence, democracy).

So while much of the rest of the country was bunkering down to ride out the social storm safely and with little personal risk, jazz musicians were busy taking advantage of the sudden atmospheric void to liberate themselves. For them the 1950s were a time of great possibilities, of resoundingly bold experimentation and sometimes hasty retreat - or sometimes both simultaneously. There are more than a few good examples, but none summed up better the musical hopes and occasional frustrating failures of the decade than Pete Rugolo, who made his initial mark in jazz just after World War II as an arranger and musical companion to the California bandleader Stan Kenton. Kenton, who had an odd and sometimes fulfilling vision of a new kind of jazz/musical movement, looked to fuse the gestures of Euro-modernism with jazz mannerism, and the results were sometimes stirring and illuminating and sometimes just pompous and dull. Of Rugolo he remarked, on first hearing, “he writes just like me,” though he should have said “he writes a lot better than I do” because that was the actual truth. Rugolo had a firm grasp of modern harmony and a nice take on post-bebop rhythmic quirks, and he composed with an agreeable sense of harmonic tension and release, concepts of which Kenton had little or no grasp (though he did, to his credit, recognize talent when he heard it). Some of Rugolo’s early compositions for not only Kenton but the Metronome All Stars and Charlie Barnett’s 1949 bebop big band (both these units recorded his *Overtime* in 1949) showed just how far jazz was preparing to go in the 1950s, a decade that rose out of the ashes of not only Charlie Parker’s fantastic innovations of solo form but also Parker’s gradual physical and psychological decline. Rugolo was a part of the next wave, and the series of works which he composed for Kenton’s band, in addition to his ingeniously plotted accompaniments to Kenton’s singer June Christy, showed that his was a first rate modernist temperament.

But all that was to change. A series of big band albums which Rugolo made for Columbia Records were surprisingly mainstream and dully and discouragingly accommodating to what sounds like

some record company executive's idea of mass jazz taste; the rest, as some people are prone to say with a discouraging and jaded sense of inevitability, was history. Rugolo soon found that the greenest pastures (pun intended) on the West Coast were in the studios that turned out, Eli Whitney style, music for motion pictures and television, and it wasn't long before he wrote the main theme for the T.V. series *Leave It To Beaver*. It was a limp but catchy tune that shadowed Wally and the Beaver as they walked, with apt intentions, up a pretend street and entered the facade door of a pretend house to see their pretend parents (and it was based on what were probably the most commonly used chord changes in jazz history - those of George Gershwin's *I Got Rhythm*).

But Pete Rugolo occupied only one corner of the 1950s, and represented the acts of only one aberrant modernist. His personal heresy is less important than the fact that the jazz decade was teeming with his kind, with talented musicians who were so enamored of the art form that they could think (at least at first) of nothing that they wanted to do so much as work in the music and play (with) the music, engage with the ideas that, first, Charlie Parker and then Lennie Tristano (and Lee Konitz and Warne Marsh) had brought to such marvelous fruition. These were ideas of rhythmic and harmonic displacement, of dissonance of one kind or another, of both consonant and dissonant counterpoint, of forms that defied the kind of playing-by-numbers art that bebop, in certain orthodox hands, had become.

And these musicians weren't even necessarily rebelling in any material sense against bebop because the music, though prone to some repetition and cliché, was no worse in these tendencies than any other form, musical, literary, or otherwise. What counted was what you made of it, the uses you, as a musician, made of its stop-start rhythms, variable accents, and sometimes shrill stretching of aesthetic boundaries. You might have had no truck with some of the more petulant avant gardists because you disliked their rhetoric or what you perceived as the stark coldness of the musical canvases they created, but you had everything in common with them, particularly their idolization of Charlie Parker and their core

dedication to the language and syntax of bebop. It was, after all, this language and syntax that, for better or for worse, formed the basis of almost all jazz creations in those years, which served, to adventurous musicians of the 1940s and 1950s, as the equivalent of a new and revelatory kind of computer language. **(FN dislike of Tristano)**

And yet you might have, musically, much more “conservative” leanings than people like Tristano, Konitz, or Marsh, though chances are that you rubbed shoulders with them on “the Scene,” on 52nd Street, or at Birdland, at somebody’s apartment, or even at the odd wedding or Bar Mitzvah (because a gig was still a gig and money was still money, and necessary for living). This didn’t necessarily mean you weren’t a progressive in some way, shape, or form, but only that you heard things differently than they, modeled yourself in a different way after the common idols of bebop (like not only Parker but the pianist Bud Powell and the trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie), and had different (not lesser) personal standards. If you were like, say, the pianist Bill Triglia (born 1924) you not only followed Powell around (with sometimes a fellow, if somewhat more experienced, disciple like Al Haig in tow) you observed and studied the master. You noted his way of “comping” (accompanying other musicians), his method of voicing chords (the positioning of roots and upper and inner intervals), the way he manipulated scales and intervals, the patterns of rhythm that he used and the ways in which he re-harmonized commonly-played tunes.

This was jazz in the *early* 1950s, after the first flush of Charlie Parker and Bud Powell and Dizzy Gillespie - an amalgamation of experiences, of stone beboppers like Triglia; arrogant mavericks like Lenny Tristano; young and intellectually ambitious though relatively unassuming musicians like the pianist Dick Katz; ingenious if still-searching nonconformists like Konitz and Marsh; insecure yet brazen kings-of-the-mountain like saxophonist Sonny Rollins (a man-eater at jam sessions); young and artistically scuffling prophets-to-be like John Coltrane; compositional malcontents like the bassist Charlie Mingus; or distracted geniuses like the

saxophonist Dave Schildkraut. Look further and deeper and you'll also find drug-addicted and dissatisfied but natural leaders like Miles Davis, technically sharp and growing youngster like Jackie McLean, fiercely and musically independent women (and pianists all) like Barbara Carroll, Mary Lou Williams, and Marian McPartland, and infinitely curious and worldly talents like the vibist Teddy Charles and the pianist Hall Overton. And we mustn't leave out West Coast sun and fun modernists like Shorty Rogers, Russ Freeman, and Jimmy Giuffre, and instant futurists like saxophonist and composer Teo Macero. Like America in the 1950s jazz had a relatively innocent outlook, tamed by the prosperity and hopes of the post-War years and with little sense of the inadvertent preparations, psychological and logistical, that were being made for the cataclysmic 1960s. One need not carry sociological parallels unreasonably far to see that it was likely that these jazz players, in the throes of youth and in the midst of Herculean efforts to define their own artistic sensibilities, were, like the rest of the country, simply unaware of the storm ahead.

Though the decade of the 1950s was not all modernist experiment - far from it, it included large doses of the mainstream, not to mention the very personal if sometimes hesitant historical re-visitations of Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, as well as the further adventures of the New Orleans Revival - it was witness to some of the first (advancing and faltering) steps of some remarkably original musical adventurers. And many of these, it seems, after receiving an audience with the occasional and sundry independent record company, after making a few or more sides, retreated, in the face of rejections real and imagined, toward the promise of more steady work in the mainstream, toward studio work, academia, or other musical and non-musical employment.

But the most striking thing about 1950s modernism is how much was started and never really completed, at least in the form in which it was begun, and how much musical business was left unfinished. Teddy Charles' small group manipulations with Hall Overton and Jimmy Raney never really jelled in any public,

professional sense, and Teo Macero's forays into the saxophone's altissimo range, his careful realignment of the small group bebop format and his tonally strident, important orchestrations, remain, historically, largely un-credited. Jimmy Giuffre's West Coast miniatures (which he continued successfully on a world stage over the next three decades), Shorty Rogers' early and successful experimentations, Spud Murphy's very personal take on twelve-tone composition, Johnny Carisi's personal and quirky take on the cool school, all remain, to this day, in historical limbo. And the music of Duane Tatro, or Ralph Burns' and George Handy's liberated sessions with Schildkraut (who seemed, despite his habitual brilliance, to be working harder and harder to avoid the kind of musical success to which he had, at one time, seemed destined) - all are like trees falling in the forest - it's as though, without historic witness, they don't really exist.

But that was the 1950s - a new beginning for jazz but also a laundry list of stalled-out musical ventures, a finite end for certain modes of experimentation and sonic manipulation. Which is not to say that the 50s had no connection to the increasingly liberated urgings of 1960s jazz, but only that so much of what was done in the 1950s feels, from our somewhat distant perspective, self-contained, and seems to stand almost alone; so much from that era exists, not as part of some jazz "continuum" (as the New Ager of jazz history are prone to saying these days), but rather as an interrupted if creative day-in-the-life.

There's no better example of this than in the life and work of the pianist Lenny Tristano. An instant 1940s modernist and one of the first jazz musicians to offer an alternative to what Parker, Powell, and Gillespie were playing, he produced a brilliant body of music in the 1950s and a few very important disciples like Konitz and Marsh. And yet, though his influence was significant in a second-hand and spiritual sense (he offered the first promise of a true jazz avant garde, and musicians were affected and persistently prodded by his active and continuing challenge to the established tonal order of jazz) his work in those years stands in historical isolation, as worthy of study and as a continuous challenge to the

more complacent tendencies of jazz, but still in isolation. The music is wonderful to listen to, fresh and original forty and fifty years after its original creation, but seems, in terms of broader influence and acceptance, to hit an historical brick wall after 1960. (FN TRISTANO BOOK_)

Tristano himself went into retreat and hiding in the 1960s, and it might appear that this conscious avoidance of the spotlight was the thing that retarded his popularity. That, however, would confuse cause and effect. He certainly could have continued to work in those years, and he likely, as time passed, would have become a regular on the growing international jazz festival circuit. Instead he chose to withdraw to his large and comfortable house in Jamaica Estates (part of Queens, New York City), to teach and speak angrily of how bad things were “out there,” in what amounted to not just a rejection of the status quo but a rationalization of his own personal and artistic isolation. Tristano, increasingly prone to cranky outbursts and insulting observations about other musicians, may have known and understood how much he was really a creature of a different era, how much his attention to musical principles and a uncompromisingly schematic modernism was not only a throwback to a bygone (if still recent) time but also a luxury that a jazz musician of the new decade could ill afford. And rather than face the possibility of rejection he chose to make the first move, to reject and recant his previous loyalty to jazz and deny the importance of the rest of the world’s acceptance, before that world could deny him *its* acceptance.

