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MODERNISM IN BLACK AND WHITE: AMERICAN JAZZ IN INTERWAR EUROPE

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I

Anyone at all familiar with the lives of jazz musicians knows that the tenor saxophonist Lester Young never recovered from the experience of his war years. Geoff Dyer's semi-fictional account of that experience in *But Beautiful* feels at once authentic and sufficiently detailed to suggest why Young latterly withdrew into a near-catatonic, drink-fuddled paranoia:

> Exercises in the daybreak cold, men shitting in front of each other, food that made his stomach heave before he even tasted it. Two guys fighting at the foot of his bed, one of then pounding the other's head on the floor until blood spotted his sheets, the rest of the barracks going wild around them. Cleaning out the rust-coloured latrine, the smell of other men's shit on his hands, retching into the bowl as he cleaned it.
> —It's not clean Young, lick it clean.
> —Yes sir. (1991: 14)

What broke one of the greatest of all jazzmen was not the German but the American army. And those who bullied and beat Young loathed him not merely because he was an uppity nigger, but because they suspected that although a married man and adored by women —most famously by Billie Holiday— Pres was a faggot.

There is no space here to offer detailed reasons for this suspicion. I do however need to remark that the American jazz world itself was for the most part aggressively *macho*. Coleman Hawkins, who in the 1930s preceded Young in the tenor chair with the Count Basie orchestra, and who was renowned for the fullness of his tone, for his determination to "cut" any rival,

typifies the *macho* manner which Young opposed, sometimes by outplaying "Bean", usually by choosing to perform sitting down and then raising his instrument until it was in a horizontal position —as though his tenor was a flute, someone recalled— but never by trying to outdo Hawk's volume. Herschel Evans, a tenor man who idolised Hawkins, once said would-be insultingly to Young, ""Why don't you play alto, man? You got an *alto* tone." Lester tapped his head. "There's things going on up there, man," he told Herschel. "Some of you guys are all belly"" (Shapiro and Hentoff 1962: 302). But confrontation was not Young's style. He enjoyed giving the big men names which contained more than an element of camp. Harry Eddison told the historian of jazz, Max Jones, that "Prez started calling me "Sweetie-Pie" [...] and at times everybody was called Lady. It was "Lady Basie" and "Lady Duke" you know, and so Billie was "Lady Day"" (Jones 1987: 112).

You know. As Clarence Williams remarked of the early New Orleans pianist Tony Jackson, "Yes, Tony Jackson was certainly the greatest piano player and singer in New Orleans [...]. About Tony, you know he was an effeminate man —you know" (Shapiro and Hentoff 1962: 302). And many years later Duke Ellington's biographer, James Lincoln Collier, wrote that although Duke grieved for Billy Strayhorn's death —"he was my right arm, my left arm, all the eyes in the back of my head, my brainwaves in his head, and his in mine"— Strayhorn had not necessarily been a good influence on the master. "Ellington always evinced a tendency —weakness, if you will—towards lushness, prettiness, at the expense of the masculine leanness and strength of his best work, the most "jazzlike" pieces. Strayhorn encouraged this tendency" (Collier 1987: 272-273). This is as close as Collier comes to acknowledging the fact that Strayhorn was gay.

It seems that Strayhorn himself only came out towards the end of his life, by which time he had ceased to work regularly with and for the Duke. He died in 1967, Pres ten years earlier and Tony Jackson earlier still. For any of them to have been open about their sexuality would have been difficult, given that homosexuality was as officially prohibited in the USA as it was unofficially anathematised in the jazz world. But —and this is the point— had any of them spent time in Paris they would have found life a great deal easier. For Paris was not only sexually far more permissive than virtually every city in America, it was little bothered by racism. Not only that. Paris was also the great good place for jazz and had been so from the period immediately following the great war, when American jazz musicians first played there. Roger Shattuck dates the arrival of the music in Paris to 1918,

> the year after *Parade*, when a Negro orchestra from America played at the Casino de Paris. It became fashionable in the twenties, when Cocteau and *les Six* adopted the Bar Gaya as their haunt. Here the enterprising pianist Joseph Wiener, who had helped to make Satie's music known before the war, earned his keep by playing jazz with a Negro saxophonist by the name of Vance Lowry. (1968: 155)

And with the arrival of Josephine Baker in 1925, the interest in negritude which had been so marked a feature of early French modernism re-awoke and for some became the fashion of the season, for others a cause, and for still others an opportunity to rationalise and, as some would nowadays say, theorise their interest in jazz.

