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The Play of Meaning and the Meaning of Play in Jazz

Trumpeter Don Cherry was fond of saying that 'there is nothing more serious than fun'.[1] And philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer (1993, p.102) seems to echo his words when he writes: 'Seriousness is not merely something that calls us away from play; rather, seriousness in playing is necessary to make the play wholly play'.[2] Individuals, communities and cultures the world over delight in the play of musical sound *and* debate its play of meanings. For specialists, musical discussion often hinges on cryptic symbols and impenetrable codes, but for everyone, understanding music relies on basic cognitive and social processes. By *musicking* together — to borrow Christopher Smalls' (1998) evocative phrase for taking part in any way in musical activity — we bond with one another and create shared meanings.[3] We also define or express ourselves within and against a musical community and a historical and cultural tradition.

The world of jazz as a tradition provides a rich context for investigating the relationship between formal musical syntax, social interactive processes and cognitive and cultural understandings. In this essay I explore original jazz performances by John Coltrane (*A Love Supreme*) and Sonny Rollins (*Freedom Suite*) and recent reinterpretations by other artists for insight into the cognitive and social processes through which musical meanings are negotiated and renegotiated. My analysis draws on work in cognitive science with categorization and conceptual mapping and on the notion of signifyin(g) first proposed by Henry Louis Gates (1988) for African American cultural studies.

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[1] Quoted to me in an interview with Adam Rudolph, a percussionist and former collaborator with Cherry.

[2] See Sutton-Smith (1974) for an introduction to anthropological perspectives on play.

[3] In *Keeping Together in Time*, William H. McNeil (1995) argues that coordinated rhythmic activity is fundamental to life in society. And music, from marching bands to dance clubs, certainly plays an important role in organizing this coordinated rhythmic activity.

A Love Extreme: Defining and Categorizing Music

Categorization is a central part of human cognition, and it dramatically affects how we attend to our environment and which details we recognize, store and later recall. How and what we categorize also invariably affects other important debates over cultural, historical and artistic value. Considerable research in cognitive science demonstrates that the 'basic' level of human understanding operates at the middle level of taxonomy, optimising efficiency and information (e.g., Rosch, 1978). A child first learns to categorize things like 'table', or 'cat' before the more specific level of 'coffee table' or 'Himalayan Persian cat' or the more general level of 'furniture' or 'pets'. And when I am asked by a stranger to describe what is in my case when I am travelling, I normally respond with 'saxophone' rather than 'musical instrument' or 'Selmer Balanced Action tenor saxophone', optimising information with efficiency.

This cognitive economy can be achieved in several ways. One can determine membership based on formal, necessary and sufficient conditions. For example, the category of birds would seemingly involve the necessary and sufficient conditions of feathers, beaks and winged flight. Obviously an approach focused on a limited set of prevalent features may inappropriately include, or exclude, members. For example, a categorization of fish focused exclusively on the necessary and sufficient conditions of natural environment and means of locomotion would include whales and dolphins despite the fact that their mode of respiration and means of reproduction makes them mammals. Alternatively, one can invoke prototypes as a way to describe the most typical member of a given category. A wren or robin, for instance, is often perceived as a more typical bird than say a penguin or emu. Finally, models of categorization are inherently conditioned by individual and cultural values and goals, which can change, often dramatically, over time.

In many jazz circles, performers, listeners, critics and scholars debate not only the merits of specific performances, but also the very naming of the music and which approaches and sounds can be considered as 'authentic' jazz. Definitions of jazz range from those focused on necessary and sufficient conditions — such as 'acoustic music' that 'swings' and features 'improvisation' — to those that accept and even emphasize the fluid and hazy boundaries of graded membership (e.g., Latin jazz, Turkish jazz, classical jazz, electronic jazz, and so on). Our definitions of jazz, or at least the processes we use to categorize potential instances of the music, significantly affect how we hear and evaluate both newer and prototypically canonical work. Referring to 'textbook' definitions of music in general, Zbikowski (2002, p.48) writes 'although such debates appear to be about music, they are in fact about how to define the categories through which we organize our understanding of music'.[4]

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[4] Of course the category of 'music' itself varies between individuals, cultures and historical time periods. Ethnomusicologists often point out that not all cultures have a term that translates to Western notions of 'music', both accepting more and less into their conceptualizations. And contemporary Western musicians have challenged listeners to hear any sound as musical (for instance, John Cage,

The specific sounds and dynamic structures of musical performance can also exploit and challenge our ability to categorize. Each musical gesture or utterance, on first or subsequent encounter, is heard in relationship to our individual musical history and acculturated musical sensibilities. The mere mention of the title to John Coltrane's album *A Love Supreme*, for instance, invokes a whole host of responses to jazz aficionados. For many, the title brings immediately to mind the four-note motive — A-Love-Su-Preme — that serves to unify the composed and improvised parts of Coltrane's suite.[5] Others may instead hear in their 'mind's ear' the opening stroke on the Chinese gong and the introductory 'benediction' of Coltrane's horn. And for Los Angeles residents and National Public Radio listeners, the mention of *A Love Supreme* may even bring to mind the KCRW program titled *Which Way LA?*, which uses Coltrane's memorable introduction as its opening theme. Jazz performers may be triggered to reflect on their own experiences either practicing along with the recording in private, or trying their hands at playing the spiritually charged music with a group at a jam session or in concert. Avid fans may connect to the first time they heard the suite or to the context of a particularly memorable encounter with the recording. A select few may even have been fortunate enough to hear the only known live performance of *A Love Supreme* by Coltrane's group in Antibes, France in 1965. Regular jazz concert-goers may also be able to recall experiences hearing all — or more likely part — of the suite performed live by groups led by Elvin Jones, McCoy Tyner, Alice Coltrane, or perhaps John McLaughlin and Carlos Santana, or others. And those listeners newer to jazz may actually know the recent recorded version of *A Love Supreme* by Branford Marsalis' quartet rather than the original recording.

