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Approaching jazz-influenced wind music

Introduction

A lecture given by Dr. Alan Wagner on “Jazz Influences in Twentieth Century Symphonic Band Literature” at the 2003 conference of the British Association of Symphonic Bands and Wind Ensembles revealed an extensive list of jazz-influenced works should refute any claims that wind ensembles suffer from lack of quality works by established composers. However, what was also highlighted is the fairly limited extent to which many of these works are both available for performance and programmed in concerts. Incredibly, the latter seems to be true even in the case of the pieces that are amongst the best known in the “jazz-influenced” repertoire such as *La création du monde* (Milhaud, 1923); *Rhapsody in Blue* in its original band orchestration (Gershwin, 1924); *Ebony Concerto* (Stravinsky, 1945) and *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs* (Bernstein, 1949). I believe that the reasons for this are intimately bound up with the nature of such works, which conflate typical, traditionally defined notions of ‘standard’ ensemble formats and accepted stylistic conventions, rather than any deliberate prejudice on the part of conductors and programmers.

Although the works may be grouped together under the “jazz-influenced” heading for convenience, they are in fact very disparate, as they represent both American and European responses to jazz in the 1920s, when jazz was a relatively young form, and the 1940s, when it was approaching maturity. Thus, the nature of the jazz influence on the composers and the way this manifests itself musically is different in each case, suggesting the necessity for an individual and informed approach to each work. The wind ensemble, itself flexible in terms of its instrumentation and the wide variety of styles within its music, may be considered the most compatible forum for jazz-influenced works to be understood and performed and hence it is important for us to formulate approaches for embracing this important area of repertoire. The article will explore some problematic aspects of these pieces and outline a multi-faceted approach to understanding and performing these works, which can then be applied to the increasing amount of jazz-influenced repertoire now available for wind ensemble.

Approaching *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs*

Bernstein was commissioned to write his *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs* in 1949 for Woody Herman’s big band following the success of a previous commission - Stravinsky’s *Ebony Concerto* in 1945. However, by the time Bernstein had completed the work the group had disbanded. The piece was eventually premiered by the clarinettist Benny Goodman, the work’s dedicatee, in a television programme presented by Bernstein entitled “What is Jazz?” in 1955.

Bernstein's interest in jazz can be seen throughout his life and work, beginning with his undergraduate thesis on "The Absorption of Race Elements into American Music". Gershwin and Copland's early use of jazz were influential on Bernstein's distinctly American compositional style, which often combines symphonic and jazz elements. Malcolm MacDonald writes in the Preface to the second volume of the Anthology of Bernstein's works:

The title proclaims the marriage of concert music and jazz, the Baroque form of the Prelude and Fugue being complemented by a series of riffs (in jazz parlance, a riff is a short, repeated melodic figure).
(1998, p. v)

The piece could be interpreted on one level as the playing out of the tension between its conflicting stylistic influences. The "fast, exact" playing of the *Prelude* breaks momentarily into "slow rock" before the music is driven back to the complex rhythmic figuration of the opening. The saxes fugue drifts into a stride piano pattern taken up in the final movement, shortly after which, the addition of the string bass then the drums add rhythmic and harmonic stability. It is in the last movement that themes from the *Fugue* are repeated as riffs and then eventually subsumed and the "slow rock" is contextualised. The piece has achieved a problematic middle-ground position due to this inherent blending of styles. It is not generally accepted into either the jazz or "classical" repertoire and is therefore not often performed: thus the work's great strength becomes a weakness. Nor can the piece comfortably be accommodated within the "third stream" category, as although *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs* is undoubtedly indebted to Bernstein's knowledge and experience of jazz, it *seems* to require no improvisation.

This apparent lack of improvisation is also the main factor that prohibits the piece from being accepted within the conventional jazz canon, in which music making must be seen to be spontaneous. Traditionally, there is opposition in jazz between "readers" and "fakers" where the latter group is seen to embody the true nature of the genre and the former is required to conceal their literacy, often by performing from memory. This may be as innocuous as learning jazz standards so as to be able to perform them on demand on the bandstand without recourse to notation, or, more deliberately, memorising improvised solos (sometimes of other musicians) and re-performing these in such a way that they may seem spontaneous. Most jazz musicians would regard the latter procedure with disdain, as although studying improvised solos is an important part of many jazz musicians' education, to perform them intact is tantamount to plagiarism. With reference to quasi-improvisational passages on piano and vibraphone in the last movement of the Bernstein, it may seem that this is exactly what they are being asked to do. In this way, performing a fully notated composition is not commensurate with the mythical image of jazz.

Ironically, when considering the notation of *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs* more closely it becomes clear that it is not strictly correct to state that the piece requires no improvisation. A glance at the drum kit part reveals that this is notated in the conventions of big band jazz rather than orchestral music. Indeed, in the big band idiom, such sparse use of notation is the norm and “rhythm section” players are therefore often required to improvise constantly, although drawing of course on established patterns and stylistic conventions, as with all improvising. It is clear that this part, which is vital to the piece, requires a player with some knowledge and experience of these techniques. Bernstein clearly expected that a drummer would know what to do in response to his directions “slow rock” and “with all possible sock”. The end of the piece also requires improvisation in its widest sense, with the direction “This repeat should be made at least three times, and as many times as seems psychologically right (that is, to an “exhaustion point”).” Although this is not jazz improvisation as might be conventionally defined, it is clear that such repetitive procedures may be observed within the context of improvised “arrangements”, for example by a small jazz combo.

This gives rise to consideration of the wider question of interpreting a score in performance. It must be remembered that the notation is only the starting point, as the music itself doesn't exist until it is performed and heard. In much contemporary music (for example, Mark Anthony Turnage's scores), extensively detailed performance directions and markings leave fewer parameters available for interpretation. Typical big band charts may vary as to the extent to which they may be marked, but in any event the notation is usually performed with reference to certain stylistic norms. This may be likened to “clean” scores of Baroque music and the various editions that are available, which are similarly performed with reference to certain personal, historical or conventional beliefs about the music. In this case, these influences may change depending on fashion and scholarship, but yet the parameters for coherent interpretations do not extend infinitely, before the music itself becomes distorted.