In this way was Tristano (to quote, from a very different context, Robert Klein) a child of the ‘50s, an artifact of a time in which certain kinds of artists, in spite of the Cold War, in spite of Joseph McCarthy, and in the face of a growing country’s expanse of green, leafy, lawns and Eisenhower-led political passivity, was able to defy the gravity of conformist pressure in the shelter of a self-contained and in-bred group of like-minded artists. The “smaller” the world of the 1950s became, in terms of mass communications, travel, space exploration and inter-locking political spheres of influence, the smaller the world of jazz musicians like Tristano

became, the more self-limited and dependent upon dedicated concentrations of audience and specialized twists of demography.

But if the 1950s represented a kind of social contraction for uncompromising individuals like Tristano the 1960s demanded expansion, an expansion of product to meet growing ideas of mass distribution and a diversification of product to match a fragmented and rapidly over-extending and largely suburban population. Tristano, understandably, was simply not up to the task of this new idea of *mass cult*, and he responded accordingly, content to live with the slow motion development of his own *narrow* cult of personality and the legend, which he did nothing but encourage, that was *Tristano*. In this he had enough to salve his own very large ego; he was content to let his accomplishments sit frozen in time and historically suspended, like an ancient and well-preserved body caught visibly beneath the ice of a very different and culturally distant age.

From a cultural perspective the 1950s are both fascinating and illuminating. Post-War America was a place of great optimism and opportunity; literary movements were active and aggressive, from the modernist poetics of people like Frank O'Hara, William Carlos Williams, and Kenneth Koch to the peripatetic advocacy of the Beat writers. Allen Ginsberg, for one example, though aligned with the most famous and the most critically abused Beat, Jack Kerouac, gradually won the grudging respect of some of the old-line literary establishment, though he stubbornly continued to go his own way, praising Kerouac and pointing to him as the literary founder of the new movement. Kerouac himself was, as both a writer and public figure, problematic, capable of sharp and beautifully structured prose, but succumbing more and more, as the decade progressed, to the ravages of an advancing alcoholism. He was not just an unlikely prophet but an unwilling and hostile one, fleeing the fame that, more and more, seemed to hold him psychologically captive.

Writers like Ginsberg and Kerouac were reacting to what seemed to them to be the destructively hypnotic effect of mass culture, to the budding 1950s ideal of "the organization man," the

growing influence of corporations, and the rise of conglomerate media like television. Television itself was beginning to feel the strength of its influence in that decade, making the transition from the still relatively individualized programming of theater-based drama and variety shows to the increasingly homogenous fare of game shows and comedy and dramatic series. Even the trendy post-War *film noir* of Hollywood was losing its allure by the late and middle 1950s, with the studio system flexing its muscles in the move to wider screens and richer spectrums of cinematic color.

Mainstream popular music of the day was experiencing changes that mirrored, in their radicalism, jazz's transformation, though not its small audience share. The rise of post-War rhythm and blues and the gradual development of rock and roll were to have major effects on jazz as it related (or, maybe, failed to relate) to the marketplace. Not only did rock provide grist for the mill of jazz's growing litany of complaints (jazz musicians have long viewed rock as a kind of musical anti-Christ, and critics, like, for example, Stanley Crouch, who much later made scathing criticism of Miles Davis' "mining" of the "fool's gold" of rock and roll popularity, have concurred), it reached *toward* the roots of American music at a time when jazz must have seemed, to audiences, to be reaching *away*.

The rise of rock and roll and the relative popular eclipse of jazz in the period of 1956-1966 had (have) great philosophical implications. Jazz was no longer the dangerous tool of black musical magic, and its replacement by rock and roll as an object of establishment scorn and anger was, very ironically, echoed in the jazz press, by both critics and musicians. Perhaps it was inevitable that, as jazz became more and more self-consciously a form of artistic expression, it would lose its social edge; at any rate the jazz world has, by and large, never really understood rock and roll's (and later rap and hip hop's) large and dominating claim on the rebellious imagination of American youth.

It's no surprise that the key figure in rock and roll's transformation was Elvis Presley, whose ultimate Los Vegas heresy put his career on an oddly parallel path to that of Louis Armstrong:

both men emerged, in their earliest years, with musical styles that were inseparable from their socially undesirable and underground points of origin, and both worked hard, in later years, to find a middle ground reconciling their own personal, roots-laden instincts with real-world commercial considerations. And Presley, with his intuitive acceptance of a broad universe of music, and an ability to absorb and integrate all kinds of musical styles from Tin Pan Alley to the blues to country music, grew and shed as many musical skins as Armstrong, who himself spent the 1950s in search of new musical sources and fresh musical angles (and who found them in ways identical to Elvis). (FN OTHER BOOK)

In 1956 Saul Bellow's book *Seize the Day* was published, and it, too, represented, through its author and its manner of presentation, something of a literary benchmark. Bellow vocally opposed the formal anarchism of beat writers like Allen Ginsberg, and stood on both the literary and political right (relatively speaking, that is); books like *Seize the Day*, brilliantly written manifestations of a new and heightened literary realism, symbolized both the end and the beginning of a particular kind of literary focus. Most specifically and tellingly, they represented the old school as it tried aggressively to establish itself as a new school.

In the wake of McCarthyism's decimation of the political left the New York intelligentsia was put largely to its own devices, splitting into literary and political camps that reflected old-school battles of not only modernist philosophy but of Trotskyism and Stalinism, socialism and communism. The left side of this spectrum had its own internal divisions, and was critically split between not only remnants of the old and new Left but also between battling literary schools of thought. Some accepted and idealized older notions of the "social" novel, while others had more contemporary, avant garde ideas of literature's goals and purposes. Though these battles were to be fought most actively in the 1960s they were begun in earnest in the decade of the 1950s; *Seize the Day* (with no specific political agenda), neither stodgily old fashioned nor formally innovative, and retaining the highest literary standards, shows how

complex these issues of literary turf were. Reflecting a state of mind that was decidedly contemporary in its angst and existential surfaces, it took form in a way that was still much older in fashion, particularly in its adherence to socially identifiable literary values.

Jazz was something of an uninvolved spectator in these fights. It lacked the convoluted intellectual history of the New York literary school or the ties with official representatives of the academy and the artistic establishment which might have led to equivalent philosophical skirmishes. On the other hand, these literary/artistic conflicts predicted jazz's own seismic shifts in the 1960s, a decade during which many once-dedicated musical radicals found themselves increasingly outflanked by a new generation of avant gardists. In the 1950s, however, they still stood, musically, to the left, their own work serving as a backdrop to other progressive movements. Their own art was something of a pressure valve, background music for people involved in the larger literary and art worlds, for the new generation of not only writers but painters, particularly those idealized in critic Harold Rosenberg's influential essays on action painting and the world of the abstract expressionists. Jazz's advances have always been based on uncanny alliances of instinct and the intellect, and it's likely that one of the reasons it was so admired and patronized by 1950s literary and art mavens was that it represented something of an intellectual haven, an emotional escape from day-to-day didactical struggles. **(FN Tendency to look only at the beats and not other modernists -writers and painters)**

Jazz musicians had their own problems and aesthetic dilemmas, in those years, as insulated as they may have been from public debate. It was a time when musicians as outwardly different as the pianists Paul Bley and Marian McPartland engaged in similarly-motivated philosophical dialogues with themselves through the music they played; they experienced their own internalized artistic and intellectual crises, which they resolved in the only way they knew how, by performing and exercising their intellectual prerogatives in public, in the presence of other musicians and in front of audiences who sometimes, but not always, understood. It

was a time for the German-born pianist Jutta Hipp, who spent World War II under fire by Allied troops and then came to the United States to establish herself as a progressive jazz musician, to quit the music rather than conform to others' expectations, to work in a factory and, in her spare time, paint (she lived in New York City until her death). **FN CONVERSATION/L FEATHER** Or for a bebop refugee like the trumpeter Howard McGhee, who suffered from not only changing musical tastes but drug addiction, to reinvent himself as a hard-bopper, a post-bopper, and then a neo-bopper; and for the assertion of self of such a seemingly ancient musician as the trombonist Tom Brown, one of the earliest jazz instrumentalists to perform (in Chicago in 1915, even before the Original Dixieland Jazz Band) and one who continued, throughout the 1950s, to work in the city of his birth, New Orleans. And in jazz it was even a time for such past, present and future pop stars as Doris Day, Peggy Lee and Bing Crosby, all of whom had deep roots in the jazz world of either the pre-Swing or the Swing era, and all of whom continued to perform brilliantly in the 1950s.

Though historically “lost” to jazz in a much different way than some others we’ve mentioned, these three singers still remain, to the present day, apart from our ideas of jazz authenticity, particularly as embodied by the wandering and impoverished hipster. Embraced by the larger world of pop and celebrity, they found themselves suddenly without jazz pedigree - they had too much renown, too many cars and houses and furs to be “real” jazz people. Never mind that their ties with the music were deep and lasting, stemming from more permanent ideas than nostalgia or glib barrelhouse sentimentality. Faced with demands that had little to do with music, they went with their instincts through the 1950s, understanding that jazz, like pop music, was not averse to change for its own sake, to making artistic decisions based on very practical ideas of sustenance and survival.

Chapter 2

Living in Glass Cities

Anyone who has lived through the emergence of a new millennium (as in 1999 to the year 2000) knows how artificial that kind of transition can be, how captive of slick marketers and media hounds a simple calendar change can become. Though we like to package certain things for our own convenience - hence a book about jazz in the 1950s - the reality is that decades are not brick barriers, they neither necessarily begin something nor end something else with finality. In spite of the title of this book jazz is no different in this respect. As full as it is of a character that is distinct and individual, the decade of the 1950s has important physical and psychological overlaps with the 1940s and the 1960s. Dividing a history into divisible decades has the same effect as forming a circle with your fingers and then looking through the circle with one eye close up - what you're looking at actually appears to be closer and more clearly focused, though in reality you've performed no real act of magnification, made no alteration of the object's relative properties. As when cropping a photo to reveal a specific detail of a person or a person's face, the removal of certain peripheral and distracting historical elements brings other aspects into what at least appears as much greater focus, forcing a refreshing and sometimes revealing clarity.

What this means is that some things that happen in the 1950s occur as much, psychologically, in the 1940s as they occur in the 1950s. Or they may belong, artistically and aesthetically, to earlier movements, but may also symbolize transitional realities, intellectual processes that are not captive of any one decade. Still, they might also be very much of their time - reflecting, in jazz, for instance, a second post-War modernist movement, predicting, in the early 1950s, the Third Stream movement of the late 1950s.

