

## THE JAZZ SCENE: INTRODUCTION TO THE 1959 EDITION

by Eric Hobsbawm (Francis Newton)\*

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*This is the Introduction to the first edition of Eric Hobsbawm's book "The Jazz Scene", originally published in 1959.*



*Eric Hobsbawm: jazz is one of the most remarkable cultural phenomena of our century...*

**T**his book is about one of the most remarkable cultural phenomena of our century. It is not merely about a certain type of music, but about an extraordinary conquest and a remarkable aspect of the society in which we live. The world of jazz consists not only of the noises which emerge from particular combinations of instruments played in a characteristic way. It consists also of the musicians who play them, coloured and white, American and non-American.

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*\*When, in the mid-1950s, the historian Eric Hobsbawm noticed that the novelist Kingsley Amis, who surely knew less about jazz than he did, was writing on the subject for a national newspaper, he asked Norman Mackenzie, who now wrote for the "New Statesman", to secure him the post of jazz critic for the magazine. Hobsbawm got the job, and became its regular jazz reporter under the pseudonym 'Francis Newton' (Frankie Newton, who played on Billie Holiday's recording of "Strange Fruit" was one of the very few American jazz musicians who was generally believed to have been a Communist).*

The fact that British working-class boys in Newcastle play it is at least as interesting as and rather more surprising than the fact that it progressed through the frontier saloons of the Mississippi valley. It consists of the places in which they play, the business and technical structure which is built round the sounds, the associations they call up. It consists of the people who listen to it, write about it, and read about it. You who read this page, I who have written it, are not the least unexpected and surprising parts of the world of jazz.

What business have we, after all, with what was not so long ago a local idiom of Negroes and poor whites in the Southern states of the USA ? It also consists of that vast section of modern popular entertainment and commercial music which has been profoundly transformed by the influence of jazz. In fact, this book is not simply about jazz as a self-contained phenomenon, the hobby and the passion of what is by now a rather large public of enthusiasts, but about jazz as a part of modern life. If it is moving, it is because men and women are moving: you and I. If it is a little lunatic and out of control, it is because the society in which we live is so. At all events, leaving aside the value-judgements, jazz in society is what this book is about. For this reason I have not confined myself to writing about the history and stylistic development of jazz (the subjects dealt with in Parts 1 and 2) but have also included sections on Jazz as a Business, Jazz and Popular Music, and Jazz and People — the Jazz Musician and the Jazz Public — and Jazz and the other Arts.



*In 1958, there is probably no major city in the world in which someone is not playing a record of Louis Armstrong (left) or Charlie Parker (below)... ARMSTRONG PHOTO CREDIT CAREL DE VOGEL*



At the moment I write this, in the spring of 1958, there is probably no major city in the world in which someone is not playing a record of Louis Armstrong or Charlie Parker, or of players influenced by these artists, or improvising on the theme of the *St Louis Blues*, or *Indiana*, or *How High The Moon*. W C Handy, who first turned the blues into a written form, has died and been laid in his grave to the accompaniment of a hundred or two hundred thousand fellow-citizens of Harlem and a wall of verbiage by (white) politicians and journalists as solid, if not as relevant, as the wall of blue sound which emerges from Miss Carrie Smith and the Back Home Choir of Newark, New Jersey (formerly Savannah, Georgia), singing *I Want Jesus to Walk With Me*.



*W C Handy (left): when he died he was laid in his grave to the accompaniment of a hundred or two hundred thousand fellow-citizens of Harlem... PHOTO CREDIT JARED BOYD*

Louis Armstrong has been invited to the Edinburgh Festival. The Demochristian Party in the Italian election

campaign is hiring Dixieland bands to cheer up its meetings because its rival, the Communist Party, proved in the last local elections that they pulled in the crowds. (The late Boss Crump, whose election campaign in 1909 produced the Memphis Blues, had the same idea.) An 'international band', composed of players from virtually all European countries between Portugal in the West, Czechoslovakia and Poland in the East, is to play at an American Jazz Festival. Jazz bands and skiffle groups accompany the march of the opponents of the nuclear arms race to Aldermaston. A Mr Jack Kerouac has published a novel designed to symbolize the fate of the 'beat generation': it is symbolized largely in terms of 'cool' jazz.