Crucially, jazz has retained something of its origins as an oral culture through the practice of recording, which developed alongside the genre. This has led to the use of recordings as jazz “texts” which can diminish the importance of the existence of notation. Jazz has a body of recordings in which it is possible to hear performances that might be regarded as definitive, but yet the presence of improvisation, if nothing else, ensures that there still remains potential for interpretation. Recordings do, however, leave a lasting legacy of performance practice, which means that when reading notation certain things may be taken for granted which are not indicated in the score. On a most basic level, it would be unnecessary to indicate “swung” quavers and jazz phrasing in a fast swing number, just as trills over the dominant chord in a perfect cadence and double-dotted rhythms would be expected in the performance of a Baroque overture. In this way, recordings play a similar role in influencing jazz performance practice as research into manuscripts and treatises in early music. However, as recording

reproduces the sound itself rather than being merely a descriptive or graphic representation of it, it is less ambiguous. It would seem likely that in a piece written for a well-established jazz band and referencing typical musical aspects of this genre, that Bernstein too may have assumed stylistic knowledge and expected certain aspects of his notation to be interpreted in a fairly specific way. The role of recording will be considered in greater depth subsequently with reference to Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*.

Certain notation may indicate different things within specific genres, and it is necessary to view each work in context to fully interpret the notation. However, misguided notions about jazz can mean that it is possible for the interpretation of notation in jazz-influenced works to be taken too far. The stereotypically free and spontaneous nature of jazz means there is a temptation to fundamentally change the notation that is supplied by the composer, rather than interpret it. This highlights the need for conductors to be sympathetic to the various influences on the music to achieve a reading of the work that is faithful to the composer's intention. Small but significant indications on the score of *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs* play an important part in its realisation in performance. Firstly, the score gives the direction that "the composer has suggested that the solo clarinet be discreetly amplified in performance" and the piano part is also marked "miked". Whilst in classical music, amplification of soloists is clearly an anathema; in jazz and popular music it is often a necessary part of the performance. Bernstein's care over orchestration in his overall output clearly indicates his proficiency in this area, and he obviously realised that without amplification the *Riffs* movement would not be effective. Indeed, Bernstein's use of his chosen forces is a particularly important part of the overall structure of the piece, and to incorporate the clarinet in the *Fugue for the saxes*, as in the Meadows Wind Ensemble's performance, is to diminish the impact of its eventual entry at the start of the *Riffs for Everyone*. Bernstein indicates "Traps: Hi-hat, Snare Drum, Bass Drum, &c.". The "&c" is telling; it proves, as suggested earlier, that Bernstein was expecting the player to use a full drum set as in a big band and to improvise accordingly. The indication "string bass (solo)" is also important. This establishes, in addition to the actual musical material that Bernstein writes for the instrument, that it is a (jazz) "string bass" rather than a (classical) double bass that is required, and its solo rather than sectional status means that it can fulfil a typical role within the rhythm section as in a big band. Bernstein does not specifically indicate that the bass should be amplified, but this would certainly be the convention within contemporary big bands and the audibility of the bass can contribute significantly to the effectiveness of the work in performance.

Bernstein's work deliberately references and re-interprets typical features of instrumental jazz. The idea of writing sectionally with the groups pitted against one another, often found in "classic" big band charts, is taken to extremes, with movements scored for brass and percussion (*Prelude* - with string bass in unison with the melodic or rhythmic material), and saxes (*Fugue*). The slower section introduced in the *Prelude*, and recapitulated in the final movement, references

typical triplet-based “slow rock”, as Bernstein writes on the drum part. The trumpet parts at this point feature prominent lip-trills and glissandi. The most overt jazz references are found in the final movement of the piece, with stride piano, slap and walking bass lines, and virtuosic quasi-improvised solos on piano and vibraphone. Thus, whilst *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs* is conventionally notated and hence appears to require minimal knowledge and experience of jazz techniques, a certain amount of experience on the part of the performers is taken for granted, and this may cause problems when approaching the piece from a conventional symphonic perspective. At the same time, the piece may seem overly prescriptive for jazz ensembles. Theoretically, it is the wind ensemble, with its links to cutting edge contemporary music and popular styles, which should have sufficient flexibility to perform the work.

Approaching *Rhapsody in Blue*

Arguably the most famous piece in the jazz-influenced genre, *Rhapsody in Blue* was commissioned by Paul Whiteman for a concert entitled “An Experiment in Modern Music” on 12th February 1924. The orchestration was made by Ferde Grofé, who was one of Whiteman’s arrangers, and drew on the multi-instrumental capabilities of Whiteman’s reed players. The piece was later re-orchestrated for symphony orchestra, but it is the band version that concerns us here. Here I shall discuss the role of recordings in shaping interpretations of the work, focussing particularly on the central slow section (*Andante moderato*). For more detail on all aspects of the piece, I highly recommend David Schiff’s book published in the Cambridge Music Handbooks series.

Due to the rapid speed with which *Rhapsody in Blue* was composed and orchestrated (Gershwin apparently only began work on the commission having read a newspaper report announcing it in January), the original manuscript score of the band version of *Rhapsody in Blue* is rather sketchy. A facsimile of the score is published by Warner Brothers, and shows Grofé’s use of shorthand rather than writing out repeated passages, indicating that this was a working document rather than a fair copy. Also notable is that the score is dated 4th February, just over a week before the first performance. The piano part, which was probably partially improvised by Gershwin at the first performance, is only roughly represented in the score. The details that we now expect as part of the piece are often missing and one entire cadenza (before the central slow section) is not written out at all, merely giving the direction to the conductor to “wait for nod”.