All of this is to say that *A Love Supreme* invokes at least as many meanings as there have been individual listeners to the now-famous work. And yet it also, increasingly so, has a shared canonical meaning to historians, performers and fans alike — a meaning that appears to transcend its historically situated original incarnation. Ashley Kahn's (2002a) recent book focuses explicitly on Coltrane's best-known work. And it does much both to provide specific historic detail on the production and reception of the album *and* to preserve and further the sense that *A Love Supreme* holds a transcendent place in the recorded work of Coltrane and in the history of recorded jazz. According to Kahn (2002b) *A Love Supreme* has become Coltrane's 'career-defining, genre-defying classic'. In exploring the specifics of categorization, one might ask how this 'classic' work evolves and what the impact of such a prototype continues to be on the listening and performing jazz community.

The music on the original release was recorded direct to two-track stereo in less than four hours (the evening of December 9, 1964) and in album order, and,

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although his role as a 'composer' and the performance of his works as 'compositions' conform to our conceptual models for music and music making.

[5] Lewis Porter (1985) uses this perceived structural unity to argue for Coltrane's uncanny ability to improvise with 'extraordinary compositional clarity . . . to get the most out of his restricted selection of materials' (pp. 600 and 607). His emphasis and specific language, however, reflect the general bias for compositional study and European conceptions of musical structure and coherence in the music academy.

in the case of the third and fourth parts, in one seamless take.[6] Its quick release in February of 1965 benefited from both commercial and cultural factors. ABC–Paramount, Impulse's parent company, offered strong support to the album's release, riding the industry-wide wave sparked by the success of the 'British Invasion.' And Coltrane's profoundly spiritual music and message — delivered most clearly in the album's liner notes and 'recited' by Coltrane's horn in 'Psalm,' the fourth part of the suite — struck a chord with both civil rights activists and the burgeoning counterculture (Kahn 2002a, pp.150–65).

Coltrane, however, only performed *A Love Supreme* once in concert, and the existing recording confirms that the suite was improvised over only the barest of preconceived sketches. The ontological identity of *A Love Supreme* as a conceptual model may then be construed as somewhat fluid. Conceivably a new version of the work need only reference these basic underlying materials to ensure membership in the category. Even off-the-cuff quotations of the 'A-Love-Su-Preme' motive on bandstands and at jam sessions around the world — frequently in extremely diverse contexts — can evoke the original work to listeners and other musicians without fail. And yet the definitive studio recording is so well known and well regarded by millions of listeners that any attempt to revisit its structure, or any departure from its original form and content is suspect. Not only is the 'A-Love-Su-Preme' motive well known, but the exact instrumentation and personnel on the album, and each musician's approach to improvisation and exact improvised solos are intimately familiar to countless listeners. An 'authentic' approach to this work focused on these 'necessary and sufficient' conditions would require a drummer who 'sounds like' Elvin Jones, a piano player who plays like McCoy Tyner, a bass player who can imitate Jimmy Garrison's individual touch, and a saxophonist who can reference Coltrane's sound and style and his specific approach to developing the four-part suite.

So how have performers dealt with *A Love Supreme*? Countless saxophonists who have been influenced by Coltrane's music have, of course, offered posthumous tributes, but usually with the conspicuous absence of this 'career-defining classic'. Musicians who play instruments not featured on the original recording seem more willing to take on Coltrane's signature suite. Electric guitarists John McLaughlin and Carlos Santana recorded a popular version of *A Love Supreme* (actually only Part 1 — 'Acknowledgement') in 1973, which adds Latin percussion, fiery riffs and electronic distortion to produce a very different group sound and approach. And more recently, trombonist Conrad Herwig and trumpeter Ray Vega have offered Latinized versions of Coltrane's best-known work as well. And perhaps the most unconventional contemporary interpretation of Coltrane's memorable music is by bagpiper Rufus Harley.

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[6] On the following day in the studio, Coltrane invited saxophonist Archie Shepp and bassist Dr. Art Davis to expand the group to a sextet but none of this material made the original release. It seems that the sextet only recorded 'Part I — Acknowledgement' that day. The two surviving takes were released for the first time on a 2-CD Deluxe Set by Impulse in 2002 and provide an interesting example of how unreleased material, when later released, can provoke similar ontological comparisons as those discussed in this article. See Kahn (2002a, Ch. 2) for a nice discussion of this session and for commentary from involved musicians and listeners.