*Jack Kerouac (left) published a novel designed to symbolize the fate of the 'beat generation', symbolized largely in terms of 'cool' jazz...*

A fashionable novelist and literary figure reviews jazz for the most intellectual of the London Sunday papers. Before me there lies a pile of records brought back by a friend from Johannesburg: in Sophiatown and the rest of the South African ghettos the 'jive bands' play what is patently jazz, derived from American records of the 1930s. The Birmingham Mail's 'Jazz Panorama' column reports on the latest jazz clubs to be opened among and by the juveniles of the British Midlands, and records the fact that the most popular jazz records in the second city of England at present are by Duke Ellington, Oscar Peterson, and Miles Davis.

And yet, when men and women now barely middle-aged were born, none of this existed. The very word 'jazz' entered print and printable meaning a little over forty years ago — say around 1915. Even if we trace the music back beyond its present label, the lifetime of an elderly, but not a very old, man spans its entire history. In the early 1900s even Southern Negroes from outside the Mississippi delta heard it with surprise. When the Original Dixieland Jass Band came to Reisenweber's in New York in 1917, the management had to put up notices pointing out that this music was intended for dancing. Since then jazz has conquered and evolved in a wholly extraordinary fashion. It is hard to find a parallel for its unique history.



*The Original Dixieland Jass Band: when they came to Reisenweber's in New York in 1917, the management had to put up notices pointing out that this music was intended for dancing... PHOTO COURTESY DEFINITIVE ILLUSTRATED ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JAZZ & BLUES*

Other local musical idioms have had the power to proselytize: the Hungarian, Spanish, Latin-American. Our age and culture is one that needs periodic blood-transfusions to rejuvenate tired and exhausted or thin-blooded middle-class art, or popular art whose vitality is drained by systematic commercial debasement and over-exploitation. Since the aristocrats and the middle class first began to borrow the waltz from the 'lower orders' and the polka from the peasantry of an exotic and revolutionary nation, since the romantic intellectuals first discovered the thrill of the

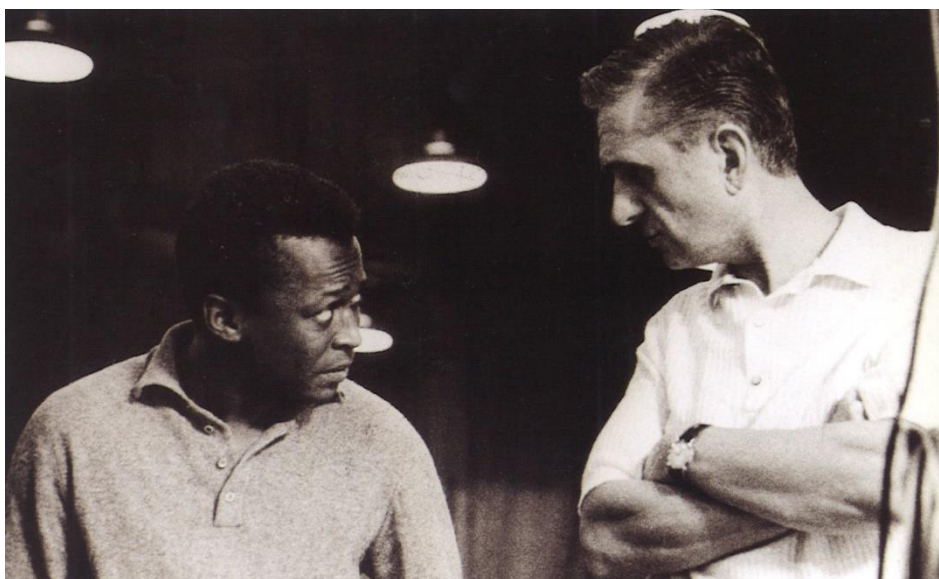


Andalusian Carmens and Don Jose's (they have been significantly transposed into a jazz setting in the film *Carmen Jones*), Western civilization has been a pushover for exoticism of all kinds.

And yet, the triumph of jazz is greater, more universal and all-embracing than that of previous comparable idioms. It has become, in more or less diluted form, the basic language of modern dance and popular music in urban and industrial civilization, in most places where it has been allowed to penetrate. It has done more. Most exotic idioms have created for themselves a body of enthusiasts who appreciate them not only as the bringers of some new musical tinge or sensation, but as arts to be studied, discussed, and generally taken seriously. Most of these bodies of aficionados have remained small self-contained groups without wider influence, and consist mainly of people with a first-hand knowledge of their subject. We know of the existence of these communities dedicated to the attractions of the gypsies, bullfighting, flamenco, Rumanian folk-music, or West African dancing, but only as we know of the existence of the small groups who have fallen in love with Ethiopian culture or with the Basques. They are of no general importance.