The subsequent number of printed versions in which the *Rhapsody* exists causes problems when trying to define the precise identity of the piece, and has given importance to various recordings in preserving the detail and sense of the work. Recording has always played an important role in preserving and disseminating performance practice in jazz, an orally based and improvisational art form. In the case of *Rhapsody in Blue* recording has played a vital part in the ongoing

development of the work in performance, to the extent that constituent and expected features of the work seem to have originated almost entirely from recorded rather than conventionally notated sources. A famous example of this is the opening, which was performed by clarinetist Ross Gorman as a glissando as a joke in rehearsal. Gershwin, however, liked the sound and instructed Gorman to perform the theme with as much of a wail as possible at the première (Schiff, 1992, p. 102). The glissando is not indicated on the score produced by Grofé but is present in the early recordings of the piece.

The first recording of *Rhapsody in Blue* was made in June following the February premiere, but is now very rare. Readily available however are the CD transfers of the piano rolls that Gershwin made of the piece, performing both the solo and ensemble parts (issued in 1927 but probably made in 1925) and a 1927 recording featuring Gershwin with the Paul Whiteman band. The most striking aspect of the piano roll performance is the speed, which is considerably brisk especially when considered in relation to more familiar modern, quasi-romantic interpretations, especially of the orchestral version. The first half of the piece seems to drive along until the central *Andante moderato*, a momentary respite before the concluding sections. This is not to deny that there is considerable *rubato* flexibility in Gershwin's performance, but it seems clear that any romantic sensibility is balanced with the rhythmic aspects of the piece. There are certain advantages to adopting such radical tempi, not least that the piece, which is intrinsically sectional and fragmentary, seems to flow much more readily. The slow section feels more central and contrasts better with the rest of the piece. Similarly, the final *Grandioso* functions more conclusively. The 1927 recording incorporates numerous cuts and highlights the symphonic rather than the jazz aspects of the work. The interpretation tends to be more romantic and ponderous, especially in the central section.

These early recorded sources exemplify the two main approaches ("jazz" and "symphonic") that have been taken subsequent interpretations of the piece. In fact, *Rhapsody in Blue* is truly a "crossover" work and was intended as such by Whiteman and Gershwin. Whiteman in particular advocated the style of "symphonic syncopation" in which he saw the possibility of improving "primitive" jazz through the introduction of symphonic elements, a concept suggestive of racism, but which was carried out at the time with the best of intentions. Prior to the composition of *Rhapsody in Blue*, Gershwin had been immersed in the popular song publishing business and had already composed his first works for musical theatre, a genre that draws on popular and classical elements. The style of the *Rhapsody* is deeply rooted in the popular music of the day, which was inherently jazz-influenced. Therefore, this suggests that successful interpretations of the piece should acknowledge the importance of both classical and jazz elements in the work.

The importance of recordings in defining the *Rhapsody in Blue* has led to misunderstandings that have permeated many modern readings of the work.

Schiff identifies the 1927 Whiteman/Gershwin recording as the “originator of what has become known as the ‘Hollywood Bowl’ style of performance” (1992, p. 65), in which the *Rhapsody* is viewed as a “popular classic” and a “romantic piano concerto”. An infamous example of the misleading influence of recordings can be found in numerous band and orchestral recordings of this type in which the central slow section described by Schiff as “the most famous melody in twentieth century concert music” is rarely played as written (1992, p. 22). The first two bars of the theme are usually performed at half the speed of the following six bars in which the counter-melody appears, a practice that Schiff suggests appears to have resulted from crude mechanisation of Gershwin’s own *rubato* performances (1997, p. 22) that may be heard on the early recordings. Schiff suggests that this section should be interpreted as a 2/2 foxtrot (a popular dance of the day) albeit with some flexibility in recognition that the *Rhapsody* is jazz-influenced concert piece rather than *actual* dance music. This is an important distinction, as in the 1920s, the very nomenclature of the decade - the “jazz age” - indicates that jazz was not only popular music, but also an aesthetic movement that permeated to the core of society. It is this atmosphere that I believe Gershwin’s *Rhapsody* expresses so wonderfully. It is clearly not authentic in terms of being an accurate representation of jazz of the period, and does not preserve history like a photograph or recording. It does, however, clearly express the spirit of the “jazz age” seen through the eyes of this composer and as such is fundamentally authentic as a personal expression. This point can be further expanded with reference to the title: *Rhapsody in Blue*. A “Rhapsody” is a more flexible musical form than a concerto and implies free emotional expression. “Blue” indicates the musical language that Gershwin uses to communicate this emotion, and this implies the language of jazz.

The prominence of romantic/symphonic interpretations of the work has prompted a recent reactionary approach that builds on Gershwin’s piano roll performances as a primary source. Most notably, Michael Tilson Thomas has recorded a version of the *Rhapsody* in which Gershwin “performs” the solo piano part through a modern pianola equivalent. With reference to the *Andante moderato*, there is a curious mixture of the romantic “Hollywood bowl” style in the initial section performed by the ensemble alone (not following the way in which Gershwin performed this *tutti* section on the original piano roll). Hence, when Gershwin enters the tempo almost doubles and the band has to conform to his flamboyant *rubato*. This performance can sound uncomfortable in the tutti sections with piano, as the band race to keep up with Gershwin, and the concept has the inherent flaw that a solo recording has been transported into an ensemble context. The 1927 recording provides evidence that Gershwin may well have performed the piece differently with a band accompaniment.

The development of recording technology in the twentieth century has allowed us unprecedented access to many composers performing and conducting their own work. It is tempting to give such documentary evidence unequivocal importance as the “authentic” readings of the work to which we should aspire in our own

performances. Although there has been some opposition to the notion of “authentic” performance in other musical genres, based on the problems of sources, which are only notated representations of performances, with recordings we appear to have something much more concrete. However, although it is possible to replicate the details of a recording exactly (“authentically”) this does not necessarily ensure a convincing performance- it may be historically accurate but dull!