All of which brings us to what is undoubtedly the problematic nature of jazz's position within modernism, especially anglophone modernism. For while much in modernism opposes mass culture and mass civilisation, so that the task of "saving civilisation" often turns into a responsibility to save an ideal civilisation from its contemporary actuality, jazz by its very nature can, as we shall see, appear degenerate to some modernists —and thus an expression of the fallen world of commercialised culture, while for others it is a "pure" (for which read "primitive") pre-commercialised art form. There is an element of special pleading in both positions which often masks what is quite simply racism: blacks are inferior, therefore their art form is inferior. Or: blacks are noble savages therefore their art form is untainted by an enchained civilisation, even if —or because— black jazzmen and women have only recently been literally freed from the chains of slavery. And to say this takes us into the heart of the problem.

Most forms of modernism find their champions among their practitioners. The modernist artist, writer, musician, dancer, is typically also the self-conscious theorist. But to the best of my knowledge not a single *manifesto* exists by any jazz performer from the years historians of the music usually agree to call "the classic period", that is, roughly from 1920 to 1940. The explanations of jazz, the justifications and championing of the music, therefore came from people who did not play it, or who had no first-hand experience of the jazz life, to whom it was indeed new and strange. And in the USA, where jazz originated, racism made explanation improbable, to say nothing of discriminative appraisal. Scott Fitzgerald is credited with coining the phrase "the jazz age", but his use of the soubriquet reveals that he saw it as applying to the taste of white twenties America for illicit drink and fast

living, rather than to the nature of the music which had spread out and up from the deep south, of which I suspect he knew little enough.

This is to imply no criticism. In *The Great Gatsby* there is a telling moment when the semi-literate Tom Buchanan worries that

> Civilization's going to pieces [...]. I've gotten to be a terrible pessimist about things. Have you read *The Rise of the Coloured Empires* by this man Goddard? [...]. The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be —will beutterly submerged. It's all scientific stuff [...]. It's up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things". (Fitzgerald 1958: 19)

It would be absurd to argue that *The Great Gatsby* is flawed to the extent that Fitzgerald does not introduce any black characters to expose Buchanan's racist clap-trap (which hasn't stopped some commentators from so arguing); but, given the representativeness of Buchanan's attitude, it's not difficult to grasp why black jazz musicians should look to Europe, and France in particular, for an understanding and appreciation of their art which they could hardly expect to find in the USA. And given the homophobic nature of American society, as well as the widespread *macho* stance of most black jazzmen, France offered an especially attractive alternative for those seeking to "cancel the inertia of the buried", in Auden's memorable phrase, as well as for those wanting to escape the oppression, ignorance and bigotry of a nation where jazz was for the most part only tolerated if played by white musicians or by blacks to white audiences. For several years in the 1920s The Cotton Club, in Harlem, featured nightly performances by Duke Ellington's orchestra, one of the very greatest groups of musicians in jazz's history and playing works by the greatest of all jazz composers. No black people were allowed into the audience. But as Shattuck notes, Parisian clubs welcomed black musicians, just as proponents and exponents of modernism, artists, writers, musicians, intellectuals, responded enthusiastically to the actual music.

As it happens, however, the first serious essay on jazz —it is still one of the best— was written in London in the autumn of 1919. That year the black American musician Will Marion Cook had negotiated to take his orchestra and choir on a European tour, and in order to give his orchestra extra appeal, or so he hoped, he signed up the young Sidney Bechet, already known in New York and Chicago as a clarinet *virtuoso*. Cook's tour of Europe began in London, where between July and December the orchestra and choir gave over 200 concerts —afternoon and evening performances— at the

Philharmonic Hall. The concerts were not always well attended, but among those who went more than once was the Swiss conductor Ernst-Alexandre Ansermet, then in London with the Ballet Russe. On October 19 Ansermet's article on the SSO, as the orchestra became known, appeared in *Revue Romande*. As it is of great significance it deserves to be quoted at length.