But the community of jazz-lovers is not only larger, more influential, but also more international, and of more significance on the cultural scene. After all, how many serious or frivolous daily papers, intellectual weeklies, periodicals devoted to the arts (outside the countries directly concerned) print regular columns of flamenco criticism or discussions of Indian dancing? The social history of the twentieth-century arts will contain only a footnote or two about Scottish Highland music or gypsy lore, but it will have to deal at some length with the vogue for jazz.

Moreover, jazz itself has changed with startling rapidity. Folk-music and similar idioms are not, of course, as unchanging as romantics like to believe. There is a great difference between the first flamenco songs of the 1860s and the flamenco of today, unless it deliberately (and often unsuccessfully) strives for archaism. But this difference is as nothing compared with the gap which separates the New Orleans street music of the early 1900s from, say, the series of miniature flugelhorn concertos of Miles Davis and Gil Evans in 1958.



*A big gap separates the New Orleans jazz of the early 1900s from the miniature flugelhorn concertos of Miles Davis and Gil Evans (pictured left) in 1958... PHOTO COURTESY DEFINITIVE ILLUSTRATED ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JAZZ & BLUES*

Jazz, in fact, has developed not only into the basic idiom of popular music, but also towards something like an elaborate and sophisticated art music, seeking both to merge with, and to rival, the established art music of the Western world. Compared to the musical idioms which might at first sight appear to belong to the same order, it is not only vastly more successful but more unstable and far more ambitious. How are we to get this remarkable phenomenon into some sort of perspective? It is not really the business of this book to construct general theories, or a sociology of jazz. (If it were, there would be enough awful examples to scare at least this author back into caution.) My main object is to survey the world of jazz for the benefit of the intelligent layman, who knows nothing about it, and perhaps also for that of the expert who has hitherto overlooked some of its non-technical corners.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to look at jazz with any sort of curiosity without trying to find out, however crudely, how it fits into the general framework of twentieth-century civilization. Ever since the beginnings of jazz, observers have speculated about this. Their speculations are often totally valueless, except as an indication, of their own prejudices and desires (though these also belong to the world of jazz, in so far as they deal with it). If before sketching the sort of approach I have found useful I quote an awful example of such earlier speculation, it is simply to warn the reader that my own ideas may turn out to be quite as silly in time as these.

Thus it used to be customary in the 1920s in intellectual circles to talk of jazz as 'the music of the future', the one whose rhythm and clang reproduced the quintessential sound and movement of the machine age, the robots' melody. Admittedly such statements were normally made by people who had rarely been inside a twentieth-century factory or heard any jazz which we would today recognize as such. Nevertheless this does not excuse their almost total irrelevance.



*Hobsbawm: In the 1920s intellectuals regarded jazz as 'the music of the future', the one whose rhythm and clang reproduced the quintessential sound and movement of the machine age...*

For in the first place, as we shall see, the very essence of jazz is that it is not standardized or mass-produced music (though jazz-influenced popular music is), and in the second place jazz has very little connexion with modern industry. The only machine which jazz has ever tried to imitate in sound is the railway train which is, throughout American folk-music of the past century, a universal and most important symbol of the multiple kind welcomed by the literary analysts, but never a symbol of mechanization. On the contrary, as scores of railway blues demonstrate, it is a symbol of movement which brings personal freedom:

*Gonna catch myself a train fifteen coaches long,  
When you look for me, I'll be gone.*

It is a symbol of the flux of life, and therefore of fate:

*Two-nineteen took my babe away,  
Two-seventeen will bring her back some day.*

It is a symbol of tragedy and death, as in the numerous songs about railroad disasters and the suicide blues:

*Gonna lay my head on that old railroad line  
And let the two-fifteen pacify my min'.*