In addition, it may be argued that since time has elapsed since the original performance, whilst it may be re-performed physically it is actually impossible to replicate aesthetically, as it will be tainted by our new knowledge and experiences as performers and audience. Interestingly Tilson Thomas, in a later recording of *Rhapsody in Blue* with orchestra in which he performs the piano part himself, reverts wholesale to a typical romantic interpretation. As Schiff points out, “it seems hard for any performers, no matter how historically informed, to give up the full-blown romantic approach to the [*Andante moderato*] theme in favour of a more authentic rendition that usually sounds saccharine” (1992, p. 68). It seems that Tilson Thomas’ later interpretation, although it may be criticised for a lack of historical authenticity is arguably *more* authentic emotionally. Thus, it seems that the most sensible approach is to use “authentic” sources such as composer’s recordings in our preparation for performances to help us to produce an interpretation that is faithful to the score and the composer’s intention (as far as this can be determined) but yet we must remain true to our own creativity and integrity as musicians.

Recordings and, of course, live performances are obviously extremely useful sources when learning about jazz, where the phenomenon of performer/composer is extremely common, as many musicians compose their own material and improvisation, which may be regarded as a form of composing, is inherent in the style. Recordings allow easy access to the largely un-notatable aspects of the music, particularly the various different “feels” and “grooves” as well as the improvised elements. This idea can be applied further to jazz-influenced and other wind music, where it may be useful for the musicians to hear a piece prior to rehearsals. This goes against the traditional method of a conductor forming an interpretation through working with the score, which is then communicated to the players in rehearsal. However, I believe that with the quality and quantity of recordings available today, recordings in all genres, but particularly popular genres, often become part of the history of that work and critical evaluation of recorded performances can be important in helping us to find our own reading of a piece. Often, however, additional contextual research is necessary to provide greater depth of understanding of the performance style that we might encounter on recordings in which composers perform or conduct their own music.

Approaching *La création du monde*

Darius Milhaud documented his encounters with jazz in London in 1920, where he attended performances given by Billy Arnold and his band and “sat close to the musicians [and] tried to assimilate what I heard.” (1953, p. 118). It was at this stage that he “had the idea of using these timbres and rhythms in a work of chamber music” (1953, p. 119). It is significant that from the first time that he heard jazz, Milhaud was determined to incorporate it into a chamber work, but yet it was three years before he began work on *La création du monde* (although he did complete piano pieces entitled *Caramel Mou* and *Trois Rag-Caprices*). This was because he felt that he had to “penetrate more deeply into the arcana of this new musical form” (1953, p. 119). Indeed, Milhaud is a little disparaging of composers who had already used jazz in their work, citing Satie, Auric and Stravinsky, stating that they had “confined themselves to what were more or less interpretations of dance music”. It is clear that he wanted to achieve a deeper understanding of jazz and to achieve a stylistic synthesis rather than a mere “interpretation”.

Milhaud’s personal experiences in both America and Paris were as important to the composition of this work as the initial stimulant of Arnold’s band. During a visit to America in 1922, Milhaud encountered different styles of jazz ranging from Paul Whiteman’s band to New Orleans jazz in Harlem. The latter seemed to make a greater impression on Milhaud, and he purchased “Black Swan” records of black performers that he “never wearied of playing over and over” (1953, p. 137). These experiences provided him with the necessary inspiration and knowledge and by the time he returned to France, he resolved “more than ever...to use jazz for a chamber work” (1953, p. 137). It was in the composition of the ballet *La création du monde* in 1923 that Milhaud finally “had the opportunity I had been waiting for to use those elements of jazz to which I had devoted so much study.” (1953, p. 148).

Milhaud stated that in *La création du monde* he “made wholesale use of the jazz style to convey a purely classical feeling” (1953, p. 149). Indeed, *La création du monde* is basically “classical” in style and conception, in that it is “fixed” in terms of its representation in a conventional score and thus appears to have fewer potential interpretive problems than many other “jazz-influenced” works. However, I would argue that there is a need for a thorough understanding of the way in which jazz influenced Milhaud as in *La création du monde*, jazz manifests itself overtly and audibly in certain parts of the work, but also acts more subtly as a pervasive influence throughout. Significantly, the stimulus for the close imitation of jazz was by no means purely musical and examination of the non-musical aspects of the work, not often seen in performances today, can aid an overall understanding of Milhaud’s composition. Arguably, the cultural climate of 1920s Paris was as important as Milhaud’s experiences in Harlem in the genesis of *La création du monde*. The work was involved the collaboration between a composer, writer, designer and choreographer that typified the inextricable links between arts forms that had existed in the cultural climate of Paris since the late nineteenth century. Milhaud had close friendships with the writer Blaise Cendrars

and the artist Fernand Léger who were vital to the production of *La création du monde*, and the relationship between music and the concept behind the ballet was clearly very important to Milhaud when he was composing the piece, and he comments that “on this occasion I remained more closely in contact with my collaborators than for any other of my works” (1953, p. 147).

The interest in exotic cultures in Paris stretched back into the nineteenth century, culminating in the 1889 *Exposition Universelle*, for which the Eiffel Tower was built, featuring displays from all over the world. At this stage, the traditional foundations of music and art, tonality and Greco-Roman principles respectively, were being eroded and this prompted many composers and artists to seek inspiration from outside the confines of Europe and the Western world. It is significant that artists working in different media were pursuing similar goals and therefore collaborating and socialising closely in Paris, as in Milhaud’s time. Shops selling exotic books, prints and *objets d’art* were opened and exhibitions held between the main *expositions* to cater for the trend. Exotic art was extremely collectable and easy to obtain in Paris, and thus exerted a significant influence on the majority of Parisian artists from the middle of the century, including Monet, Manet, Gauguin and Degas, and arguably it was to this prominent trend as much as to his encounters with the gamelan at the 1889 *Exposition* that Debussy responded in his “oriental” works. Similarly, Watkins suggests that an important impetus for Milhaud’s composition was Brancusi, a sculptor who Milhaud met in America, who produced a work entitled “Beginning of the World” (1994, p. 126).