In this you have Teddy Charles, out of Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, who went to New York City to study at the Julliard School of music, where he ran into a pianist and composer named Hall Overton. Charles arrived to study percussion and then taught himself the vibraphone (also a percussion instrument albeit one that uses the tempered scale), and was soon under the influence of not only Overton (an adventurous and ambitious modern composer who would later write his own works for both symphony orchestra and string quartet) **FN** but the entire New York jazz scene. Charles was and would remain a progressive, even in relation to the high and happy New York beboppers, who themselves, in the next ten years, began to split into informal camps. He also encountered a California-born musician named Charles Mingus, and he recorded with other like minded surf-jazzers in Hollywood just a few years later. That body of work - not only that of Charles but also his the sideman, including the compositional efforts of people like the saxophonist and clarinetist Jimmy Giuffre, the trumpeter Shorty Rogers, guitarist Jimmy Raney, and Overton - constituted a new jazz underground, one that flared up musically in brief and significant ways, but that left an incomplete and scattered legacy. It was a legacy of cautious but real experimentation, of careful manipulations of form and rhythm, of attempts to define a place in jazz for musicians with a uniquely and aesthetically (as in truly Euro-American) **(FN)** multicultural perspective.

By the time Charles and Overton - who was also, by 1947, studying at Julliard - got to New York, Charlie Parker had not only been there and done that, he'd been there and gone - to the West Coast, a jazz player's apparent rite of professional passage, where he tore up a club called Billie Berg's with the new music called bop or bebop or rebop, depending upon who you were reading or listening to at the time ("cut the rebop," cried Marlon Brando as Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire*). Though Bird found not only acceptance but rejection - audiences, if wildly enthusiastic, were small, and Billie Berg's decided it was better off with a steady diet of jazz middle-of-the-roads like Slim Galliard and Harry The Hipster Gibson - neither coast was ever the same

after his meteoric mid 1940s rise. One thing that all modernists who came after him had in common - whether they were Tristanoites or Mingus followers, upstanding family men, cool guys and/or hipster, alcoholics, or junkies - was a love for Parker that was always musical and often personal, an acceptance, forged by not only his personal generosity but by his overwhelming abilities, of his lack of discipline and often bizarre behaviors.

By 1950 he was in the beginning stages of a physical decline that would, in a musical sense, only manifest itself intermittently. Many of the younger musicians whom he'd first gathered under his wing - like Miles Davis or Curley Russell or Al Haig - had, by now, developed cautiously jaundiced views of him and his habits, from the road trips and one night stands in which they had to fight, in one way or another, for their pay (years later Haig, sitting for a tape recorded interview, said: "Playing with Charlie was a pleasure; no problems, no hassles" - and here he turned off the tape recorder - "no money...". Curley Russell said, around the same time, and only somewhat in jest, "the thing I'm proudest about in my life is that when Bird died I owed *him* money.") (FN AUTHOR) Though Parker had burned some professional bridges he was still in demand by not only fellow musicians who, unlike most of the public, knew just how astounding his powers as an improviser were, but by savvy record company owners like Norman Granz. Granz, who was just beginning to gather a steam that he'd first built by virtue of his live and recorded Jazz at The Philharmonic slugfests, did his first formal session with Parker in 1947. Over the next few years, and into the 1950s, he recorded him with intelligent frequency, in sessions that included Parker's first date with the string players who would, if only temporarily, change his life.

These string sessions helped to broaden his popularity and were held in contempt by purists, but no musical background could mask the fact that his late 1940s and early 1950s playing was new and different from what it had been before, that he had changed, if in sometimes subtle ways. For one thing his tones were darker; though never a glib improviser, he now more than ever seemed to make every phrase count, to ride the crest of waves of

inspiration that broke in increasingly brilliantly organized, if sometimes more disparate, fragments. It was as though Parker was living out his tragically short life in public and on the horn, but in a way which implicitly rejected the glib realism of the popular and hardboiled novels and films of the day. To paraphrase the critic Richard Gilman (who later made this point about the play *Waiting for Godot*), Bird was showing us not some parallel to, or allegorical equivalent of, real life, but was instead depicting the *actual life* itself, and doing so in the truest sense, as one increasingly fragmented by the confusions of dream, existence and the imagination.

His Verve recording session of August 1951 is firm evidence of this. *Back Home Blues*, for one, is a much different performance than, say, *Parker's Mood* (also a blues, which he had recorded for Savoy in 1947). *Parker's Mood* was an epochal recording for him, full of hope and discovery, something which can not exactly be said for *Back Home Blues*, fine as it was. *Back Home Blues* (like *Loverman* from the same session) was certainly a different Bird, neither particularly optimistic nor overly pessimistic. This Bird was, rather, transcending, for the time being, at least, the kind of detailed and rational introspection that might have forced him to look at not only what his life had been but what it was rapidly becoming. This was the survivalist Bird, still in command of his own talents yet painfully self-aware of the self-destructing course he was on.

Even more impressive was his playing on a tour he made of Sweden near the end of 1950. Accompanied nicely by young Swedes who were no doubt elated by his presence, Parker is not only astonishingly inventive on such war horses as *Anthropology* and *Scrapple From the Apple* (from a concert recorded in Halsingborg) but is also aggressive without being dismissive on a reprise of *Embraceable You*, spry and gymnastic on *Star Eyes* and *All The Things You Are*. The darker edge to Parker's playing was blunted on this trip by a joy at European acceptance; following in the wake of the previous year's visit to France, the Swedish tour

must have been equally exhilarating, a chance to, if not escape his junkie obsessions, than at least to sidestep, if only temporarily, their deleterious effects. It certainly helped to have an accomplished musician like the “local” trumpeter Rolf Ericson on the bandstand (Ericson was only two years younger than Parker) and the sympathetic ears of an audience newly liberated from the uncertainties of Nazi terror.

These recordings make clear why Parker continued to be such a beacon for young modernists. If, more and more, his personal life was becoming a lost cause, his musical life was still vibrant with possibility. Musicians who found it harder and harder to deal with his personal foibles could still appreciate how advanced his concepts of line and harmony were. Certainly Teddy Charles, emerging from the cloister of academia into the glare of New York’s twenty-four hour jazz scene, understood the implications of the brilliant abstractions that were Parker solos. Though in later years critics like the ever-perceptive Max Harrison and musicians like fellow alto saxophonist Lee Konitz noted that they believed the most profound Parker was the Parker of the more carefully organized solos and studio dates on Dial and Savoy Records, **(FN)** the Parker most pregnant with possibility is the club-hopping, freelancing 1950s Parker, whose flights of extreme improvisation seemed increasingly to be performed without the benefit of a harmonic net. While this is not to say that he was, in any prophetic way, a “free” improviser, his ability to piece together increasingly distant intervals into coherent and densely organized (and tonally consonant) solos, his willingness to take slightly odd and even technically “wrong” turns, and his absolute fearlessness, constituted some of the most significant early steps taken beyond bebop orthodoxy. Certainly he must have been listening to Lenny Tristano, Lee Konitz, and Warne Marsh, who were equally explorative, though his own ideas were taking a very different (and potentially more radical) turn. **(FN '50s)**

Teddy Charles was also listening to Bud Powell, another musical radical who, in tandem with Thelonious Monk, was taking certain ideas of dissonance and unresolved musical tension even

further than Parker or Tristano had taken them. The intellectualism of Monk's musical persona and Powell's three-minute recorded wind sprints were a far cry from the things Charles and Hall Overton had experienced at Julliard. The floating, freely associating emotionalism of Powell's playing had no equivalent in the academy, and his use of dissonance was organically correct in ways that, though he was familiar with the classical keyboard literature, had little if anything to do with classic theory. His touch and sound, the manner in which his fingers curled away from the keyboard and struck it with a slightly dull but still-precise thud, were not only out of a very specifically African American tradition of improvised instrumental techniques, but also constituted an organic fusion of cause and effect, a seamless melding of technique and idea. Jazz musicians rarely had the luxury of formalism, of theories detached from practice and economic reality. For them it was no play, no pay; though this could, for the least compromising of them, be a repressive formula for poverty and deprivation, for Monk and Powell it led to rare and ingenious pop fusions of form and content. Though some see their (and particularly Monk's) use of Tin Pan Alley as merely manipulative and humorous, their acceptance of the popular repertoire went far beyond practicality, constituting an acceptance of the core values that lay behind that repertoire's development of ideas of sequence and form. And sarcasm had (almost) nothing to do with it. **FN**

This was the system, both social and musical, into which Teddy Charles and his associates emerged in the early 1950s. Harmony was triadic and scales were diatonic, and the jazz musician did what he did for a living. If he had some latitude in the recording studio, to experiment and manipulate form, on the gig he usually played in what has come to be known as a "straight ahead" manner, in-tempo and with song structures that audiences could recognize and appreciate. For most jazz musicians of the time this was no great burden, but just the natural musical order of things. The jazz concert had, thankfully, already come into being as a means of showcasing jazz away from the nightclub, in a setting and manner that allowed some diversity of expression and form; but the

jazz club was still the staple, a bastion of old-school bosses, with sets timed to allow waiters free circulation amongst the customers, drinks in hand.

Teddy Charles managed, on his early recording sessions, to write some answers to the musical questions that progressives were beginning to ask in the new decade. By 1951 he'd recorded as a leader, and his first vibes solos, though perhaps no one realized it at the time, surpassed the work of Milt Jackson, who was widely regarded than (and is widely regarded now) as the supreme bebop vibist. Charles' playing had a density and passion that made that of Jackson, a great improviser but frequently an emotionally detached player (perhaps a hazard of the instrument) seem somewhat pallid. On the first session he led - which was formally a bit daring and consisted only of bass, vibes and guitar - Charles seemed intent on establishing a jazz presence, and by the next year - in a group with the brilliant guitarist Jimmy Raney and the much underrated drummer Ed Shaughnessy (who later played with Doc Severinsen's *Tonight Show* orchestra) - all seemed ready to show more of themselves, working both with and against the grain compositionally (as in their versions of a standard, *Night in Tunisia* and two originals, *Nocturne*, by Charles, and *Composition for Four Pieces*, by Raney). These furtively original compositions had a careful, searching quality to them, and Raney, who shone as a sideman in those years with the likes of Stan Getz and the pianist Al Haig - with whom he was particularly close musically - was showing more and more how daring he could be harmonically; his was a conservatively gray suited modernism, and his lines skirted the edges of chords without really departing from a conventionally triadic feeling. Still, they landed unpredictably and in satisfyingly consonant ways, with an original and aggressive but never strident logic. Charles, like Raney, was an "inside" player (as in one who plays, tonally, inside of the harmony), but like other inside players with broad musical imaginations he studiously avoided the more obvious clichés of bebop. Like Raney his playing seemed not really to reach but to just approach a boiling point, to peak just a little bit prior, in subtle and disarming ways.