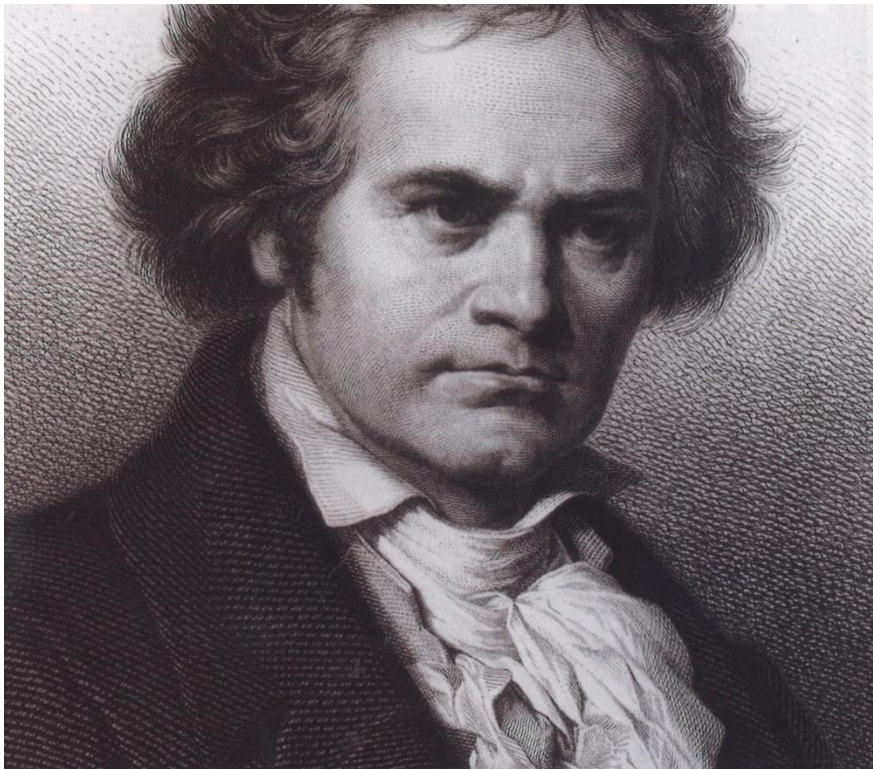
*Meade Lux Lewis (left) his 'Honky Tonk Train Blues' is a powerful example of 'railroad jazz'... PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ FROM NEW ORLEANS TO NEW AGE JAZZ*



Of yearning and grief: 'How I hate to hear that freight train go boo-hoo '; of the labour in building it, as in the great ballad of John Henry; of male power in the running of it; of sex, as in Bessie Smith's Casey Jones.\* Indeed, the most usual use of mechanical metaphors in jazz - eg telephones and cars - is for sexual symbolism: 'Got Ford movements in my hips.' The railroad is a symbol of man's journey to paradise or perdition, as in numerous Negro sermons ('The Gospel Train').

Jazz players, especially blue pianists, have reproduced the sound and sensation of this, the only product of the industrial revolution to have been fully absorbed into poetry and music, with uncanny power, as in Meade Lux Lewis's *Honky Tonk Train Blues* or Red Nelson-Clarence Lofton's *Streamline Train*. But if this reflects any phase of industrialization, it is not the mass production of the twentieth century but the unmechanized society of the late nineteenth. There is nothing in 'railroad jazz' which could not have been created in the 1890s. All this is a warning against wild and comprehensive generalizations based on insufficient knowledge.

And yet one might as well generalize, and I propose to do so. Readers who feel unhappy about such general discussions may perhaps skip the remainder of this introduction and go straight on to the more down-to-earth sections of this book. The history of the arts is not one history, but, in every country, at least two : that of the arts as practised or enjoyed by the wealthy, leisured, or educated minority, and that of the arts as practised or enjoyed by the mass of the common people.



*Beethoven: his last quartets belong almost entirely to the arts as practised or enjoyed by the wealthy, leisured, or educated minority...*

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\* 'Riding', 'rocking', and 'rolling' are words applied both to the railroad and to coitus. In the prison and labour-camp songs the railroad is also the vehicle which brings the prisoner's girl to him.



Beethoven's last quartets, for instance, belong almost entirely to the first; it is reasonably certain that even in Vienna very few members of the average football crowd would accept even free tickets to hear them. On the other hand, in Britain certain kinds of music-hall comic belong almost entirely to the second. I daresay a number of, say, university lecturers have at one time or another seen Lucan and McShane, or Frank Randle, but almost certainly without pleasure; nor would they normally think of putting them into a history of the twentieth-century arts, assuming they were to write one.