Even those musicians intimately associated with John and the original sessions have only touched on his suite lightly. His widow, Alice Coltrane, was first to record a portion of the suite in 1971 (again, only 'Acknowledgement'), but she used a drum-less group featuring her organ and harp playing and Leroy Jenkins' violin. Drummer Elvin Jones, in revisiting his original work on the album, has perhaps stayed closest to the 'classic' quartet arrangement and approach. As Jones stated, 'I always live in the hope that someday all of John Coltrane's compositions will be played as a matter of course. It shouldn't be anything exceptional for musicians to play this music' (quoted in Kahn, 2002a, p.207). Starting in 1978, Jones added two parts of the suite ('Acknowledgement' and 'Resolution') to the repertoire of his groups, despite the misgivings of some of his sidemen including Frank Foster, a tenor saxophonist, who later expressed, 'I wish I had stuck to my guns and said, "No, Elvin, I can't do this"'. Even saxophonist Ravi Coltrane (John's son) admits,

> when you go to a gig, and somebody wants to play *Resolution*, it might be fun, but to me, it's sacred as a whole. *A Love Supreme* is not just a tune or a record, it's an offering to God, and not just an idle offering. It's really music for a different purpose, not to be hip or cool, or even nostalgic (quoted in Kahn, 2002a, p. 206).

Despite these frequent warnings and misgivings, several contemporary jazz musicians have taken on this rather marked challenge in John Coltrane's repertoire. Starting in 1992, trumpeter Wynton Marsalis has occasionally performed the entire suite in a quartet setting (often with Elvin Jones on drums) and in February of 2002 he led the Lincoln Center's fifteen-piece jazz orchestra in an arranged reading of the work. Saxophonist Branford Marsalis recorded a truncated version of the suite for the compilation album *Red, Hot & Cool* and more recently revisited the work with his quartet on the album *Footsteps of our Fathers*. Saxophonist David Murray has also recently recorded 'Part I — Acknowledgment' on his album titled *Octet Plays Trane*.

For his rendition, Branford Marsalis used not only the 'classic' quartet instrumentation, but also the same rhythmic structure and transition approach for each part of the suite and the same order of solos. While the improvised portions of the suite clearly differ (and represent the experienced style of each of the band members), they differ in a way that keeps the original in mind for the well-versed listener. From the opening gesture of 'Acknowledgement' — which maintains the gong-like statement and the rubato saxophone introduction — to the spiritually evocative recitation of 'Psalm' it is possible to hear Marsalis' performance as a conscious and continual reference to, and reframing of, the original. Coltrane's opening call of the 'benediction' is a forceful ascending phrase, so Marsalis enters with a stately phrase utilizing the intervals of the primary 'A-Love-Su-Preme' motive but in descent. And the recurring 'Thank You Lord' cadence of the original 'Psalm' relies on a descending minor 3rd or perfect 5th interval, while Marsalis' version seems to imply more often than not an ascending resolution to tonic from the minor 7th just below. It is at this level of micro-improvisational detail that Marsalis' recording exploits and challenges, in

subtle ways. His approach seems also to imply that an 'authentic' performance of Coltrane's suite must include many of the 'necessary and sufficient conditions' discussed above.[7]

In contrast, David Murray's recording adds two trumpets, a trombone, and an alto sax to the original foursome. Although Murray plays the original's opening 'benediction' figure rather literally and his bass player, Jaribu Shahid, plays the four-note unifying motive throughout the performance, it is also clear from the opening gestures that the expanded instrumentation allows Murray additional possibilities of improvised and arranged polyphony. The four other horns quickly enter into a densely improvised texture to frame Murray's 'benediction', and background figures appear and reappear throughout the performance to frame each of the solo statements. Murray's drummer, Mark Johnson, also performs a rather different rhythmic interpretation than the original, offering a more funk-based groove throughout.

On the original recording of 'Acknowledgment,' Coltrane uses the four-note motive as the building block of his improvisation. At one point (starting at 4:54) he plays the figure 37 times in succession, transposing the melodic fragment through all twelve chromatic keys with, in the words of Ashley Kahn (2002a, p.102), 'exhaustive precision and apparent randomness'. Murray's tenor saxophone solo, by contrast, uses extreme glissandos and vocalized screams that, at times, blur exact pitches in a style more reminiscent of Coltrane's later work. The various individual soloists in Murray's octet also depart in significant ways from the motivic, developmental approach to modal improvisation pioneered by Coltrane. Murray's reliance on the central 'A-Love-Su-Preme' motive in the bass ensures that informed listeners are continually aware of the original conceptual model, but the instrumentation, rhythm, arrangement and soloing styles heard on his recording depart significantly from the model established by Coltrane and his colleagues. In the liner notes to the album, Murray acknowledges:

> I admired his songs, his arrangements, his technique, the tempos he chose. But to do this recording, I did not want to just copy him. The writing, the playing, had to have my signature. . . . I had to get a signature sound before I could embrace someone like Coltrane.

A Love Supreme, both in its original form and as it has been reified and refashioned, invites us to rethink the ways in which we discuss and categorize music, performance and cognition. The ontological identity of the music is intimately bound into a complex network of experiences for listeners and performers so that the notions of perception, conception and action — often treated as separate cognitive processes — appear to emerge from a single experiential blend. From its inception, Coltrane's suite connected strongly with its socio-political moment *and* was received as a work of universal and timeless significance. *A Love Supreme* represented both genre-defying music and, perhaps ironically, the most

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[7] His comments during a 'Before & After' ('blindfold') test conducted by *Jazz Times* magazine (December 2002) when Murray's octet performance was heard also appear to support this contention.

prototypical jazz of its time. Its status as a revered recording made it something to which subsequent generations of musicians would aspire and something from which they just as often would recoil. Depending on one's perspective and ideologies, Coltrane's work exemplified the 'prototypical' approach for music without preconceptions and boundaries or the 'necessary and sufficient' conditions that describe competent and compelling modern jazz.