The next year Charles went into the studio once again, but this time with only Shaughnessy and Hall Overton, and the results, if ultimately more noteworthy for what was attempted than what was achieved, were still significant. Three out of the four pieces they played were composed by Overton who, though not yet the strong and original composer that he would become (**see note**) was attempting, in a way unlike anyone else in jazz before, to apply the lessons of academic modernism to improvised music. If he seemed to lack either the will or ability to take the next step (as Jaki Byard was about to do in Boston (**FN**) or as Cecil Taylor would do three years later) he at least possessed the desire and some of the knowledge, putting him significantly ahead of the jazz curve. There is a sense about these recordings that he is biding his time, looking for a way to polytonal or atonal freedom, and they are made doubly interesting by the fact that they're so unlike other recorded examples of Overton's jazz playing; in nearly all else he recorded his solos were very much inside the changes, beautifully detailed but very orthodox in their organization.

There is much more here than meets the eye, and these musicians could probably have used the kind of support system that simply did not exist in jazz in those years. Suffice to say that few aside from Tristano and his brood were thinking about playing "free" at this time (that is, before 1953); and one can, given the fact that there was virtually no outlet for these ideas and forms, no place for musicians to express these ideas with consistency and exposure, only regret the lost musical opportunities.

It was on Teddy Charles' 1953 California sessions (and Teo Macero's from the same year, though we'll get to that later), however, that everything came together with finality and without experimental meandering. The music recorded on August 21 and 31 of that year by the vibist and a group of California-based jazz players has earned, over time, the right to be considered on its own terms and without an historically marginalizing label. On those two days Charles and trumpeter Shorty Rogers, saxophonist Jimmy Giuffre, bassist Curtis Counce and drummer Shelly Manne recorded eight pieces (that have been released) that show exactly what

Charles (and, by proxy, Hall Overton) was thinking. The idea, as Overton put it in his contemporaneous notes to a ten inch LP release, was that “jazz has exhausted most of its harmonic resources, and by emphasizing improvisation in unfamiliar harmonies good jazz musicians can and will find new and fresh melodic patterns.” (FN) In other words, enough of “rhythm changes” (tunes based on Gershwin’s *I Got Rhythm*) and tunes based on the same old/same old - because, though bebop was less than ten years old when Overton was writing his liner notes, the intensity of the jazz scene of those years, the constant jam sessions and repetition of certain chord progressions, the imperatives of professional survival and the natural tendency of audiences to want to hear more of what they had heard before, had all bred a certain amount of predictability in jazz players. Charles’ and Overton’s way out of the morass was to employ fresh harmonies and progressions that resolved in unfamiliar ways, to use shifting tonal centers and to work toward, again in Overton’s words, “an evolution to a jazz style more controlled with regard to form, unity of materials and development while generating through this medium a greater freedom for solo and group improvisation.”

In this they succeeded. Though Shorty Rogers would soon move into and stay in the mainstream, his early studies gave him some sympathy for the fringe. He wrote a piece for this session called *Wailing Dervish*; his own trumpet playing showed a finely-tuned sensibility reflecting the likely influence of Miles Davis but with its own personal middle-register warmth and studied intelligence. Jimmy Giuffre, was, at this time, focused on the new designs of freedom as seen through the lens of Lester Young’s dry tone and acerbic phrasing. The ideas of thematic miniaturization and chamber aesthetic that he developed so clearly in the middle and late 1950s were not yet fully formed, though he showed flashes of real formal comprehension and was composing exploratory pieces with significant if self-conscious titles like *Evolution*. Another tune from the session (and also written by Shorty Rogers) was called *Free*, and with that Charles and group were off to the avant garde races. The music recorded on those two days was

adventurous if never radically departing, but fresh in its refusal to fall back on the usual harmonic suspects. The basic language of its improvisations was still bebop, but it was bebop reduced to its plainer elements, stripped of its clichés and finessed with thematic and scalular discernment.

If Teddy Charles and Hall Overton had a plan to alter what had, until then, seemed to be the natural course of jazz, they had some interesting if informally allied co-conspirators. First and foremost was Lennie Tristano, although his musical philosophy, if sympathetic to theirs, was still very different. Overton professed a need to find new chord systems and progressions; Tristano used, primarily, just those song forms which Overton and Charles thought to be overused and outmoded. His (and Warne Marsh's and Lee Konitz's) technique was to so internalize certain chord movements through repetition that an understanding of their sequences and resolutions became second nature; this, they believed, allowed the improviser an unparalleled amount of personal freedom. And though they were still working within conventionally modernist frameworks, they did bring back certain songs - like *I'll See You In My Dreams*, *I Can't Believe that You're In Love With Me*, and *Pennies From Heaven* - that were relics of a previous age, forcing, by the very nature of their novelty, a change in the bebop mindset.

Still, most essential to the improviser from this school was that he learn and absorb a piece through repetition, and then allow himself, through habit, instinct and intellectual re-evaluation, to reset its harmonic parameters by phrasing against normal expectations - if most musicians worked in measured groups and in *measure* groups of two and four, Tristano and the others might work in threes, or with five and three. This applied, as well, to individual note groupings. The effect it had was somewhat similar to the effect of Teddy Charles' alteration of song form: pieces seemed to start and stop in odd spots, and the music breathed in new and unexpected places, giving both group and solo playing an extended, open-ended quality. There was a sense of unceasing forward motion far different, in its odd sequential feeling, than the usual head-and-solos jazz approach.

This regrouping of note phrases was, of course, something that Charlie Parker had been a master at. Miles Davis has commented in his autobiography about how Parker would, on the job, change the time so the second and fourth beats seemed to be the first and third. This is called “turning the beat around,” and Davis said he used to yell at the rhythm section to ignore what Parker was doing and hold steady, though this was often difficult if not impossible to do. (FN) Tristano found a new way to achieve something of the same effect, and he, (and Konitz and Marsh) coupled it with an approach to scalar/harmonic invention that was completely original, a rolling-on-a-log style that appealed, in its refusal to conform to jazz convention, to more than a few witnessing musicians of both that generation and the next. (FN)

If the new modernism was welcomed, it was still a matter of some time before complete synthesis of not only these new ideas but the new possibilities that they implied, was fully possible. Some musicians were still young and inexperienced, though they idealized the new age and began searching for novel ways to harness it. One, a saxophonist named Gil Melle, from Riverside, California, struck up a friendship with Alfred Lion, whose record company, Blue Note, was successfully and astutely making the transition from swing to bebop. Melle was a bright and curious youngster, and his recordings for the label have an assortment of prophetic, pre-space age titles (like *Four Moon*, *Mars*, *Cyclotron* and *Venus*). Though he was, in those early years, a very good and clean Lester Young-influenced player on tenor and baritone saxophone, he still had some way to go as a composer/arranger; he was, however, profoundly correct in his sense that the jazz status quo needed to be challenged.

More in possession of an immediate understanding, scattershot as it was, of potential avant garde paths was the West Coast bandleader Stan Kenton. He led what started out as, in some ways, a typical swing band, but evolved, by the end of the 1940s, into a peculiar pastiche of excellent, straight-ahead neo-bop orchestra, blowsy symphonic wanna-be and, on more than one occasion, stringently contemporary jazz concert band. Though Kenton had

some strange ideas about what would constitute his legacy, he still managed, in the 1950s, to pull more than a few new musical rabbits out of his hat. His stable of arrangers included the very talented Pete Rugolo, who put together more than a few sharp arrangements, most of which, despite the occasional leaky *au courant* cliché, managed to hold water, and whose best work was done etching ingeniously sly but brash backgrounds for Kenton singer June Christy; Bill Holman, whose work was much more down-the-middle of the jazz strike zone, and whose stuff, with its thick band textures and bright riffs swung in a manner that was a great relief to audiences of Kenton agnostics; Franklyn Marks, who aimed for and achieved a moody synthesis of jazz time and ersatz but relatively restrained exotica, and whose work frequently sounded liked that of a not-very-knowledgeable outsider with his nose pressed up against the window of world music; Bill Russo, who had a talent for moody themes, but whose writing, more and more, reflected his own tendency toward puffed-up and pompous philosophical grandstanding (something which he may have learned from Kenton); and, most significantly, Bob Graettinger, a brilliant iconoclast who showed, on pieces like *City of Glass* (1951) *You Go To My Head* (1952) and *Incident in Jazz* (1950) that he knew how to do everything Stan Kenton professed to want to do - write swinging and organically modernist tomes that were really jazz but never *just* jazz and never “better than” jazz, but new and novel in the best sense of the words. In personal terms Graettinger was mysterious and a mystery, a composer and an oddball, though not necessarily in that order. (FN) As much as any other jazz composer, before or since, he applied, in systematic ways, radically modernist ideas of musical novelty and change. He proved one could self-consciously strive to be different and strange and still be interestingly different and strange, not to mention artistically convincing and valid. And he proved that change for the sake of change was definitely, for jazz, still an option.

Kenton could have used more like him, though he managed to find reasonable, if musically very different, substitutes. Johnny Richards joined him a few years later and brought his own very

individual brassy arranger's attack to the band, which was just what Kenton needed as, in the middle of the decade, he set out to build a book with Latin numbers. Like Kenton Richards liked a sound that was top-heavy (lots of trumpets and trombones), and was very good at achieving it, waving the flag over screaming horn sections and making a very convincing musical case for his own South-of-the border transcriptions.

And still the mainstream of bebop was broad and deep enough to encompass some very good music. In spite of musicians like Tristano, Teddy Charles, and Hall Overton, who continued to pull at the stylistic reins, there were still large numbers who worshiped at the altar of Bird. Which is not to say that they made it their business to slavishly recreate the early days of bebop glory, but rather that, like musicians for the next fifty years, they found in its syntax a language more than sufficient for the requirements of their own ideas and expression.

Though they were few in numbers, some musicians even moved, if sometimes tentatively, over from other stylistic camps. Early progressives like Coleman Hawkins, Don Byas, and Lester Young (tenor saxophonists all) had always supported the young revolutionaries of bebop, and though they now accommodated themselves to the new repertoire and the wild cat rhythm sections, their basic styles remained, with some modification, intact. Hawkins did, from time to time, tame his heavy-lidded vibrato, and he tried to restore some equilibrium to an eighth-note attack that, at times, threatened to slip into phlegmatic excess. His ears were young, and he perceived, harmonically, everything that the youngsters were doing; his musical personality varied from evocations of his dense 1930s ballad style to aggressive mid- and up-tempo races with what seemed sometimes like imaginary opponents (one gets the sense that, in those days, Hawkins, like others of his generation, sometimes imagined himself to be running a race against irrelevancy; though this may seem, from our latter-day perspective, silly and unnecessary, there's no doubt that he and

others of his peers felt, from the beboppers, a real commercial and artistic threat).