The fascination with “other” cultures in Paris continued into the twentieth century and developed into an interest in the primitive, which was particularly influenced by the First World War. In the post-War era, what were perceived as basic, simple cultures were to be seen to contrast with the decadence of Western society, which some moralists believed to have caused the War. It was believed that these so-called “primitive” cultures provided useful models for modern life for Western civilisations after the barbaric and destructive realism of the War and the resulting disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the past. In Paris, there was great interest in African art and culture at this time, with many exhibitions and publications that influenced modernist artists such as Picasso and Derain. Indeed, it is a paradox that primitive cultures were on one hand adopted because they were far removed from Western society, but yet primitivism itself became a prominent trend in modern art, a phenomenon manifests itself clearly in *La création du monde*.

Interestingly, it can be seen that whilst some artists directly imitated the style of African art, others more subtly attempted “to express the workings of the primitive mind” (Rhodes, 1994, p. 7), and similarly in *La création du monde* there is evidence of both close imitation of African art and the deeper influence of African culture. The latter approach was probably influenced by more direct contact with black art and culture, rather than reliance on objects observed out of context in

museums and the “staged” *Exposition* displays for inspiration. Indeed, Cendrars, Léger and Borlin (the choreographer) had been engaged in ethnographic research prior to collaborating with Milhaud (Watkins, 1994, p. 122). Cendrars had visited Africa and South America and in 1921 published *L’Anthologie nègre* containing African songs and poems in translation (Bouchner, 1978). The scenario for *La création du monde*, which depicts the creation of the world from an African perspective, was drawn from this material:

The couple embrace. The [dancing] circle quietens, checks itself and slows and starts to die down peacefully all around. The circle breaks up into little groups. The couple is separated off in an embrace, which carries it along like a wave. It is springtime. (Mawer, 1997, p. 146)

Similarly, Léger’s design for the ballet was clearly inspired by the muted colours and striking patterns of African art. The dancers were dressed in costumes of the same colours that functioned as masks for the body, inspired by copying and redesigning drawings from African masks reproduced in Carl Einstein’s *Negerplastik* (1915) and Marius de Zayas *African Negro Art and its influence on Modern art* (1916) (Archer-Shaw, 2000, p. 112).

However, it is significant that neither Cendrars nor Léger attempted to directly reproduce African material in *La création du monde*, but rather, paradoxically, its incorporation ensured the modernity of the work. There was modern message behind the “primitive” creation story in that it drew on the desire for new beginnings in the post-war era (Archer-Shaw, 2000, p. 110). Léger’s design reflected the similar need for realism in modern art, as it integrated the dancers with the set in the aim of “depicting the very process of creation, with partly formed creatures: insects, birds, animals and man himself, developing before ones’ eyes. Form from chaos.” (Mawer, 1997, p. 147) Although the design was influenced by African art, it was also reminiscent of trends in contemporary art, such as simultanism and Cubism. The masks allowed the dancers anonymity, symptomatic of the modern world, and the constant movement of the dancers and the set was representative of the inexorable pace of modern life (Watkins, 1994, p. 118).

Milhaud’s composition of the score for the ballet clearly compliments the formulation of its narrative and design. Firstly, there is obvious evidence of imitation of “primitive” sources and their assimilation into modern art, except that in his use of jazz, Milhaud was imitating a modern form within which the African influence was *already* assimilated. Jazz was unique in the 1920s in presenting “primitive” culture in a way in which it could be easily understood, reproduced and experienced directly by Europeans, as it was based upon standard instruments and musical principles, and thus “became a cultural shorthand for that which was both supremely modern and, through its African roots, connected with the exotic origins of things. It was the music of the urban jungle” (Lively, 1998, p. 99). From Milhaud’s own accounts, it seems that the timbre of the jazz

that he heard in London and America that struck him most forcefully. With reference to his experiences of Arnold's band, he describes the individual characteristics and combination of saxophone, trumpet, clarinet, trombone, piano and percussion, a typical jazz ensemble of the day probably inspired by the recent visit of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band that popularised jazz in Britain. However, the instrumentation of the shows that he attended on visits to Harlem a few years later: "a flute, a clarinet, two trumpets, a trombone, an assortment of percussion instruments all handled by one player, a piano, a string quartet in which the viola is replaced by a saxophone, and a double bass" (Collaer, 1988, p. 69); clearly also had an influence on the chamber orchestration of *La création du monde*. It is interesting to note that the "assortment of percussion instruments", is replicated in Milhaud's work and particularly inclusion of the "Grosse caisse a pied avec cymbale" the precursor to the modern drum kit that had begun to appear in jazz bands from this time. Milhaud's understanding of the saxophone as a viola replacement is also seen the positioning of this instrument in the score, although it features prominently and soloistically throughout the work.

Indeed, the way in which Milhaud wrote for the instruments present in small jazz bands such as Billy Arnold's shows the continued influence of these experiences, which he described in *Notes without Music* (1953, p. 118):

the saxophone breaking in, squeezing out the juice of dreams

the trumpet, dramatic or languorous by turns

the clarinet, frequently played in its upper register

the lyrical use of the trombone, glancing with its slide over quarter-tones in crescendos of volume and pitch

held together by the piano and subtly punctuated by the complex rhythms of the percussion

It is significant that the influence of jazz (as defined by Arnold's band) is mainly restricted to two specific areas of the piece, marked I and IV in the score, which use clarinet, saxophone, trumpet, trombone as the main melodic instruments with piano and percussion in the accompaniment – the exact orchestration that Milhaud noted in Arnold's band. Milhaud was also influenced by the rhythms of jazz, noting that the "constant use of syncopation" in the individual melodic lines together produced contrapuntal complexity, and his use of a fugue with a syncopated subject evidences his experimentation in this way. Sections I and IV are the most rhythmic, as although syncopation is present throughout the work, it is not as striking in the other sections of the piece. Therefore, through the use of timbre and rhythm, Milhaud creates two sections that are distinct from the rest of the work.