Performed with only the barest of compositional sketches, the elastic and dynamic form of *A Love Supreme* challenges the all-too-frequent notion that music is best represented as an abstract and symbolic code and in a disembodied and ahistorical fashion. Events, rather than objects and their names, appear to form the basis for the process of categorization and conceptualisation (Rosch, 1999). Our models of categorization are also inherently conditioned by individual and cultural values and goals, which can change, often dramatically, over time. In the case of Coltrane, his immense spiritual and emotional resonance in the jazz community made certain of his performances 'off-limits' to all but those who were most intimately connected to the man and his music or to those daring enough to depart in significant and marked ways from the originals. But perceptions and categorizations can change. An untouchable part of the revered canon can, over time, become a decidedly more impersonal historical milestone. And yet, at any given moment, the range of artistic conceptions and interpretations will vary widely. While Elvin Jones' dream may have become a partial reality — it *is* less exceptional to play even Coltrane's most spiritually evocative work like *A Love Supreme* — the status of Coltrane as a canonical 'forefather' may always mark in complex ways any tributes to his work and significance.

Sweet Freedom: Musical Syntax and Cross-domain Mapping

In listening to music, we rely on syntactic conventions to understand the local patterns specific to the immediate performance we are hearing and to relate those patterns to previously encountered musical structures. In other words, musical syntax describes at the same time the structure specific to an individual work and the structures shared between musical 'works' that give rise to a musical tradition or genre.

Cross-domain mapping is a general cognitive process through which we structure an unfamiliar or abstract domain in terms of a more familiar or concrete one. Recent work in cognitive linguistics has offered substantial evidence that cross-domain mappings are not simply manifestations of literary creativity, such as figures of speech, but rather are pervasive in everyday discourse and integral to the very process of cognition and consciousness.[8] Cross-domain mappings do not simply 'represent' one domain in terms of another. They are grounded in our

[8] In *The Literary Mind*, Mark Turner (1996) asserts that simple stories are basic to human communication and cognition. And Antonio Damasio (1999), in *The Feeling of What Happens*, offers considerable empirical evidence and neurophysiological detail to support the idea that 'simple stories' are fundamental not only to human communication and cognition, but also to consciousness itself.

bodily experiences and perceptions and create precise, inference-preserving mappings between the structures of both domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Because of the rather abstract and transient nature of musical sound, cross-domain mapping plays an important role in musical discourse. Our musical vocabularies are filled with conceptual metaphors: pitches are high or low; sounds are close or distant; textures are dense or sparse. We cross modalities with other senses: sounds can be light, bright, clear, or dark; harmonies can be sweet or tart; textures can be sharp, rough, or smooth. To quote Larry Zbikowski (1998, n.p.)

> Although we speak of 'musical space' (and locate tones within it), this space does not correspond, in a rational way, to physical space; although we speak of 'musical motion', the motion is at best apparent, and not real. The concepts of space and motion are extended to music through metaphorical transference as a way to account for certain aspects of our experience of music. These metaphors are not an addition to musical understanding, but are in fact basic to it.

Zbikowski analyses the conceptual metaphor *pitch relationships as relationships in vertical space*. After a century of ethnomusicological inquiry, it is clear that this metaphor is not valid in every culture or even in every time period in the West. The Balinese have 'large' and 'small' pitches to correspond to the size of their gongs and metallophones. And in Ancient Greece, pitches were conceived of as 'sharp' or 'heavy'. Why has the conceptual metaphor of *pitch relationships as relationships in vertical space* become the dominant one in the contemporary Western World? It does not correspond to the physical layout of all, or even most western instruments: e.g., to go up in pitch on a cello or stand-up bass you must go further down the neck of the instrument. But it does correspond well to the system of notation that has permitted the preservation and visualization of musical works for several centuries. As Zbikowski (2002, p. 72) notes, 'The cross-domain mappings employed by any theory of music are thus more than simple curiosities, they are actually key to understanding music as a rich cultural product that both constructs and is constructed by cultural experience'.

Framing jazz in terms of the cultural experiences it constructs and is constructed by is no easy task. Jazz music has exhibited, to loosely borrow W.E.B. Du Bois' well-known phrase, something of a double-consciousness. Much of the impetus for past and present scholarship in jazz studies has been to gain a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which African and European values, resources and imperatives have combined and continue to recombine in this music. From the earliest meetings of downtown Creoles of Color and uptown Negroes in turn-of-the-century New Orleans, jazz has been a multi-cultural music. Over the years (and particularly since the 1960s) many jazz artists have looked to freer, more avant-garde modes of improvisation and interaction and away from traditional Western conceptions of tonality, metred time, and, by connection, the hegemony of musical notation and the role of the composer in music. Not only did many practitioners of the jazz avant-garde dispense with the use of standard notation; in many cases, this freer approach to improvising and the often highly complex resulting sounds and textures defied the very act of

notating music. How, they might ask, can a dynamic, temporal art ever be reduced to a static, two-dimensional representation?[9]

Unhinged from the process and products of standard music notation, this type of music, or better 'musicking', encourages different cross-domain mappings and different ways of engaging with musical sound and meaning, while at the same time not completely dispensing with those mappings that are already established. One conceptual metaphor that remains in use today for describing this type of adventurous jazz playing is 'outside' (Such, 1993). The continuum from 'inside' to 'outside' playing creates a cross-domain relationship between our embodied sense of interactions with containers or structures and the music's allegiance to traditional Western musical values and practices. Musical dimensions in which a music or musician may travel 'outside' include tonality, metered time, instrumental timbre, articulation and others.