Lester Young was undoubtedly deeply effected by bebop, though his gradual physical and mental decline throughout the 1950s tended to obscure cause and effect. He could still, however, make terrific music, employing young rhythm sections but admonishing them to go easy on the cross-coloration of accents than so prevalent in bebop. *He* would be the one to make or imply radical changes in rhythmic or pitch emphasis; the “kiddies” would have to be content to follow along. Of course he had a right to his eccentricities, possessing his own substantial modernist pedigree. After all, his revolutionary 1930s recordings had established, with their insurgent, declarative rhythms and harmonically elusive qualities, some of the ground rules for the whole Tristano school, and saxophonists like Lee Konitz and Warne Marsh were clearly captive of his some of ideas of sound and free-form phrasing. To his credit Young continued to make interesting adjustments to his playing throughout the 1950s. It now seemed to contain, in a visionary haze of push and pull, even wider and more open spaces. And with his uncanny knack for building tension and release through note repetition and subtle but telling variations of pitch and tone, he continued to sound not only very contemporary but *interested*.

Don Byas had always felt the tension, in his playing and accompaniments, between an older style of phrasing and newer methods of harmony. He'd never allowed it to stop him, however, from linking his phrases together with a bebop knowingness, or from playing with an arrogant and challenging aggressiveness. He was surely aware, however, that he risked, at least to his own mind, dating his style if he failed to come to some increasing accommodation with the new methods of the 1950s. As the decade advanced he continued to play with his distinctive mud-and-sandpaper sound, though he seemed to be somewhat conflicted between a calling for romantic, soaking-wet ballads and a desire to strut his harmonic stuff on both slow and rhythm pieces. For the most part he made the tension work to his benefit, often brilliantly,

though sometimes it gave his playing a slightly tense and unpleasant edge.

Still, “Bird’s children,” as we might call the great teams of Parker disciples who fanned out professionally into all areas of jazz in the 1950s, were pervasive in their practice of and influence on the music. The tenor saxophonist Sonny Rollins, who first recorded with the singer Babs Gonzalez while still in his teens, made, in the early 1950s a series of recordings for Prestige records which established his place in the new jazz hierarchy with surprising youthful authority. The records with Gonzalez, as well as the sessions he recorded in 1949 with the trombonist J.J. Johnson, showed clearly what other musicians on the scene were learning first hand: Rollins, with shocking ease, was absorbing jazz technique and the received ideas of bebop at an amazingly young age, and learning to express them with original weight and force of expression. Given his youth and his accomplishments, one might say he had two choices: to stay with the tried and true and rest on his youthful laurels, or to look ahead, to try and find answers to questions that he hadn’t even yet had the presence of mind to pose. As was his wont, and in a manner that would become consistent with his work over the next 20 years, Rollins went forward, though it’s unlikely, given his way of moving so restlessly from idea to idea, his constant renewal and reshaping of sources, that even he knew exactly where he was ultimately headed.

The recordings he made for Prestige in those first years show what a dominating figure he was; in nearly everything he played on he established, with his first raw and pleading phrases, his control and dominance. But Rollins was no narcissist; ultimately, his expressions of ego were successfully subordinated to a powerful and steadfastly creative vision of the saxophone’s new role in the jazz group. And unlike someone like, say Lennie Tristano, his surges of ego were accompanied by disarming and mitigating expressions of insecurity, of a kind which allowed him to step back from the proceedings and observe them as though in the third person. And so his best recordings were an uncanny combination

of chest-thumping invention and finely wrought observation, like an abstract painting begun with great splashes of paint and finished with representational detail.

Rollins learned from Parker at second hand. Though he eventually recorded with him (in a fascinating session with Miles Davis, in which Bird, under a pseudonym, played some heart-wrenching tenor sax) (FN) he was of another generation, born nine years later and in a very different place, New York City. He and the musical companions of his youth - like Jackie McLean - shadowed Parker, picking up his musical ideas, an occasional gig, and, unfortunately, some of his bad habits. That they still made so much good music may seem like something of a mystery, but the junkie culture of jazz permitted, in the 1950s, a great deal of creativity. Maybe it was because these musicians were so young, able to not only weather much of the physical debilitation but to bounce back from the inevitable bad days, to score and produce in a way that not only led to a lot of exciting and important music but which also left them open to exploitation. In later years, for instance, McLean had little use for the recordings he made for a particular jazz-oriented label. No doubt he felt its owners took advantage of his desperate need of cash, of his inability to bargain and get a good deal for himself. And yet those records - which he made throughout the 1950s - were, almost without exception, brilliant realizations of the state of bebop in the interim, the years after the music's first successes but before the radical changes forced by John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman.

Trumpeter Howard McGhee, fourteen years older than McLean and eleven years older than Rollins, was a good deal closer to Parker. He played with him on that first California trip and he recorded with him on the altoist's first solo studio setup. In the process a he built a swing-based style into a bebop one (by way of Roy Eldridge), and he quickly assimilated the ideas of Parker and Dizzy Gillespie into a method that evoked the transitional years of swing with belligerence and zeal. Like Parker he recorded for Dial, and though he was a major figure of the 1940s, professionally he

sank like a stone in the 1950s. His playing never suffered; recordings from a tour he made of the Far East with bassist Oscar Pettiford, saxophonist Rudy Williams and trombonist J.J. Johnson offer a compelling picture of a trumpeter whose style was very much built out of the heat of the moment, who seemed always to be, solo-wise, forging ahead, with great spontaneity and little aforethought. McGhee's playing had some of the same virtues as Eldridge's; he had a marked ability to string together ideas that connected in series like an electrical current, in solos that suffered not at all from their sense of impending emotional implosion. His sound was never particularly large or broad, but it was so emotionally concentrated as to bring immediate attention to itself

A particular revelation on those Far East recordings was Rudy Williams, another musician missing, thereafter, from jazz's perceived history. A member of the original swing band Savoy Sultans, he was a marvelous soloist whose first, pre-War, recordings predicted, in no uncertain terms, bebop. (FN) In the early 1950s Williams, who died tragically in a swimming accident in 1954, played in the way that was later called *mainstream*, neither particularly old fashioned nor on the modernist cutting edge. His sound and approach indicated both Lester Young and Coleman Hawkins, and he appeared, in some of his more aggressive moments, to make reference to the relatively new school of honking rhythm and blues tenor. He had great technical control, swung like mad, and played with the kind of pleasing lyricism that may very well, with one notable exception, have escaped the attention of the youngsters by whom he was now surrounded in the jazz world - that notable exception being the eternally observant and open-minded bassist Charles Mingus, who recorded *Elegy for Rudy Williams* a few years after his death.

This kind of keen observation and appreciation of Williams was typical of Mingus who, in his haughty and sometimes contemptuous and aggressive advance through the stylistic and professional conventions of the 1940s and 1950s, sometimes demonstrated a surprising amount of peripheral vision. The early Mingus is noteworthy for not only the straggly romanticism of some

of his first recordings (FN) but also for his associations. The man who professed to be so discomfited by his ambiguous skin coloration, who was so deeply sensitive to racial insults both very real and sometimes imagined, who had a firm grasp on the reality of white American and all that white power implied, was also unafraid to ally himself with some of the most important early white jazz progressives. In those years he was, in his search for a musical afterlife (after Bird, that is) stylistically color blind.

In 1951 he made a series of recordings with Spaulding Givens, an African American pianist who had some of what Mingus was looking for - a personal style and a desire to studiously avoid bebop clichés. Though musically he sounds only partially formed on these duo sessions, he also sounds like no other pianist of the time, using snippets of Art Tatum, Bud Powell, and even Tristano in original if sometimes ungainly ways. He was an original talent, and only Mingus seems to have noticed him (not altogether surprising, given the number of jazz musicians who suffer from stylistic xenophobia.) (FN)

In that same year Mingus recorded several of his own compositions in an interesting small group/vocalist setting, with Lee Konitz on alto saxophone and, most notably, the singer Jackie Paris. The close instrumental/vocalization of *Portrait* (in two takes) takes on a determined, sideshow modernism; its self-consciously eerie unisons evoke “modern music” concerts and loft audiences, or backgrounds for beat poets. Another piece from the same date, *Extrasensory Perception*, illustrates Mingus’ debt to the whole Tristano school, with its snaky chromaticism and insistent roller coaster rhythms, handled knowingly by Konitz in both theme and solo statement.

Mingus and his cohorts were coming, or trying to come, to grips with real artistic issues of form and detail, issues that would, for a great number of musicians, become increasingly important throughout the 1950s. For musicians like himself, hungry for originality and change, most jazz ran too regularly, for their tastes, on auto pilot, devoid of subtlety and attention to detail and subject to repetition of outworn musical gestures. Many of these

musicians, not surprisingly, gravitated towards each other - Mingus, for example, recorded a few years later with Teddy Charles; drummer Max Roach, Mingus' partner in the formation of an independent jazz record label (Debut) and militantly conscious of his status as a black man and musician, regularly turned up in challenging and changing settings. He worked on not only some of Mingus' sessions, but expressed solidarity with white radicals like Lennie Tristano (and years later he even performed at Tristano's funeral). This all occurred during a time of relative racial innocence, before public declarations of racial solidarity made such cross-cultural unions a little bit harder, politically, to sustain. Though Roach and Mingus were early pioneers of racial self-awareness, there was less pressure on them, then, to take public positions or to define themselves strictly in terms of the racial company they kept.

And as with some of Miles Davis' later racial pronouncements there was often, with Mingus, a gap between word and deeds. For example, and to his credit, Mingus was unafraid to go public a few years later in defending the white West Coast pianist Dave Brubeck from Davis' assertion that he didn't swing. In an interesting response published in the jazz magazine *Downbeat* he declared without ambiguity that he understood Brubeck's creative dilemmas. He clearly thought Davis was just too intolerant of other musicians, and he berated the trumpeter for his shortsightedness. This was typical if unpredictable Mingus largesse, intellectually honest to a fault. (FN)

Though not a likely Mingus ally, Brubeck was another of the new generation of seekers in jazz, though what he and his associates were seeking was not always exactly clear. In the late 1940s and early 1950s he led a series of Octet recordings with a group that included the talented composer Dave Van Kriedt, and these were, perhaps, the most fully realized of all his modernist experiments and gestures. (FN) Then, in the early 1950s, he formed a trio, and showed himself to be an accomplished post-bop pianist, albeit one who was, more and more self-consciously, trying to manipulate his materials in new (or just new-sounding) ways. If

too often he sounded like he was not quite up to the task, or was just running in place, fellow jazz musicians like Mingus recognized that he was at least making the effort. After all, the prime issue for them was *form*, and the impact that variations of form had on the improvising musician. And the questions they asked were the correct ones, though only a few seemed to understand that problems of form could not be resolved without parallel alterations of language (i.e. content), of those components of scale and chord that constituted the improviser's tools in trade.