However, accounting for the most obvious manifestations of jazz in the work is important, but only part of the story, as in addition the influence of the blues throughout the work indicates that similarly to Cendrars and Léger, Milhaud had researched the equivalent of their “primitive African” sources in detail. Deborah Mawer has noted the prevalence of the blues influence both in the melodic material and in the underlying structures of parts of the piece in her extensive analysis (1997). For example, the blues is implied in juxtaposition of the raised and lowered third degree of the scale (F# and natural) from the outset in the opening section of the piece; the blues scale is used in the fugue subject and there is a possible quotation from the St. Louis Blues march in the counter-subject; and a blues-type structure is used in section II. However, Mawer mainly analyses a later version of *La création du monde* for piano quintet, and hence focuses on the harmonic and melodic aspects of the piece whilst the all-important instrumental timbres and rhythms that define the distinctive “jazz” sections receive little attention.

Milhaud certainly recognised the difference between jazz such as that performed by Paul Whiteman which had “the precision of an elegant, well-oiled machine, a sort of Rolls-Royce of dance music, but whose atmosphere remained entirely of this world” and the music that he heard in Harlem which was “absolutely different from anything I had ever heard before and was a revelation to me...this authentic music had its roots in the darkest corners of the Negro soul, the vestigial traces of Africa” (1953, p. 136). It seems clear in his score to *La création du monde* that Milhaud was similarly aware of the difference between the jazz bands such as Arnold’s and the blues that he heard in Harlem. Indeed, understanding what Milhaud was trying to achieve in *La création du monde* seems to hinge upon the relationship between jazz and blues. In particular, the way that the two influences are linked within the work is significant, for example, by slowing down the “jazz” fugue theme and presenting it on the cello within a restatement of the initial “blues” material in section II, Milhaud makes the listener more aware of its blues inflections. Similarly, the rhythmic cliché in section IV is slowed down and used to punctuate a restatement of the same initial blues material. This may suggest that just as Cendrars and Léger had embarked upon their own investigations of African culture that enabled them to progress further than mere imitation of sources, so Milhaud, through his Harlem experiences, was able to understand the cultural and musical origins of jazz and incorporate the language of the blues thoroughly within his own style.

Watkins suggests that *La création du monde* demonstrates a total assimilation of the primitivism. The “primitive” influence on Cendrars, Léger and Borlin functioned within an established Western cultural format (ballet) but yet the work is profoundly modern as it is representative of the latest artistic trends. Similarly, Milhaud’s use of the language of jazz and blues within traditional formal structure of the prelude and fugue, suggests that the work is representative of the concurrent musical trend of neoclassicism (which Mawer suggests is clearer in a

later piano quintet version of the piece) the incorporation of “primitive” musical influences into the score ensured its modernity. Therefore, a fundamental problem with *La création du monde* in the twenty-first century, as Watkins has pointed out, is that it “sounds like a 1920s period piece”, particularly in the aforementioned “jazz” sections. It may be unfavourably compared in retrospect with both Stravinsky’s *Sacre du printemps*, which embodied revolutionary primitivism, and Gershwin’s contemporaneous *Rhapsody in Blue*, in which an often similar-sounding jazz influence is apparently more consistent. However, *La création du monde* evidences Milhaud’s deep understanding and respect for jazz and blues outlined in his writings. It is significant that he eventually decided to “give up jazz” because “Snobs, Whites, amateurs of exoticism, tourists of negro music had penetrated even its most intimate nooks” (1997, p. 124)

Mawer writes that “any practising jazz musician would assert that Milhaud’s assimilation of jazz and the blues scale is still a far cry from the real, spontaneous art” (1997, p. 274). Such a view brings to bear modern notions of jazz upon a response to its earliest forms, and would fail to recognise the context within which Milhaud’s assimilation took place. Similarly, Blake’s view that the contributors to *La création du monde* made African music and dance conform to European values does not recognise the value of their work as a European response to more direct experience of exotic culture than ever before. *La création du monde* can be best understood as “multi-media” collaboration between composer, writer, designer and choreographer, within the specific cultural climate of Paris in the 1920s, where jazz signified a complex amalgamation of African primitivism and Western modernity.

Approaching *Ebony Concerto*

Stravinsky was a composer whose output embraced many of the major musical trends of the twentieth century, ranging from jazz to serialism. He wrote several jazz-influenced works, of which he cites *Ebony Concerto* as his favourite “though it is remote from me now, like the work of a sympathetic colleague I once knew well” (1968, p. 53). *Ebony Concerto* was composed in response to a commission from Woody Herman and completed in 1945, the same year in which Stravinsky became an American citizen. It was first performed by Herman’s band in Carnegie Hall in the following year (White, 1966, p. 397).

Stravinsky had been reliant initially upon sheet music to provide him with access to early jazz and produced the *Ragtime* in *Histoire du Soldat* and *Ragtime* for eleven instruments. He had, however, encountered live jazz by 1919, prior to emigrating to the USA in 1939. Stravinsky states that during his time in America he had only encountered jazz in Harlem and performed “by Negro bands in Chicago and New Orleans” (1968, p. 53), although as his *Scherzo à la russe* was commissioned by Paul Whiteman in 1944 and he had heard Whiteman’s band perform, one might assume that he did not consider the music that they played to

be jazz. These experiences recall Milhaud's differentiation between Whiteman's band and the music that he heard in Harlem.