There are, fortunately, overlaps. Education or national and social pride turn minority artists into universal ones. Democracy, modern mass media, or national pride make the minority public aware of the common tradition, and there are art forms which, even without these aids, are sufficiently powerful to press inexorably into new territory : jazz is one of them. But it is still true, outside countries whose major cultural tradition is the popular one (and even sometimes within them), that when the books are written, 'culture' or 'the arts' means minority culture and the minority arts.

Arnold Bennett, Thomas Hardy, G K Chesterton are in the *Oxford History of England*, but not Marie Lloyd, or the Cup Final as an institution. Sterndale Bennett and the London Philharmonic Society are in, but not the Northern brass band movement and the choral societies singing their Messiah. If it comes to that, even the Americans, who have much less excuse for neglecting their popular tradition, spend a great deal more time on analysing the adequate but by no means sensational classical composers they have produced than they do on their folk-music and jazz, which are far more original and influential contributions to world culture.



*Thomas Hardy (left), G K Chesterton and Arnold Bennett are in the "Oxford History of England", but not Marie Lloyd, or the Cup Final as an institution... PHOTO COURTESY WIKIPEDIA*

Little need be said about the place of jazz in minority culture, the 'official arts'. As we shall see, until recently it has had only a marginal place among them, partly because the official arts were ignorant of it, partly because they resented it as a sort of populist revolt against their superior status and claims, or as an aggression by philistinism against culture. It is both these things, though it is also a great deal else.

In so far as jazz has been absorbed by official culture, it is as a form of exoticism, like African sculpture or Spanish dancing, one of the 'noble savage' types of exoticism by means of which middle- and upper-class intellectuals try to compensate for the moral deficiencies of their life, especially today when they have lost the nineteenth-century confidence in the superiority of that life. This is no criticism of jazz. A blues singer from North Carolina, a trumpeter from old New Orleans, a professional showman-musician, the veteran of decades of bread-and-butter touring and dance-hall playing, are not responsible for the fact that European or American intellectuals (including, I suppose, the writer of these observations) read the answer to their frustrations into their music.

They would be well advised to listen to the voice of Mr Rex Stewart, the trumpeter: 'And that stuff about us not being sincere! Listen when a band walks into a studio to do a session the boys don't sit down to get sincere. They just play. That's all there is to it.' Or of Mr Harry Carney, the saxophonist: 'The critics take it too serious. They keep writing theories about it and talking about its history and the jungle and tomtoms and white man's influence. You got to take it easy. You play jazz for the kicks in it, not to make up history.'



*Harry Carney (left): you play jazz for the kicks in it, not to make up history...PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST*

Well, it is not as simple as all that. In any case, the intellectual jazz-lover cannot 'take it easy'. If he could he would probably not feel the need for jazz except perhaps as a good rhythmic music for dancing. Where jazz plays its really important part and has its real life is in the common tradition of culture. This lies in analytical darkness, lit only by a few vague and sometimes misleading generalizations. I suppose the best known of them (which also reflects the incurable romanticism of most people who deal with the subject) runs something like this.

Popular culture today, in industrial and urbanized countries, is a matter of commercialized, standardized, and mass-produced entertainment, disseminated by mass media like the Press, TV, the cinema, and the rest, and producing cultural impoverishment and passivity: a people of watchers and listeners who take in packaged and predigested stuff. Sometime in the past — just when depends on the point of view of the observer — popular culture was lively, vigorous, and largely self-made, as in rural folk-song, folk-dance, and similar activities.

There is much rough truth in this. The trouble is that such generalizations leave out everything which might help us to understand the world of jazz, and a great deal about the problems of popular culture besides. In the first place they leave out the question, What really happened to the flourishing old, pre-industrial popular culture? Some of it undoubtedly died out with industrialization, like most rural English folk-song, or survived merely in remote corners of the countryside to await the tape-recorders of the itinerant folk-song enthusiasts. But other kinds of popular culture were more adaptable, and succeeded in flourishing quite vigorously in an urbanized or industrialized society, at least until the rise of mass-produced and standardized entertainment: for instance, English music-hall song and comedy acts.