Brubeck was grappling with all this as he entered the studio in 1950, and his answer was, simply (or too simply, some might say) to find simple and single gestures of phrase and rhythm, to shake his materials around like he was stirring a drink, changing the relative saturation of certain elements, but leaving them unchanged in their essentials. It was no longer enough for a musician like him to just learn the craft and practice it in the ways of an artisan; the serious jazz musician was now, almost without fail, an artist of scope and ambition.

Chapter 3

Jazz, Pop, Poets, and Progressives

In the 1950s jazz musicians achieved a new kind of artistic consciousness, a function of their new *self*-consciousness at being observed and judged, picked at and, in a critical sense, picked apart. They received a new level of critical attention, and in some ways this new critical nitpicking was a good thing. It showed that jazz critics and audiences were actively engaged with the music, giving it the kind of intellectual respect that it had earned and that not a few musicians desired.

Some of this desire was a function of racial consciousness; if black musicians of the 1950s never quite achieved the level of racial awareness (at least in a public sense) that black musicians of the 1960s achieved, they were still, as an educated class emergent from an educated class, painfully aware of where, in the world,

they stood. In those days it was probably good to be a jazz musician, in a business that was starting to achieve a new level of recognition, and starting to find a niche in the bohemian imagination. The jazz musician who, in the 1950s, played the right kind of music for the right kind of clientele, was allowed to rub elbows with a growing and increasingly self-conscious artistic elite. At least this was true in place like New York City, where jazz clubs increasingly became places to see and be seen, and where bars that had jazz were, in the middle and end of the decade, powerful symbols for the new poets and painters. (FN)

The party line on jazz in the 1950s was, journalistically, captive of a few jazz magazines, like *Downbeat*, the *Jazz Review*, and *Metronome*, whose columnists, intellectuals like Nat Hentoff and Barry Ulanov, were determined to create the music in their own image – or at least to create an image of the music to their liking. Looking back on what they wrote, on the reviews and words of advice, on their sometimes very self-righteousness pronouncements, is sometimes a little jarring. The unilateral advice, the harsh words of criticism for musicians who did not meet their standards of intellectual integrity, or just the declarations of solemn wisdom, give one a taste of the tenor of those (jazz) times.

What brought on such a fierce intellectual reckoning? Maybe it was a syndrome of post-War intellectual exhilaration, of a liberated subculture that co-existed, on some subterranean level, with the larger culture of repression and sublimation. Or maybe it was a response, both conscious and subconscious, to the McCarthyite wave, an attempt at self-liberation in an age of intellectual and psychological self-imprisonment. Whatever the cause, the effect was to usher in a new age of intellectual call and response, a time of instant reaction to trends, both real and imagined, in the jazz world. This world was starting to feel its philosophical oats, to carve a place for itself in an era of scholarly journals and academic discourse. If its methodology was suspect, maybe that was because it didn't really have a methodology, because men like these (Ulanov and Hentoff, not to mention Martin Williams) were really,

in the historical and journalistic sense, and for better and worse, winging it.

But that's not all that jazz was in the 1950s. It was also a music that, taking its clue from the newly dominant organization men of corporate America, began to diversify. Though it has been said many times before, it is basically true that jazz had, in the main, largely lost its commercial appeal, its currency as music to accompany dance and entertainment. Most ominous, however, was the second rise of teenage consumer power; the bobby soxers who had made Frank Sinatra popular and the frantic teens who had rocked to Benny Goodman at the Paramount Theater now passed the torch to youngsters whose ears (and feet) were more and more attuned to rhythm and blues.

1. Pop and Jazz

Rhythm and blues itself had risen out of the ashes of the swing era. Its basic shuffle rhythm was a second-cousin to that era's rich ride cymbal sound and it found itself, as the next few years passed, evolving in a number of directions and pasting itself onto quite a few different forms - teen-oriented love songs, new pop ballads in simplified song form, country and hillbilly boogie and honky tonk, the city blues of Chicago and Detroit (as passed through a prism of country and delta blues). Eventually, and with commercial finality, it metamorphosized into the pastiche of country and western, hillbilly music, and the blues called rockabilly and then rock and roll. Most of this confused and bewildered (and continues, to this day, to confuse and bewilder) the jazz audience, which, generally to its credit, has never been good at trends and trendiness. Besides, jazz had its own deep factionalism, its own sectarian battles between "moldy figs" (essentially, those who longed for the good old days) and newcomers, Condonites (who looked to bandleader and club owner Eddie Condon for direction and musical sustenance) and beboppers. With that much bloodletting on its hands, it had little time or need for opening up new fronts in the musical wars.

Some of the adaptations jazz musicians made, however, were notable and music-worthy. Valaida Snow, a black woman and Swing Era star on the European jazz circuit, who'd suffered horrible deprivations in the wake of the Nazi advance (including time in a prison camp) made one last 1950s attempt at recouping her former status. Though she was commercially unsuccessful the records she made were quite good, and showed how easily adaptable, with the right songs and record placement, her girlish, fall-back vocalizing would have been to the current-day market. She sang on some of them with the accompaniment of Jimmy Mundy's orchestra; the leader, like many another bandleader, was scrambling, with only middling success, to keep up with the times, writing danceable riffs and punctuating nearly every chorus with the kind of bluesy colloquialisms that were supposed to catch an audience's attention. (FN)

Better at it was Lucky Millinder, whose big band crossed over due to not only its quick and early grasp of Harlem musical realities (bands that played primarily for the African American community, particularly as World War II ended, had to be especially adept at pleasing dancers and assorted hepcats with large doses of jive and the blues) but to its annexation of good commercial singers like Wynonie Harris and Sister Rosetta Tharpe. (FN) Most successful of all in these crossovers were Luis Jordan, whose little jump band was basically a shaved-down big band in style and format, and Buddy Johnson, whose orchestra combined good riffing with nicely woven rhythm and blues ballads, particularly as sung by his sister Ella. The sound of that pounding jazz orchestra - much differently shaped than a typical swing band, its rhythms pre-war but grafted onto very contemporary harmonies (lots of sixths and ninths, not to mention flat fifths, flat ninths and thirteenthths) predominated in the new rhythm and blues; smart bandleaders like Johnny Otis - recognizing a recipe for success when he saw one (take a swing-type band, add some hip arrangements and a good singer out front) - were quick to notice and apply its lessons to a new and expanding market. To listen to some of these recordings is to marvel at how well the accompanying musicians played and at

how successfully they fused swing feeling with bebop figures.
(FN)

And Valaida Snow wasn't the only singer of the old school who took a stab at a fitting into a new one. Singer/pianist Gladys Bentley, creature of the Harlem Renaissance, an extraordinary performer, a cross dresser, and pioneering lesbian feminist (she apparently married a white woman from New Jersey in the 1940s) moved West after the War to try her hand at the odd jazz/pop fusion that a lot of rhythm and blues had become. Though she made only a small dent in the field, she continued to sing with distinction before getting religion, going straight (though its been speculated that she did this for practical reasons, as a gay fish out of water in than-sexually conservative California) and dying from the flu in 1960. (FN)

2. Jazz and Pop

Interestingly enough, the middle of the road wasn't the only place for swing musicians to land in the new age. Though few in number, some headed straight to the left, like saxophonist Charlie Barnet, who'd led a very popular band during the height of the Swing Era and who formed, if only briefly, an actual bebop band after the war. It was filled with young beboppers who had plenty of musical "attitude," playing with the kind of visceral aggression which gave the music, in times like this, an almost vicious hit-and-run charm. Though Barnet made, in the next ten years, a transition back to a mainstream band, bebop left a permanent imprint on his music. Likewise with the trumpet star Harry James who, in the late 1940s, began to hire arrangers like Neal Hefti and Johnny Richards to try to make a real go of the new music. Hefti was a particularly good fit; his music showed an awareness of the new environment without a radical re-tooling of the big band format. Fortunately James hired the kind of musicians who kept the old feeling while finding the new, without sentimentality, false nostalgia, or novelty shallowness. Though his commercial recordings of those years leave some large gaps, his late 1940s and early 1950s transcriptions show not only a band that played with swing and exacting

bravado, but a leader whose trumpet playing was taut and exciting, who met new requirements of execution and sound with masterly control. James, who moved comfortably between the two often very different worlds of jazz and show business, was, simply, a terrific jazz musician with a very good *jazz* orchestra.

Commercially singers still ruled the roost, though jazz or quasi-jazz singers like Al Hibbler or Nellie Lutcher occupied their own particular airspace. Versatile and soulful, Hibbler went from working with Duke Ellington to selling substantial amounts of records as a single, making a name for himself on the Decca label and trying, sometimes successfully and sometimes not, to overcome the overstuffed arrangements with which they saddled him. His work in the first part of the decade with Atlantic Records was better and his accompanists more sympathetic, but Decca had more promotional power and packed more punch in the marketplace.

Nellie Lutcher became the preeminent female hipster of the day with her Capital recordings, and had crossover success probably because she invested everything she sang, from throw-away novelties to superior songs like Johnny Mercer's *I Thought About You*, with equal conviction. Her piano playing was a perfect complement to her voice, a rummage sale of jazz styles and effects, of rubbery slurs and kitten-ish glissandos. Its quick stops and stuttering starts just added to the overall hip effect without detracting from her supremely musical showmanship and swing.

Less likely to appear on the charts were (capital J) jazz singers like Mary Ann McCall or Annie Ross. McCall, who left the Woody Herman band with a distinctive style and a bad drug habit, began to record under her own name in the late 1940s. She grew to full maturity in the 1950s, doing some of her best singing in the middle of the decade with the kind of subtle rhythmic embellishments and bitter-sweetened tone that also characterized the singing of the Boston-based Teddi King and the former Claude Thornhill vocalist Fran Warren.