Stravinsky's move to America necessitated a move into commercial music composition to survive. In works like *Tango* (1940), *Circus Polka* (1941) and the aforementioned *Scherzo* there is a sense that he adapted his musical style to adhere to particular briefs (Walsh, 2001, p. 548). However, it seems that in *Ebony Concerto*, Stravinsky was clearly keen to move away from an imitative approach to "popular" composition and it is clear that his new method drew, like Milhaud, on a deeper understanding of the cultural aspects of jazz rather than merely incorporating musical details into a piece. It seems that in *Ebony Concerto* Stravinsky has tried to achieve a fusion between his individual compositional style and the jazz elements, rather than having to adapt his musical language to fit an imposed style.

Indeed, the jazz influence in *Ebony Concerto* is very subtle, but clues to Stravinsky's thinking and compositional approach may be found in his dialogue "Jazz Commercials" with Robert Craft (1968). It might seem odd, initially, that a composer who had become aware of improvisational element in jazz and admired improvisers such as Art Tatum, Charlie Parker and Charles Christian wrote a work containing no improvisation, especially as Stravinsky attributes the success of the work to his discovery of this aspect of jazz (1968, p. 54). However, just as Stravinsky describes his "non-metrical pieces for piano solo and clarinet solo" as "written-out portraits of improvisation", so the *Ebony Concerto* may be considered a written-out portrait of jazz. In particular, the piano and solo clarinet flourishes in the first movement are good examples of "written out improvisation" that may have been influenced by the be-bop that Stravinsky was listening to at the time, but remain within his own musical language for the piece. Linked to this is Stravinsky's idea that "jazz performance is more interesting than jazz composition", by which he means the non-notated elements of the music such as improvisation, but this also implies performance style. Hence, it is not surprising to find a certain freedom in the performance of *Ebony Concerto* conducted by Stravinsky, particularly in respect to the reed players who take a jazz approach, incorporating a variety of (non-notated) articulations and some "swung" quavers.

Also important when performing the piece is Stravinsky's explanation of the title: "'Ebony' does not mean 'clarinet', incidentally, but 'African'". Stravinsky goes on to say "blues meant African culture to me", and it is the influence of the blues rather than contemporary be-bop that can be more clearly discerned in the work (1968, p. 53), particularly in the second and third movements. The second movement uses a blues-influenced melody echoing between tenor and baritone saxophones and harmon muted trumpets. At the end of both sections of the binary form, the colour of a closely scored clarinet ensemble is introduced, which adds to the dark and sombre mood. The last movement takes as its basis a simple blues-inspired theme, which uses only four pitches and incorporates a

prominent minor 3rd. An initial variation (*Con moto*) seems comedic, burlesque, with chattering clarinets, glissandi and flutter tonguing in the brass. A restatement of the opening theme leads to a second variation incorporating virtuosic flourishes from clarinet, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone and bass clarinet. A harmonised motif from the original theme using the 1st, 3rd and 4th degrees of the minor scale is used in the saxophones as an accompaniment in this section. This provides the basis for the coda of the piece, in which the brass flutter-tonguing and harmon muting provides timbral interest. The ending of the piece is understated, but yet the presence of a sharpened third (F#) in the harmony suggests muted triumph and the overall effect is powerful. This seems to draw on our expectations that a big band will play loudly at the end of a piece—Stravinsky's ending is strong in a more subtle way.

The fact that “Ebony” does not mean clarinet means that the piece is not really a clarinet concerto. Indeed, the presence of a solo clarinet can probably be put down to the fact that Herman played clarinet in his band rather than a conscious decision to feature the instrument. Rather, as Stravinsky himself stated, the “concerto” idea manifests itself here as a “concerto grosso” (1968, p. 53). The first movement is in a sonata-type form. The opening has great rhythmic drive and interest, and the second idea is more melodic, whilst remnants of the initial theme remain in the accompaniment. The soloistic flourishes for clarinet and piano occur before the repeat of the opening section, a conventional place for such “developmental” material. The second movement is in simple binary form, and the third a loose theme and variations. Hence the piece is rooted in conventional “classical” structures.

A “classical” approach is also evident in the instrumentation of *Ebony Concerto*, which uses extended big band orchestration incorporating harp and French horn. Although there is sectional writing derived from conventional big band scoring, such as the use of a harmon muted trumpet section in the first movement, and the saxophone section towards the end of the piece, Stravinsky's approach to the constituents of the ensemble is free. For instance, unusual combinations such as clarinet and trombone, and baritone saxophone and trumpet can be heard in the first movement. Significantly, there is no sense that Stravinsky is writing for a “rhythm section” (like Bernstein in *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs*) as piano, guitar, bass and percussion are treated just as additional instrumental colour in the ensemble.

The use of conventional formal structures in conjunction with an individual musical language links the work with the neo-classic tendencies present in other works by Stravinsky. Like these works, of which *Pulcinella* may be one of the best known, various influences are skilfully combined within the overall style so that the work remains an individual expression rather than just an imitative pastiche. This may be best illustrated with reference to the use of rhythm in the work. Although syncopation, a feature of jazz, is prevalent throughout *Ebony Concerto*, it is often achieved through metrical displacement of ideas, a feature of

Stravinsky's style that can be seen in numerous other works: "in retrospect, it is easy to see how the repetitive patterns, syncopations, and small but characteristic instrumental grouping of jazz were so readily reconcilable with the ostinati, shifting accentuation and chamber ensembles of Stravinsky's post-*Sacre* production." (Watkins, 1994, p. 102).

Indeed, Walsh, in his *New Grove* article on Stravinsky, points out the similarity between *Ebony Concerto* and the *Concerto in D* for string orchestra, composed immediately afterwards in 1946, stating that these two pieces represent respectively the commercial and neo-classic sides of Stravinsky's compositional style at this time. There are certainly notable resemblances when the thematic material of the two pieces is compared, and Walsh notes that it is not "clear that the conventional piece is superior to the pot boiler". I would argue that the similarities between the two pieces indicates that the *Ebony Concerto* was more than a "pot-boiler", as Stravinsky himself attested, as pursuing another composition along similar lines would seem to indicate that *Ebony Concerto* was part of his compositional development rather than a diverting but financially rewarding sideline as the earlier popular pieces had been. The designation "pot-boiler" could in fact be applied to the *Concerto in D*, written after the *Ebony Concerto* and re-working ideas for a necessarily "safe" composition, which was "Stravinsky's first European commission for over twelve years" (White, 1966, p. 399).