*Hobsbawm: jazz was resistant and powerful enough to survive even the environment of mechanized entertainment, or even in part to dominate it...PHOTO CREDIT PROSPECT MAGAZINE*



Yet others were resistant and powerful enough to survive even the environment of mechanized entertainment, or even in part to dominate it. Jazz is the chief among these. If I had to sum up the evolution of jazz in a single sentence, I should say: It is what happens when a folk-music does not go under, but maintains itself in the environment of modern urban and industrial civilization. For jazz in its origins is folk-music of very much the type studied by the collectors and experts: both rural and urban. And some of the fundamental characteristics of folk-music have been maintained in it throughout its history; for instance, the importance of word-to-mouth tradition in passing it on, the importance of improvisation and slight variation from one performance to the next, and other matters.

Much of it has changed out of all recognition; but that, after all, is what we should expect to happen to a music which does not die but continues to evolve in a dynamic and tempestuous world. In the second place, the generalizations about popular culture leave out the question of how the mass-production entertainment industry which unquestionably takes over from pre-industrial forms of culture, gets at the standardized entertainment it purveys, how it standardizes it, and how that standardized entertainment conquers the public. For Tin Pan Alley no more invents its tunes and fashions in a sort of commercial laboratory than the canning industry invented food : it discovers what is most profitably processed and then processes it.

This is particularly important to remember, for unlike other modern industries, which sometimes create genuinely new demands — for instance for aeroplanes — the entertainment industry caters for demands which have remained substantially unchanged through the ages. Nowhere is the contrast greater than between the technically revolutionary methods by which entertainment and the arts are today brought to the people — TV, jukeboxes, films, and the rest — and the conservatism of the actual matter brought to them. A medieval fairground showman would be lost in a television studio, but perfectly at home with most of television entertainment.



*John Wayne in “The Searchers”: the 'Western' is a system of myths, morality, and adventure tales of the kind which can be found in any society... PHOTO COURTESY WARNER BROS*



Now the original raw material of mass entertainment is chiefly an adapted form of earlier entertainment, and even to this day the industry continues to revive itself from time to time by drawing on this source, and finds some of its most fruitful activities in the oldest and most perennial, the least ' industrialized ' forms of popular creation. Consider the ' Western', which has maintained a steady, perhaps even an increasing, popularity throughout a period of dizzying technical revolutions. At bottom the 'Western' is a system of myths, morality, and adventure tales of the kind which can be found in any society. This particular set happens to have been devised by the most vigorous and lively tradition of popular culture in the modern Western world to fit the needs of that world. It has merely been taken over, tricked out, modified from time to time, and mass-produced by the entertainments industry.

Other 'pre-industrial' popular arts and themes have been taken over in a much more distorted and diluted form. Jazz is among these, though it has also been strong enough to maintain a separate life of its own. There are sound reasons why the idiom which has become fundamental to Western popular music should be drawn from an American source, and within it, from an Afro-American mixture, though some of them are still obscure. But when we consider the vast, tepid lake of modern, more or less jazz-coloured pop music, we must remember not only the commercial processing which makes it so insipid, but the cold and authentic springs from which it has drawn, and sometimes still draws, its water.

We must remember this, because the phenomenon of popular culture, even today, cannot be understood at all unless we constantly remember how contradictory it is. When people switch on their television they expect to be taken 'out of themselves', but at the same time they expect to be 'brought back to themselves'. The same people in Victorian music halls clapped the songs about impossibly dressed toffs twirling canes and moustaches (Champagne Charlie) and those about mothers-in-law, rent, and pawnbrokers. The same people in yesterday's cinemas applauded the never-never land of supernaturally beautiful, rich, and trouble-free divinities and Charlie Chaplin's accusations of the helpless poor against the powerful rich. Popular art is myth and dreamland, but also protest, because the common people always have something to protest about.



*Charlie Chaplin's accusations of the helpless poor against the powerful rich were applauded...*

The tabloid papers, which have time and again discovered that the profitable formula is a combination of cheesecake and radicalism, know what they are about. At the same time the demand to be 'taken out of' and 'brought back to' oneself is both an acceptance and a rejection of the entertainment industry. For in the nature of its technical and economic structure that industry tends, if left to itself, to develop one side of this demand more than the other. In this sense the prophets who have for a century predicted that commercialism would turn the masses into a collection of blank faces waiting to be spoonfed, into TV morons, are not wholly mistaken.