The U.K.-born Annie Ross made her first recordings for the independent jazz label Prestige in 1952. Like a few other singers

she was working out the format of what would come to be called vocalese, the placing of song lyrics to jazz solos. Later that year she recorded *Twisted*, based on a solo by saxophonist Wardell Grey, and her version not only made her famous, it established itself in the *repertoire*, from whence it was picked up by singers like the folk-oriented Joanie Mitchell, who recorded it more than twenty years later. Annie Ross had a multi-octave range, understood how to make herself not only a soloist but part of the rhythm section, and she swung, so it was not surprising that only a few years passed before she joined singers Jon Hendricks and Dave Lambert, both bebop devotees and advocate of vocalese, to form the group Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross. Though Hendricks was a little overly self-enamored of his own poesy and did little of consequence as a soloist, as a group they achieved, musically, far more than any of them ever achieved on their own. Sometimes they emulated a big band, riffing in time or behind a lead voice, and at other times they managed to do the (almost) impossible, making multi-part vocals swing with precision and sensitivity.

As the decades were changing so was the sound of male-pop, most specifically under the influence of Frank Sinatra. Still recording for Columbia Records and facing the feudal attitudes of producer Mitch Miller, he was coming to terms with his own talent and finding, slowly but with intelligence and purpose, a musical direction. Between 1949 and 1951, with a variety of arrangers, he recorded a number of songs that not only were at variance with the kind of novelty trifles Miller seemed to prefer, but which also found him settling for the middle ground between popular crooner and jazz swinger. Though arguments would persist for years over whether or not Sinatra was a jazz singer, his strength as a performer was in the natural way in which his talent circumvented such questions, making, through the dominating force of his personality, the whole argument irrelevant. No male singer who came after Sinatra could avoid, directly or indirectly, his influence, the pull of his dramatic technique, or help emulating, in one way or another, his unforced idea of swing. (FN)

Though growing rarer and rarer, there were still some productive intersections of jazz and pop music in those days. The arranger and composer Les Baxter was in the midst of what would be a long and lucrative career arranging and rearranging Hollywood exotica, with the kind of South-of-the-border musical treatments that were more palm tree than Managua. Still, he had a flair for his job, and he managed to mix in, among the silly programmatic murals of dancing native maidens, some genuinely good arrangements. Nothing he did shows a complete and unequivocal commitment to just *music*, but two pieces he recorded in 1951, *Stone God* and *Bacoa*, come closer than anything else he did in those years. While he never grew *into* his material like fellow Hollywood composer Esquivel (whom we'll consider later on), never really had enough artistic self-respect to just write, to rescue his material from the kind of studio-set oblivion for which it was destined, there was, about his work, a real (if ultimately unrealized) sense of possibility.

On the Country side, Singer Tommy Duncan, late of Bob Wills seminal Western Swing band, recorded on his own in the early 1950s with a sound that was as much honky tonk as swing (though, really, more honky tonk). His easy drawl of a voice was just fine for the new trends in country music, and he took the hillbilly world just a little farther into musical intermarriage, something to which it was, anyway, quite accustomed. Another Wills alumnus, the mandolinist Tiny Moore, was now working with Wills' brother Billy Jack, and his recordings from the beginning of the decade show how he was transitioning from swing to bebop and beginning to develop extraordinary jazz chops, working his sometimes stiff phrasing into relaxed and longer lines. (FN) Western Swing was, by this time, a music whose time had largely come and gone, but it still persisted on the radio and in dance halls throughout the West and Southwest. Many of the Oakies and Texans who'd fled dust storms and the parched Southwestern earth were now living in California, particularly but not only in places

like Bakersfield, and they carried their musical tastes, both nostalgic and new, with them.

A little more up to date was the Arkansas-born singer and bandleader Roy Hogsed. Bred on traveling medicine shows (in which he performed with his family band) he, like thousands of other hillbillies, moved West with the War industries. That was where the work and the workers were, and that was where the entertainers followed to try to collect a piece of their paychecks. The music was still primarily out of honk tonk with a dab of western swing thrown in, but with more than a shot of the blues, and had not a little in common with the playing of musicians like the black bluesman T. Bone Walker. Hogsed, however, leaned a little more toward swing, and on things like *Snake Dance Boogie* (from 1951) his lead guitarist/brother Jasper mixed it up nicely with typical jazz scales. *She's a Mean Mean Woman* (from the same session) showed what a smorgasbord of music these men were working from in those days. Country was in the midst of one of its many renovations, and *She's a Mean Mean Woman* sounds, to our ears, like nothing so much as rockabilly, a form which would not, at least officially, emerge for several years.

3. Jazz Et Jazz

If jazz was, with some Darwinian finality, making way for the new, a lot of the old was in the process of developing its own tactics of survival. Not everyone was as lucky as Eddie Condon and his sidemen, who were able to establish residencies in New York clubs owned and/or booked by sympathetic fans of the music. For a number of musicians who'd made their names before World War II the 1950s were a time of exile, a time to drift in and out of the music, to find day jobs away from it and re-enter, on occasion, with talent intact, a recording studio. Pianist Jess Stacy, once married to the singer Lee Wiley, headed West in the direction of a company called Max Factor (they made lipstick and other kinds of makeup), though before taking an extended retirement from the music he made some quartet recordings in Los Angeles. The music world had, in those days, little if any room for a talent

like his, for a player who had certainly kept up his own chops, if not, completely, with the changing scene. For Stacy nothing had been lost in the interim - he still played with an unsullied emotionalism, executing phrases with a bright and unfussy precision - except his ability to make a living. The same was true of Joe Sullivan, a pianist from Chicago who showed, from his earliest recordings with Condon in the late 1920s, a smart feeling for the jazz beat, for the kind of rhythmic digressions brought into the music by Earl Hines. Sullivan, in what would be the slow but final throes of alcoholism, settled after the War in San Francisco, and his playing seemed none the worse for wear. He worked for some time at a club named, appropriately, The Hangover, and made some recordings in 1953 (later released on Riverside Records) that showed not only was everything intact but that, in reality, he was playing better than ever. He had a surprisingly deep feeling for the blues, and a nice scattered way with standards, which he seemed to take apart and then reassemble like jigsaw puzzles. (FN) Though, unlike Jess Stacy, he always kept to the music, he became more and more marginalized by his own self-fulfilling sense of isolation, as one more musician fatally and permanently out of his time.

Less detached from the jazz world but still drifting in those years was the great tenor saxophonist Ben Webster. One of the most important disciples of Coleman Hawkins, he was very enthusiastic about the changes bebop was causing, and he had his own history of personal stylistic adjustments. His work with Duke Ellington, and in particular his influential solo on *Cottontail* (from 1942) showed he was a musical adventurer, and though he found himself in a state of personal flux after the War his recordings of the time (like those with the pianist Clyde Hart, drummer Sid Catlett and trumpeter Hot Lips Page from 1944) (FN) showed how sensitive he was to everything that was happening in New York. He, too, went to the West Coast in the early 1950s (his mother, to whom he was very attached, lived out there) and began to refine what had been a somewhat schizophrenic style: always capable of both aching tenderness and moody gruffness on the horn, he now

began to merge those tendencies into a single persona, all informed by his trademark tough guy sentimentality. On him it sounded good, without mawkishness or glib showbiz sensitivity, and the few things he recorded with the Los Angeles-based bandleader Johnny Otis fairly oozed with warmth and a renewed sense of commitment to the music. (FN)

It was a new ballgame for even the celebrated and tragic Billie Holiday, a former love of Webster's whose voice showed the beginning ravages of not only time but of her gradual and increasing dissolution. With incredible resourcefulness, however, she took her troubles and made them into something which amounted to a complete stylistic renewal. This (to the dismay of some devoted friends and fans like John Hammond) was no longer the Billie Holiday of the Swing Era, the bitter and self-destructive but still hopeful presence who'd come to define jazz singing in the most completely personal and inimitable way imaginable. Her disillusionment was now almost complete, her path to actual self-destruction clearly laid out before her. But she was still an artist and she made, out of all this, art, of a kind that was neither self-conscious nor self-pitying. Singing at the Boston club Storyville in 1951, she was a shadow of her former self, true, but a brilliantly self-possessed shadow, assured and faithful to songs that, with the strangely artificial but verifiable authenticity of pop poetry, amounted to fictional autobiography. (FN)

But what of the new progressives, the new (or, really, by now, experienced) followers of Charlie Parker who, as the 1950s unfolded, were left more and more to their own bebop devices? Pianist Bill Triglia, who had a knack for associating with some of the most personally compelling players (like the trumpeter Tony Fruscella and the saxophonist Dave Schildkraut) was starting to leave some of his more blatant stylistic debts behind. His earliest known studio recordings, with Fruscella and the altoist Chick Maures, from 1948, showed that at age 24 he was very comfortable with, and adapting to, the kind of things Bud Powell was doing, though he was not, by nature, a copyist. In 1952 he led and did

most of the composing for a session gathering some of the best and the brightest of the new generation - Fruscella, alto saxophonist Herb Geller, tenor saxophonist Phil Urso, and bassist Red Mitchell. Triglia's very good writing owed a debt to Miles Davis' and Gil Evans' Birth of the Cool sessions, and it showcased Fruscella's cool-blue temperament, his languid way of phrasing and casual way with the beat. Though he was not yet completely in control of his materials, it showed Fruscella's independence of Miles Davis, who was working toward some of the same aesthetic goals but with very different means (and, ultimately, very different ends). And though a few years would pass before Fruscella was able to make a complete virtue out of an approach that bordered, in his earliest work, on egoistic self-obsession, there was, already, in a way that was (is) very rare for jazz, great and poetic sensitivity in his playing. (FN)

Though Herb Geller would soon relocate to the West Coast, his playing on this date shows that, as an intense and idiomatically bebop-styled musician, he had much more in common with his peers in the East. From the beginning Geller was a player who sounded very theoretically attuned to the music, who seemed (like, in a very different way, Sonny Stitt) to revel in its methods and melodic contours, who understood the emotional core and the music and its means of expression. In this sense he was part of a whole school of young, mainly (but not all) white, alto saxophonists, who may have, as Charles Mingus later complained, been *carving the Bird* into small stylistic pieces, but who did so, nevertheless, with complete integrity and prodigal brilliance. Though by some perspectives Geller appears to have been walking in Parker's shoes, he, like Phil Woods, Schildkraut, Joe Maini, Charlie Mariano, Gene Quill, Jimmy Ford, and others, was so personally and emotionally committed to the music as to make the whole argument seem, in the moment that the music was playing, unimportant.