For example, jazz historians often describe John Coltrane's music developing from his more 'inside' playing of the 1950s to the final 'outside' explorations shortly before his death in 1967. The music of Coltrane's quartet circa *A Love Supreme* — with its minimal compositional details and heavily improvised, polyrhythmic and polytonal character — marks, for many, the beginnings of Coltrane's final artistic phase and his desire to move further 'outside' of accepted jazz conventions. Elvin Jones' drumming was pushing 'outside' of the confines of standard 4/4 metric time by layering multiple contrasting rhythms over and across the underlying musical meter. McCoy Tyner's harmonic accompaniment was exploring 'closely' and 'distantly' related keys (note the existing conceptual metaphor for the spatial dimension of harmony). And Coltrane was superimposing yet more harmonic implications and, with his explorations of the extreme registers and timbres of the saxophone, seemed to be finding sounds 'beyond' the instrument's traditional sonic palette (see Borgo, 2003b).

Most commentators have also connected these and similarly impassioned sounds with the larger social, cultural and political climate of the times. For example, *Freedom Suite*, a 19-minute, three-movement, integrated work by Sonny Rollins, has been called jazz music's first explicit instrumental protest piece. Duke Ellington and others had made culturally and politically aware instrumental music prior to this time, but Rollins' 1958 album came shortly after the Little Rock school integration incident (about which Louis Armstrong had made some of his first public criticisms of government policy) and the album also included a short note by the saxophonist making his message explicit:

> America is deeply rooted in Negro culture: its colloquialisms; its humour, its music. How ironic that the Negro, who more than any other people can claim America's culture as his own, is being persecuted and repressed; that the Negro, who has exemplified the humanities in his very existence, is being rewarded with inhumanity.

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[9] Jazz music has, of course, since at least 1917, relied on the 'temporally frozen' sounds of recordings to document and disseminate much of its history and performance practice. And avant-garde jazz musicians have, at times, devised innovative notational strategies for documenting and disseminating their work.

Sparked most directly by his first-hand experience of housing discrimination in New York, Rollins later said, 'At the time it struck me. . . . Here I had all these reviews, newspaper articles and pictures . . . what did it all mean if you were still a nigger, so to speak? This is the reason I wrote the suite' (Bowden, 2002). Although it appeared before the Civil Rights Movement reached critical mass nationally, the album's original release on Orrin Keepnews' Riverside label did cause a minor sensation. Less than a month after it hit the shelves, Keepnews repackaged the LP with the title *Shadow Waltz*, the name of another track on the recording, and wrote a new set of liner notes that pulled back slightly from Rollins' original statement. Although Rollins' protest suite is often given less treatment by historians than similarly intentioned, but later work by artists such as Charles Mingus, Max Roach, John Coltrane, and Archie Shepp, the fact that his words were effectively censored speaks to their importance and perceived radicalism at the time.

Like Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*, Rollins' *Freedom Suite* has received only limited treatment by other artists. Its original cultural context placed it firmly in a time and place that other artists perhaps felt unwilling or unprepared to revisit. A quick search of the database at allmusic.com produced only one additional reference to the work prior to 2002, a nine-minute rendition by pianist Walter Bishop Jr. in 1972. In 2002, however, two next-generation saxophonists recorded Rollins' suite, providing rather different interpretations and a point of discussion for the flexibility of approaches to performing and interpreting musical syntax in jazz.

First, a quick discussion of the original work as performed by Rollins. Filling one side of an LP, Rollins and his piano-less trio present the three movements of the work in a seamless fashion with a fourth theme serving as an interlude both before and after the second movement. A central melody, presented at the outset, reappears at various times in the composed and improvised sections and eventually concludes the work, providing a singular, unifying feeling to the whole. The first movement involves a rhythmically playful romp alternating between pedal point sections in G major and walking-type bass lines which briefly 'side-slip' to a distantly related key. The pronounced rhythmic interplay between all three musicians, and especially the drumming of Max Roach, lends an open and freer feeling to what is still a rather structured eight-bar form.[10] The interlude leading to movement two is in a boisterous 6/8 time with a propulsive bass line provided by Oscar Pettiford. There are no improvised solos on the brief interlude, and only a short cadenza-like line by Rollins at the end that appears unaltered in both presentations. Movement two is something of a conventional ballad, but in a somewhat unconventional move, all three musicians, including Roach on drums, take solos. At the ballad's end, the principle theme is quoted and the interlude reappears. The final movement is an up-tempo reworking of the central thematic material and provokes some of the most heated playing by Rollins and some of