The industry produces readymade articles for sale to audiences; and the most convenient audiences are those who come in regularly and quietly and sit back in darkness to enjoy the spectacle open-mouthed: the vastest audiences those who sit at home, alone or in small groups, looking at the paper or switching on the radio or TV. If the industry has not succeeded in turning the public into an aggregation of morons it is because the public does not only want to sit back as a statistical population to enjoy the show. It also wants to make its own entertainment; to participate in it actively, and above all socially.

There are British working men who go to football matches in sleet and frost rather than see them, better and more conveniently, on the telly, because the active partisanship, the roar of the crowd which makes the team play better, is as much part of their enjoyment as the mere sight of the players. There are far more citizens who would not enjoy their television unless they could also talk about it, argue the merits of each programme, or perhaps simply gossip, a tendency as natural as that of most people to take their drinks together rather than in solitude. Among young people this desire for making and actively participating in social entertainment is naturally much stronger. It was the young who abandoned cinemas and television screens in Britain in the 1950s for jazz clubs and skiffle groups.\*



*British working men go to football matches in sleet and frost rather than see them, better and more conveniently, on the telly...*

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\* It is possible that the increasing spread of middle-class or lower-middle-class standards among the working class may really create cultural moronism; for the practice of sitting back and soaking in individual cultural impressions as an end in itself is much more characteristic of the middle classes than of any other. What is culturally harmless, or even beneficial when done with Rembrandt, becomes pretty gloomy when done with a Daily Sketch portrait study of the Royal family.

The demand of popular culture is both 'commercial' and anti-commercial, though of course it belongs to the scheme of things that as soon as an anti-commercial demand is large enough it automatically (under conditions of capitalism) becomes commercial and is supplied, to the best of the industry's ability, until it in turn is diluted into pap. The appeal of jazz has always been due to its capacity to supply the things commercial pop music ironed out of its product. It has made its way as a music which people made and participated in actively and socially, and not one for passive acceptance; as a hard and realistic art and not sentimental maundering; as a non-commercial music, and above all as a music of protest (including the protest against the exclusiveness of minority culture).

It has been astonishingly and universally successful. But it has made its way by two routes. One route has led through the ordinary, commercial, popular entertainment industry, within which jazz lived, and still lives, and which has constantly borrowed from it those things it could not give the public unaided, until it enfeebled its borrowings. Jazz has made much of its way as part of the pop world, as a special flavour in an increasingly jazz-influenced pop music. But jazz has also made its way independently, as a separate art, appreciated by special groups of people quite separately from, and generally in flat opposition to, commercial pop music.



*Hobsbawm says that jazz has made its way by two routes: One through the ordinary, commercial, popular entertainment industry... and also made its way independently, as a separate art, appreciated by special groups of people quite separately from, and generally in opposition to, commercial pop music... PHOTO CREDIT KAREN ROBINSON*

However, pop music has never quite let jazz out of the reach of its tentacles — and so long as it remains part of the popular tradition in the arts it is difficult to see how it can. For, as I have tried to argue, the popular entertainment industry is merely a processing and adaptation (almost always a debasement) of that tradition. Jazz has been kept in this odd and complicated family relationship with popular music for another reason or, if you like, by another facet of its 'populism'. Throughout most of its history it has been largely ostracized or ignored by the official minority arts. It has not 'belonged'.

No eyebrows have normally been raised in the circles where it would be fatal not to have heard of *Wozzeck* or *Petrushka*, when a citizen thought that Art Tatum was a

boxer or Charlie Parker somebody's old school chum. More than this: among very many educated and cultured persons now barely into middle age, and especially among musical ones, jazz has been actively disliked and despised, partly perhaps because the world of jazz was, and is, to some extent a rebellion against the values of minority culture. Nowadays jazz has come to be much more widely accepted. Too much so, perhaps, for its own good, for it is quite possible that jazz will flourish as poorly in the atmosphere of conservatoires and chamber-music recitals as Marie Lloyd would have done in country-house drawing-rooms.

But there is no doubt that the long relegation of jazz to a world below that of the official arts has had its effect. For one thing, it has caused jazz to have much less influence on the other arts, and to be much less seriously studied and analysed than one would have expected. I think it needs such study and analysis, though this book does not pretend to do more than survey the world of jazz, to get it into some kind of perspective, to introduce readers to its different regions. It is a completely and utterly fascinating world, even to the man or woman who has no intention of analysing it, or who does not particularly like the noise which ceaselessly emerges from it: the noise of music, the noise of the tapping of fans' feet, the noise of businessmen talking one another into deals.