It was the same with Triglia and his idol Bud Powell. Like Hank Jones, Al Haig, or Duke Jordan, he took most personally to the lyric side of Powell's playing, though he still marveled at

Powell's incredible technique and his way of bending traditional tonality to his own chaotic will. For Triglia the way to emulation was an approximation of the other's method of brusque and offhanded double timing, through a reduction of Powell's powerfully clashing chordal inner voicings to much more basic and consonant ends. Though other pianists managed to isolate one or another of the elements of Powell's style, none combined as well as Triglia did the percussive with the melodic, in so personal a way.

It's hard to reconcile the mature performances on all these recordings with the fact that few of these musicians had even reached their thirtieth birthdays. And some, like the alto saxophonist Jackie McLean, were not even twenty before they were out gigging with the likes of Parker or Miles Davis.

McLean is another who shows that what's really interesting about the saxophonists of those years is not how many were modeling themselves on Charlie Parker but how smartly they were doing it, how knowingly they built up personal sounds out of what were rapidly becoming public domain ideas of melody and rhythm. McLean had, from the start, his own sound, an edgy, slightly sharp approach to the instrument that made him quickly recognizable, even on an air shot with Davis' group from the club Birdland (1952) (FN) in which he's a little bit off microphone. It's a very interesting recording; Davis is in good shape, executing with an invention and rapidity that shows he was still very much ensconced in some of the more typical moves of bebop, and that he was not above showing how enthusiastic he could be when caught in the moment (the atmosphere of a live broadcast was very different from that of a recording studio). Things like this are important reminders of not only how much good music Davis was making relatively early in his career (or at least before the more celebrated Blue Note and Columbia recordings) but also of how important his ties were to the earliest days of bebop. He certainly, on these Birdland recordings and on other remote broadcasts of the late 1940s and early 1950s, plays with the fiery assurance and stylistic focus of a veteran.

And he certainly, in McLean, recognized a like-minded stylistic maverick. So technically assured and self-conscious on those broadcasts (he even at one point appropriates the classic Bird quote of the melodic phrase "I'm Popeye the Sailor Man") McLean, on the verge of stepping out from under the immediate stylistic glare of Charlie Parker, reminds us a little bit of Sonny Rollins, grappling, as he is, so brilliantly with the still-new language of bebop. And he is doing so with urgency and immediacy, despite becoming caught up with some of the worst jazz tendencies of those years. For a lot of jazz musicians in those days drug addiction just seemed to happen, as part of the professional course of things. Self reflection was something of a luxury for younger players, who found themselves, to their own personal (though not necessarily musical) detriment, caught in its professionally discomfiting and personally confusing whirlwind.

The intense personal conflicts felt by musicians like McLean, Miles Davis, and Sonny Rollins were no doubt reflected, at least indirectly, in their playing. Though one hesitates to make such specific connections, the intensity of the stylistic adjustments toward which they were working, the fervor of the musical connections they were making, all seem reflected in the story of those times. Everything seems somehow connected in odd but real ways - the crazy and mixed up lives led by drug addicts, the whole aura of addiction as it fed on, and was fed upon by, the life of jazz clubs and jazz musicians and road trips. Money, when it appeared, soon disappeared, and gigs were like drug connections - just one more link to survival, a way of getting to the next day without the pain and suffering of withdrawal. Life and art have rarely ever intersected with such a vengeance as they did for Charlie Parker and his drug-dependent disciples in the ten or so years after the end of World War II, in a blur of exploitation and instruction, experimentation and self degradation.

The impact of all this, great as it was, spread beyond those in Parker's immediate sway, to foreign musicians who seemed to pick up on the whole ideal of drug use through personal/musical osmosis, or to musicians on the opposite Coast who were trying,

with a degree of personal desperation, to pick up on the secrets of the new music - for all these people drug use was like the secret handshake, a way to have something in common with not only fellow workaday jazz musicians but with **BIRD**, the man himself, the Creator of it all. And even non-addicts felt the effects of not only addiction but its legends and myths, the all-encompassing guilt-by-association of those who idolized and followed Charlie Parker. (Dave Schildkraut told a story of running into the arranger/composer George Handy on the subway some years after they had last worked together. Handy said to him, "Davey, are you still strung out?" and Schildkraut, a teetotaler in every way but amused by the assumptions inherent in the question, just answered, "Sure.")

It was possible, but not likely, that things were better on the West Coast. Of course, it was on the West Coast that Parker had had his first, drug-related nervous breakdown, and it was on the Coast that premier addicts like trumpeter Chet Baker, saxophonist Art Pepper, and pianist Joe Albany were beginning their dependency apprenticeships. But it was also on the West Coast that the pianist Dave Brubeck was finishing his studies and starting to gig at small clubs, beginning to build a name for not only himself but his Quartet, the entity that would, in only a few years, bring him an unaccustomed degree of jazz fame.

West Coast music, in the face of all the stereotypes (that it was cool to the point of coldness, emotionally detached and uninvolved to the point of being just plain boring) was different, seeming to reflect its distance from the sources of bebop's origination, particularly, though with some notable exceptions, as played by the new white jazzers. Certainly Brubeck, whose music was very much modern music for people who didn't really like modern music, mirrored all this. By 1952 his trio had become, with the addition of saxophonist Paul Desmond, a quartet, and it placed him as far from the madding crowd of beboppers as possible, into a world of audiences who found, in its carefully constructed and easily navigated musical mazes, shelter from the growing modern jazz storm. By showing appreciation for Brubeck they could make

themselves out to be open minded and culture conscious, without having to put up with the crass complications of more difficult modern forms.

Brubeck went relatively quickly from struggling artist to local and then national fame, and his early recordings, particularly the “live” ones, help to explain his appeal. This was neither *jazz hot* nor cool jazz, but more like music for the non-Beat cool heads who were still enmeshed with certain inalienable middle class values, for audiences that were self consciously aware of their status and functions as audiences and who enjoyed the intimacy that the new school of jazz performance provided. Unlike classical concerts, in which the wall between performer and spectator was invisible but real, the jazz performer seemed to invite the observer in to look over his shoulder and participate in the process. There are photos taken at that time of Brubeck at the piano in concert at what appears to be a college, in what looks like a classroom with folding chairs. He is surrounded by not only his quartet but by the crowd, which sits on all sides of the group, in an arrangement that one would never have found at any classical recital. The audience is in front, behind and beside him; Brubeck’s documented work of the time reflects the same surface informality, an informality that he seemed to carry with him both on record and in-person.

He plays, always, like someone who is being watched and who knows he is being watched. As such he is aware, within certain boundaries, of what is expected, which is, basically, the unexpected (or, at the paradoxical least, the predictably unexpected). For example, on a long solo version of *Over the Rainbow*, recorded at the Boston club Storyville in 1952, he does, or at least tries to do, what he does (or almost does) best - which is to avoid the obvious, the obvious clichés of the jazz soloist, the obvious harmonic resolutions and sequences, the obvious rhythmic interpolations and harmonic substitutions. There is, or was, something very refreshing about this approach, about its studious avoidance of what was being done elsewhere in jazz. One also quickly got the feeling, unfortunately, that the avoidance of predictable cadences and harmonies was not enough; too much

attention was being paid to irrelevant, disconnected, and cluttering detail, all produced as though simply in avoidance of convention.

To be sure, this was a tendency to which Brubeck fell victim more and more as the years passed. *Over the Rainbow*, in spite of its weaknesses, has a charm and brevity that he would have done well to preserve in other aspects of his work. The problem is that, as he moves through its chord changes in search of ways to alter and extend it, he suffers from the limits of his musical imagination, from the constraints of his own very pedestrian ideas of what is “modern.” The result is a very nice performance which, unlike the best jazz improvisations, has very little with which to transcend its specific time of performance. Would that Brubeck had Lennie Tristano’s talent for harmonic development; in that same year Tristano, recorded in performance with Marsh and Konitz in Toronto, gave several stunning displays of how standard harmonies might be augmented and elaborated upon, taken outside of themselves and then put back together again, added to and then reduced to their most basic sonorities. (FN) But then, Tristano had a genius for harmony and Brubeck merely a precocious and somewhat frozen talent.

Brubeck did well to bring the talented alto saxophonist Paul Desmond to the fore. Though sometimes Desmond’s playing suffers, too, from an excess of erudition, from too great a consciousness of its own designs, he was a great melodist whose solos, as early as 1952, displayed a deep and unswerving sense of continuity. It is interesting, as we compare (or really contrast) Brubeck to Tristano, that Desmond, with his smooth and icing-on-the-cake sound, was often considered to be out of the Konitz/Marsh school of saxophone playing. While he had some aesthetic ideas in common with them he also had a much different approach to the horn, much more conventional ideas of phrase length and resolution. There is a sense in his best playing of great intelligence and poised development, of sequential ideas philosophically related, if distantly, to their methods, but these were very general ties. And unlike them, at least in the early years of his development, he had a tendency toward glib recitation of

certain stock blues phrases, the kind of end-punctuations that became such weary clichés in jazz playing. It was almost as though Desmond, as one of the new progressives, had to prove his ties to tradition, his knowledge of basic emotional responses. For jazz musicians with conscious ties to the past this meant the blues, and it also meant the overuse of certain techniques. And it was obviously something musicians were thinking about in those times, about how to move forward while satisfying a critical craving for roots. Even Jimmy Giuffre, whose own composing and playing so carefully avoided the obvious and the expected, sometimes fell into this trap, of blues-reference to the point of repetition and false primitivism.

Surely one of the most important things about not only Lennie Tristano but his followers was that they yielded to no such external demands or considerations. The improviser, under the pressure of spontaneity, of the need to prove himself on the job and in the recording studio, in front of audiences and other musicians, too often reached for techniques and easy ideas that were guaranteed to please the ears of less discerning listeners. Tristano, trying to bring freshness to a music that, though it supposedly thrived on the unexpected was frequently unwilling to pay the idea anything more than lip service, pushed the envelope to the point of avoiding almost anything that smacked of glib repetition. Though not without their own stock phrases, Tristano, Lee Konitz, and Warne Marsh (like Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Bud Powell just before them) succeeded in changing the level of critical discourse in a very public way, in forcing jazz into a period of sometimes painful self examination. Like the founders of bebop they did so by raising the stakes for the improviser, by forcing him to re-examine not just the tools of his craft but the philosophical assumptions on which the use of those tools were based. They asked a lot of new and troubling (and troublesome) questions, and the answers (both literal and figurative) that they gave to those questions were not always reassuring, particularly for the critics, historians, and musicians who had already staked their claims upon jazz and the telling of its history. And though not everyone was aware of it at the time, they changed forever, in a profound and complicated way that impacted upon both musicians and critic, the relationship of musician to music and of music to audience.