Both pieces are in some way representative of aspects of Stravinsky's compositional style and both draw strongly on classical formal conventions. The main difference between the two pieces is accounted for in the additional influence on the musical language and detail of the piece, but the fact that in the *Concerto in D* this is primarily "classical" and in *Ebony Concerto* primarily "popular" does not mean that the resulting works are "conventional" or "commercial" respectively. Whilst Walsh refers to *Ebony Concerto* as "an immaculate, stylized portrait of the balletic precision of big band playing" I have argued that Stravinsky deliberately flaunts the conventions of the commercial big band style, and that the musical language of the blues and the concept of jazz, rather than necessarily its substance, are more influential here.

Conclusion

The four composers considered here were clearly influenced by jazz in different ways, largely determined by their personal, social and cultural background. An interesting observation is that whilst knowledge of (contemporary) jazz techniques is helpful when performing the Bernstein and Gershwin works, in the case of the Milhaud and Stravinsky pieces, it is less the nature of jazz itself that needs to be understood for a successful interpretation, but more the way in which it came to influence the composers. Whereas Gershwin and Bernstein as Americans were immersed in the music and culture of jazz, Milhaud and Stravinsky had to consciously seek out jazz through sheet music, limited jazz performances in Europe, and visits to America. For them, then, jazz was “other”, and indeed, it was the exoticism of music with roots in African culture that clearly appealed to both. Jazz was one amongst many music influences that could be incorporated into their compositions, but for Gershwin and Bernstein, jazz and popular music was to an extent inherent in their compositional style. Thus the influence of jazz often runs deeper than the simple incorporation of jazz elements into the music, and this illuminates the importance of analytical and contextual approach to understanding the music.

In all four cases, the main interest is derived from the way in which jazz elements are assimilated within a (neo-) classical context. Essentially, it must be remembered that although all of these works are clearly influenced by jazz, but this does not necessarily mean that they are jazz. When this is not understood, the works may be criticised for their lack of authenticity, as they may be seen as rather shallow parodies of jazz. However, when jazz-influenced pieces can be appreciated as individual compositional responses to the developing musical form of jazz, they are profoundly authentic as expressions of personal experience. Closely linked to this is criticism based on the lack of improvisation in these works, considered to be an essential element in “real” jazz. As we have seen, improvisation is in fact inherent in all the pieces, in “written-out” form in Milhaud and Stravinsky, as an important part of the compositional process, even in early performances, in Gershwin, and clearly expected in some areas of the Bernstein. The way in which improvisation is incorporated exemplifies the combination of “classical” and jazz practices in these works.

It is interesting to note that the works are all founded to some degree on “classical” formal structures, including prelude and fugue, sonata form and binary form. Even the Gershwin, with its excessive use of 32-bar popular song form, conforms to a large-scale conventional fast-slow-fast pattern. The jazz influence, then, tends to have most effect on the details of instrumentation, harmony, melody and rhythm. Bernstein addresses the stylistic conflict overtly in *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs*. However, Gershwin’s *Rhapsody* shows jazz being brought into the concert hall through the introduction of some symphonic elements to essentially “popular” material, and conversely with Stravinsky, jazz is absorbed

within the composer's primarily "classical" musical style. Indeed, Milhaud's work exhibits both the introduction of jazz to the surface of the music but also a deeper underlying and pervasive blues influence, but within the traditional format of ballet.

Therefore, the demands of both jazz and (neo-) classical styles must normally be satisfied for convincing interpretations of these pieces. However, performances show that it is tempting to over-play the jazz elements at the expense of the other aspects of the work. Often, the presence of jazz can erroneously lead to an overly free approach to the notated aspects of these works, but as they are "jazz-influenced" and not "jazz", there are limits to the extent to which improvisation can be part of performances without the integrity of the composition itself being destroyed. On the other hand, just as with any music, merely playing the notes exactly as on the page would probably lead to a defunct and dull performance. A balance must be struck between fidelity to the score on the page, stylistic awareness and personal expression to produce a lively and convincing interpretation of any one of these pieces. As I have indicated, approaching these works might involve consideration of the notation, available recordings of the work and the music that influenced its composer, documentary sources such as manuscripts, journals and reviews in addition to secondary literature on the society and culture that surrounded the composition of the piece. In addition, experience of jazz through performance can be very valuable in approaching jazz-influenced works, and the large amount of quality jazz ensemble music, historic and modern, is an important part of modern wind repertoire that may be neglected in favour of music that aspires to "symphonic" status.

Fundamentally, the most exciting possibilities within the wind ensemble world result from the flexibility of the medium. With repertoire ranging from exciting avant-garde commissions, to the serenades of Mozart, to repertoire by Duke Ellington and Charles Mingus, written for diversely constituted and sized groups, wind ensembles have an important place within contemporary, classical and jazz genres. It seems vital that we celebrate such diversity and perform a wide range of works as this can only enhance the status of the wind music and musicians. However, in doing this we must not risk homogenising the stylistic diversity of the available repertoire. In his presentation at the BASBWE Conference in 2003, Dr. Wagner outlined the increase the last twenty years in the number of jazz influenced works composed for symphonic winds. If we are to tackle this repertoire convincingly, we must be prepared to invest the same time and energy in understanding jazz, through research, listening and performance, as many of us have in our "classical" music education. Only then can symphonic bands develop the capabilities to exploit the full extent of their existing repertoire and then feel able to commission a wider range of composers and respond to the challenges that they might pose to conductors and performers.

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Sony SMK 61697

Gershwin plays Gershwin: The Piano Rolls
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