But it is twice as fascinating if we consider it not simply as a film show of human behaviour, often in Technicolor, but as one of the keys to the problem that concerns us all. The old New Orleans banjo player Johnny St Cyr once told an interviewer: "You see, the average working man is very musical. Playing music for him is just relaxing. He gets as much kick out of playing as other folks get out of dancing. The more enthusiastic his audience is, why, the more spirit the working man's got to play. And with your natural feelings that way, you never make the same thing twice. Every time you play a tune, new ideas come to mind and you slip that one in."

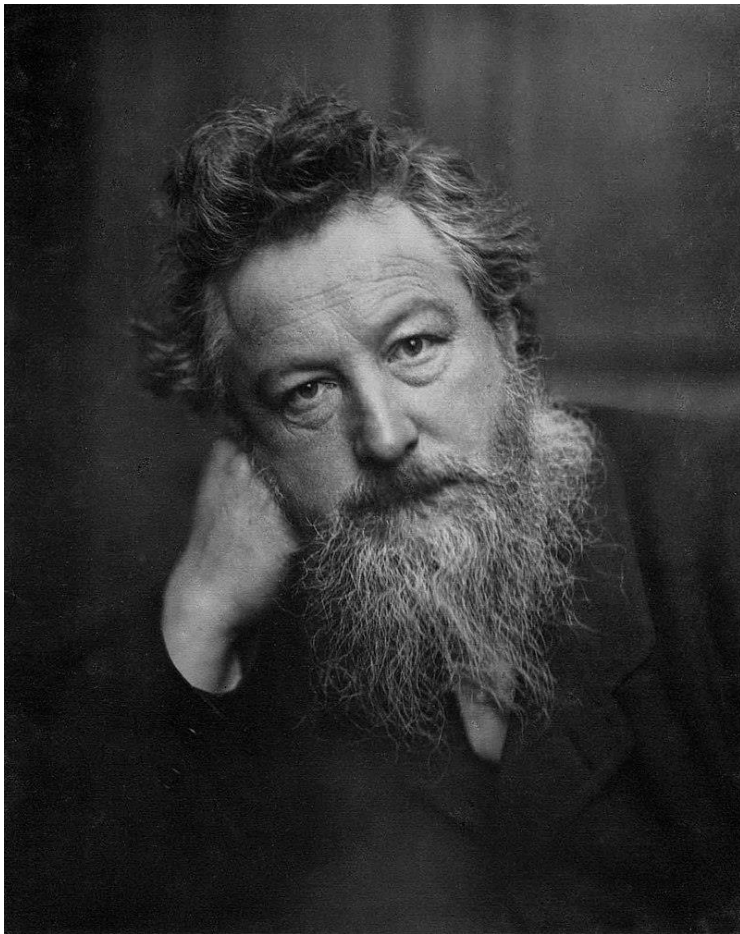


*The old New Orleans banjo player Johnny St Cyr: "You see, the average working man is very musical. Playing music for him is just relaxing. He gets as much kick out of playing as other folks get out of dancing..."* PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

If we need an illustration of the sort of art, and the sort of relation between art and the people, of which William Morris dreamed ('an art made by the people for the people as a joy for the maker and the user') we might do worse than this. It is a good



deal. It is demonstrably far from the reality of the arts in our Western urban and industrial society, and the chances are that every decade, by industrializing and standardizing the production of mass entertainment, shifts it farther away.



*English artist, designer, writer and socialist William Morris at age 53: he dreamt of 'an art made by the people for the people as a joy for the maker and the user'... PHOTO CREDIT FREDERICK HOLLYER*

How are we to restore the arts to their proper place in life, and to bring out the creative capacities in all of us? I do not claim that jazz holds the answer. Indeed, much of it has gone down one or other of the blind alleys which bedevil the arts in our world: either into commercialized pop music, or into esoteric art music. But the history of jazz, that remarkable noise from the Mississippi Delta which has, without benefit of patronage or advertising campaigns, conquered an astonishing range of geographical and social territory, can supply some of the material for an answer.

We can see how one genuine and exceptionally vigorous and resistant popular art actually works and changes in the modern world, and what its achievements and limitations are. We can then draw conclusions. It is not the business of this book to draw them. I have written an introduction to jazz, not a programme for the arts. But it might be as well to point out that if readers are so inclined, they can get more than information and entertainment from the world of jazz.