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[10] The rhythmic complexity of the performance causes author Eric Nisensen (2000, p. 128) to misidentify the alternating sections as contrasting 4/4 with 3/4.

the most involved interactions between all three. The suite ends with a final statement of the concluding phrase of the initial melody and a decisive cadence.[11]

In addition to *A Love Supreme,* Branford Marsalis recorded a complete version of Rollins' best-known suite on his album *Footsteps of our Fathers.* Similarly, Marsalis also adopts the same instrumentation as the original, removing his regular piano player, Joey Calderazzo, to form a core trio. He also maintains the same three-part structure and produces a recording only slightly longer than the original. In the only departure from the original's formal arrangement, Marsalis uses the interlude between the first and second movements only, opting for an extended drum solo to bridge to the final section. The solo order and use of conversational passages between the instruments is unchanged from Rollins' performance. Marsalis does adopt a more modern vocabulary at times, reflecting different sensibilities towards dissonance or 'outside' playing, but interestingly, during the ballad, his solo harks back to the sweetness of Ben Webster's approach as much as it does to Rollins' more brittle and idiosyncratic style. By continually evoking the original to knowledgeable listeners, Marsalis' trio plays with the specific grammar or micro-syntax of *Freedom Suite*, and makes few alterations to the overall form or rhetoric of the work. Although Rollins' original recording in 1958 only hinted at the musical freedoms that would quickly follow, Marsalis' approach in 2002 remains well 'inside' the original's frame.

By contrast, saxophonist David S. Ware, who studied privately with Rollins in the 1970s, recorded a version of *Freedom Suite* in 2002 that honours the spirit and basic structure while exploring additional territory only hinted at in the original. The most immediate difference is in instrumentation. Ware adds pianist Matthew Shipp to the original trio format, perhaps preferring not to disrupt his working quartet, but also necessitating a significant reworking of the suite. In the late 1950s, artists such as Sonny Rollins were experimenting with piano-less formats to free up the harmonic structure of their performances and remove any strong reference to Western tonality and tempered pitch. But over forty years later, the list of progressive piano stylists has grown long and impressive. Shipp's presence and musical sensibilities immediately take this performance in new directions.

The differences appear at both the macro and micro level of development. On the macro level, Ware and his quartet frequently opt to forego strict, metered time in favour of the open yet propulsive rhythmic delivery now common to freer improvisational jazz settings. And although he adopts most of Rollins' original melodic material, he frequently delivers it in rubato fashion and launches solos far less tied to predetermined chordal structures. Ware's most notable alteration to the overall arrangement of the suite is expanding the interlude material — described in its original form by author Eric Nisensen (2000, p.128) as 'ominous', 'driving', dark' and 'intense' — into a tumultuous, extended groove

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[11] On a slightly more technical note, it is worth mentioning that the key centres for the three movements move progressively upward, from concert G to A-flat to B-flat. The final statement of the theme in this new key provides not only a sense of closure to the suite, but also a sense that we have taken a journey and arrived at a 'higher' place.

described by *Wire* contributor Bill Shoemaker (2002) as 'more pile driving than dancing'. Ware also treats the ballad — which in its original can't help but be heard as slightly dated or nostalgic to contemporary ears — to a passionate, rubato delivery more akin to the modal and spiritual explorations of Coltrane and his admirers.

Even on the micro level, subtle differences mark a more contemporary interpretation of the work. To start, Ware takes apart the unifying theme of the suite and expands on the 'openness' of the drum and bass sections, a 'freedom' which was only implied on the original recording, and he launches his solo on the first movement from the unresolved, 'side-slip' portion of the melody, foregoing the strong resolution of the original and Marsalis' versions. Shipp doesn't play during Ware's solo, but when he is ready to enter (3:45) he restates the theme before beginning his own piano improvisations. He, too, starts his solo at a surprising place, landing on a sharply dissonant cluster just as the theme is about to resolve.

Rollins' third movement, now Ware's fourth with the expansion of the interlude, is also presented with a truncated melody that stays close to the unifying theme of the suite but also propels the improvisations into more 'outside' territory. And the brief cadenza-like moment of the interlude from the original version is seized upon by Ware as a moment to, according to Shoemaker (2002), 'reel in the loose ends of the past fifty years' tenor saxophone vocabulary'. In brief, Ware's interpretation expands greatly on the rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic 'freedoms' at play in the original recording. His performance goes well 'outside' of the model established by Rollins, and yet it does not result in a formless music devoid of rules or structures. Instead, his group negotiates between existing codes and their pleasurable dismantling, to borrow a definition of improvisation offered by Corbett (1995, p. 237).[12]

This negotiation resonates well with contemporary models of the way we think. The work of Fauconnier and Turner (2002), for instance, builds on the idea of cross-domain mapping to provide a more nuanced picture of the ways in which new meanings and understandings can arise from the blended input of several conceptual frames. The basic processes of blending include composition, completion and elaboration. Composition projects the content from each of the inputs into the blended space, completion fills out the pattern in the blend by referencing information in long-term memory, and elaboration involves extending or applying the now fully formed blend into new domains or new situations (see also Grady *et al.* 1999). At each of these stages of the blend, new content and new meanings may develop that were not available from either of the input spaces. Blends can be created 'on the fly' with only fleeting significance, or they may become established in conventions of thought and, in turn, allow for other distinct blends to emerge.

Each of the performances discussed here establishes a conceptual blend on the level of musical structure by referencing existing musical constructs and by extending or augmenting those mental and sonic spaces in performance.

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[12] For related work see Borgo (2002 and in press).

Conceptual blends may also emerge on hearing each of these new recordings and by drawing on one's familiarity (or non-familiarity) with the original and on one's lifetime of musical and cultural experience. And blends of this type may undergo significant elaboration or may trigger additional conceptual blends in 'non-musical' domains as well.

Freedom, for instance, has been, and will continue to be, interpreted in countless ways depending on individual, cultural and historical circumstance (see Borgo, 2003a). Rollins' original recording is connected socio-politically to the Civil Rights Movement and it evoked for many listeners, both then and now, conceptual blends between its sonic domain and its cultural and historical moment. Although there are no liner notes to accompany Ware's recent disc, his musical approach (and perhaps also the red, white and blue artwork on the cover) has sparked some comment on contemporary social and political concerns. In his *All Music Guide* review, Thom Jurek (2002) hints that the album's 'layers of meaning are particularly evocative at the turn of the twenty first century, where the very meaning of freedom is hotly debated in all cultures'. And Marshall Bowden (2002) writes 'one is also tempted to remember the story of Rollins' censorship upon the release of the original album and see a parallel with the possible erosion of civil liberties in the wake of 9/11'.

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of musical performance is its ability to engage listeners on a variety of levels, from syntax to semantics to social awareness, all embedded within an evolving historical, cultural and individual consciousness. In responding to an interview question about his choice to record *Freedom Suite*, David S. Ware stated: 'This is a perfect opportunity to show the link between me and Sonny, an opportune time to show how one generation is built upon another and how the relationships work in the whole stream of music that's called jazz' (Bowden, 2002). Ware's remarks remind us that we need better and more appropriate tools to discuss the ways in which tradition and expectation are referenced in musical performance and cognition. And we need to be aware of the variety of culture-specific ways in which these performances and processes are framed and valued.

Signifyin(g): The Play of Meaning in Jazz Performance

Signifyin(g), the term most often used to describe the semantic play commonly encountered in African American language and music, is a culture-specific example of what Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) refers to as double-voiced discourse. Henry Louis Gates (1988) has published the most extensive work on signifyin(g) and several music scholars have applied his insight to discussions of jazz. Gates describes signifyin(g) as a mediating strategy for discourse, rooted in pan-African discursive mythologies, involving aspects of repetition and revision to create double meaning, indirectness, and subtle humour.

Gates differentiates his usage of signifyin(g) from the Saussurian sense of a fixed sign by emphasizing the dialogic interactiveness of performance and the mutability and ambiguity of meaning found in African American arts in general.

As Gates (1988, p. 54) writes: 'One does not signify something; rather, one signifies in some way'. Margaret Drewal (1992, p. 4) also comments on the nature of signifyin(g) as a verb:

> What is especially interesting to me is that Afro-Americans take the concepts of signifiers and signifieds (objects–persons, places, things) and turn them into a verb 'signify', simultaneously turning the static equation between two related 'things' into a double-voiced process. 'To signify' is to revise that which is received, altering the way the past is read, thereby redefining one's relation to it.

Signfyin(g) represents an engagement with preceding texts so as to 'create a space' for one's own, both enabling a new text and in important ways reshaping our conception of the tradition in which these texts occur. In jazz scholarship, this dynamic approach to reference and revision has been commented on in several ways. John Murphy (1990) explores the process of interaction among jazz improvisers, repositioning Harold Bloom's rather Eurocentric idea of the 'anxiety of influence' to better reflect the 'joy of influence' heard as jazz musicians reference one another's work through musical tribute and quotation, and, more generally, through the process of apprenticeship. Ingrid Monson (1996) highlights in her analysis of Coltrane's performance of 'My Favorite Things' the sense of parody or irony that can accompany a jazz musician's choice to rework popular material. Gary Tomlinson (1991) offers an insightful account of the ideologies of canon formation and a cogent critique of the mistreatment of Miles Davis' fusion period by most jazz historians. And Robert Walser (1995) focused the lens of signifyin(g) theory on a detailed analysis of Davis' famous recording of 'My Funny Valentine', reminding jazz listeners and scholars that musical creativity need not be limited by abstractions such as notes.

Most signifyin(g) scholarship in jazz has relied on the idea that the first conceptual model is recognized as 'authoritative' but the validity is then granted to the second, authorial model through the rejection of the first. With 'My Favorite Things', for instance, Coltrane rejects Richard Rodgers' show-tune model for the song, the 'authentic' version of the work, and 'signifies' with a new, 'authoritative' performance. And yet the signifyin(g) relationship is decidedly more complex and subtle than that. As Walser (1995, p. 173) points out in his analysis of 'My Funny Valentine', 'as a performer, Davis is signifyin' on all of the versions of the song he has heard; but for his audience, Davis is signifyin' on all of the versions each listener has heard. What is played is played up against Davis's intertextual experience, and what is heard is heard up against the listener's experiences.'

What are we to make, then, of the recent moves by saxophonists Marsalis, Murray and Ware to engage with the 'authoritative' work of Coltrane and Rollins? Marshall Bowden (2002) implies that *Freedom Suite* and *A Love Supreme* has become 'a real yardstick' for anyone playing the tenor saxophone. But if signifyin(g) means nothing more than referencing a tradition, then it is so commonplace in jazz, and in fact in all music, as to signify nothing. Can we hear these newer versions of 'classic' works as something more than mere technical exercises or matter-of-fact tributes celebrating the 'joy of influence'?

To hear these reinterpretations as signifyin(g) on the original involves a complex matrix of cultural knowledge. If that matrix of knowledge is not in place, we are left with only the more routine process of referencing a traditional model or simply with unmediated authorial discourse. For signifyin(g) to signify something more than a most general kind of musical reference, it must hinge on musical, historical and cultural tensions between the voices at play. As Zbikowski (2002, p. 241) points out, 'signifyin(g) becomes interesting when tensions between the models become obvious — that is, when tensions become as important as the models themselves'. Can we also hear these tensions as both reflecting and shaping the various ideologies and cultural understandings that inform the production, consumption, and critical discourses of jazz?

Krin Gabbard (1995) has argued that canon formation may be inescapable if jazz is to claim its place within the academy, and yet we must be continually aware that the process of canon formation is a discourse of power, reinforcing the values of the canonizers. Canon formation entails not only choosing those individuals to be included or excluded, but also how we value and approach the work of those who have been included. Branford Marsalis' approach to the classic work of Rollins and Coltrane puts him in dialogue with their authoritative versions. While leaving the overall form and presentation of the work the same, he and his band mates signify on the details of the original performances. Their performances are heard in constant 'dialogue' with the original voices. David Murray adopts several of the defining features of Coltrane's signature work, but recasts them with different instrumentation, rhythm, arrangement and style. Both saxophonists stressed their approach to referencing the specific 'musical' aspects of Coltrane's composition. Marsalis asserts, 'If you take off the name, if you take away the fact that it's a tribute to God, then it becomes this great body of work, a great piece of music'. And Murray maintains, 'It's like any other music out there' (quoted in Kahn, 2002a, p. 203).

David S. Ware's recording of *Freedom Suite* offers a different and possibly more radical approach to signifyin(g). His performance, embedded in the present, seems both to look to the future and to ask listeners to reassess the past. Celebrating Ware's disc, Ben man (2002) writes that 'The record stands as a true testament to the fact that our most musical of musics indeed still thrives when applied by those who truly understand its structure, intent, history, and most of all, possibilities'. Yet Bill Shoemaker (2002), in praising the same performance, worries briefly that 'Ware puts the original in an arguably ambivalent light, dating Rollins' sensibilities'.

Ware's freewheeling approach to the suite does seem to highlight the fact that, despite its provocative title and message, Rollins' original performance departed in only limited musical ways from the standard practices of the hard bop era. Not long after its initial release, Rollins took the first of his celebrated 'sabbaticals' from the jazz scene, at least in part to explore the variety of sounds and approaches that were circulating in the nascent free jazz community removed from the pressures of the commercial music industry. As Bowden (2002) comments: 'I don't doubt that the piece might have leaned much more towards free jazz had Rollins recorded it a couple of years later'.

And yet Rollins' work, beyond any formalist treatment of its musical details, *was* a cry of protest against America's treatment of African Americans and Shoemaker correctly assesses that 'Ware's diamond-yielding force serves the spirit, if not the letter of Rollins' suite'. Ware does, it would seem, call the 'authority' of the original into question at the same time that he heeds the original's aesthetic and cultural impetus. With signifyin(g), meaning is not something that is fixed, but something that is created by the performer and listener in a dynamic, cultural context. Great jazz — past, present, and future — draws on a robust tradition and, in turn, must signify in some way on that tradition, calling even cherished notions and works into question. The 'prototype' for 'authentic' jazz may actually be that which departs from the specific qualities of previous work, albeit in culturally organized and sanctioned ways.

Jazz music, after roughly a century of development and dissemination, is at a point in which a few of its most influential artists and 'works' have been granted the inviolable status of master and masterpiece. Gary Tomlinson (1991, p. 243) believes

> Difficulties arise not in our inevitable making of personal canons but rather in our move to empower them by uniting with others who hold fundamentally similar personal canons. . . . It is a shift away from dialogue . . . by which we might sustain a healthy flux of impermanent and intersubjective canons.

Juxtaposing different performances or interpretations of the same musical work, regardless of genre, will create a point of comparison and the potential for new meanings to arise. Signifyin(g), however, offers a culture-specific example of musical and conceptual blending; one which involves playful comment *and* criticism, calling the original work into question and potentially inverting or subverting the status quo. Contemporary cognitive science has probed the ways in which our embodied experiences shape both our preconceptual and conceptual understandings. Conceptual structures can and do organize how we learn, discuss and engage with musical sound. They are frequently grounded in our shared bodily experiences and can be extremely precise in their application, while at the same time they remain flexible enough to allow for considerable cultural variation. Music performance, and indeed all aspects of cultural performance, relies on a strong link to community and tradition. Jazz music has hinged on and heralded resistant social formations for over a century, and it continues to provide a rich context for investigating the relationship between musical syntax, social interactive processes, and cognitive and cultural understandings.

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