Ansermet begins by remarking that "ragtime has conquered Europe; we dance to rag-time under the name of jazz in all our cities". And, he adds, the music "is passing into what I will call for lack of another name, the field of learned music: Stravinsky has used it as material for several works, Debussy has already written a cake-walk, and I well believe Ravel will lose no time in giving us a fox-trot" (1966: 116).[1]

Ansermet then spends some time analysing what he rightly sees as the harmonic limitations of the music played by the SSO, although he is quick to point out that a black musician will typically use "a succession of seventh chords, and ambiguous major-minors with a deftness which many European musicians should envy" (1966: 120). The harmonic limitations are nevertheless real enough, even if they are compensated for by deft rhythmic syncopation and the improvisational skills of individual musicians. The explanation for these skills is, Ansermet suggests, that the jazz he has heard is "popular art, —an art which is still in its period of oral tradition" (1966: 120). And he therefore concludes his article by paying tribute to

> an extraordinary clarinet virtuoso who is, so it seems, the first of his race to have composed perfectly formed blues on the clarinet. I've heard two of them which he elaborated at great length, then played to his companions so that they are equally admirable for their richness of invention, force of accent, and daring in novelty and the unexpected. Already, they give the idea of a style, and their form was gripping, abrupt, harsh, with a brusque and pitiless ending like that of Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto*. I wish to set down the name of this artist of genius; as for myself, I shall never forget it —it is Sidney Bechet. When one has tried so often to rediscover in the past one of those figures to whom we owe the advent of our art [...] what a moving thing it is to meet this very black, fat boy —with white teeth and narrow forehead, who is very glad one likes what he does, but who can say nothing of his art, save that he follows his "own way," and when one thinks that his "own way" is perhaps the highway the whole world will swing along tomorrow. (1966: 121-122)

In his autobiography, *Treat It Gentle*, Bechet implicitly contradicts Ansermat's claim that he had little to say for himself. With perhaps pardonable exaggeration he remarks that the Swiss conductor "used to come to every performance [...]. Many a time he'd come over to where I was and he'd ask me all about how I was playing, what it was I was doing, was I singing into my instrument to make it sound this way. We talked a whole lot about music" (1964: 139). I incline to Bechet's side in this. My guess is that he had plenty to say about his music but that he said it in ways, and using an idiom, that would have baffled the classically-trained conductor or have left him feeling that he had heard nothing of any consequence from Bechet's mouth.

I don't at all blame him for this. Until comparatively recently there has always been a self-protective not to say self-deprecatory element in the way jazz musicians talk among themselves and to others, a belief that the world out there won't take seriously what they do so they'll get their retaliation in first. But as Ansermet's article makes clear, he *did* take jazz seriously, and what he has to say is of the first importance, as much for its timing as for its intelligent appreciation of the music he heard. Moreover his praise of Bechet undoubtedly did much for the musician's self-esteem, as well as for his reputation and, of course, for the reputation of the music he played.

II

Jazz in other words was now on the map.[2] We might put it more forcibly and say that in the aftermath of the Great War a new art form arrived in Europe as an antidote to what many saw as the discredited art of the old world. To put the matter this way is to run the risk of sounding merely parodic, but it is a fact that those who took up jazz most enthusiastically were the young, for whom it was or could be made to represent the spirit of rebellion: of the revolt of the sons and daughters against the fathers. I have set out the influence of jazz on this revolt in chapter four of *The Radical Twenties* and do not need to repeat the argument here (Lucas 1997: 111-135). I must however note that if, for a brief period, Bechet became a musical hero to those who heard him and/ or wrote about him, the halo was knocked askew when he was deported from Britain for some pretty wild behaviour. Not surprisingly, perhaps, Bechet in his autobiography has nothing to say about the episode that led to his fourteen-day imprisonment followed by enforced departure from the UK. Accounts of what actually happened in the early hours of Saturday 2 September 1922 vary, but what is certain is that Bechet

was found guilty of unlawfully assaulting a woman he claimed was a prostitute. The most reliable version of the night's events is to be found in John Chilton's biography, *Sidney Bechet: The Wizard of Jazz*, which despite its title is by no means a work of hagiography, as is the case with far too many jazz "Lives" (Chilton 1987: 53-54). Chilton tells us that Bechet was sent to Brixton prison, served his term, appealed against the deportation order, lost, and on 3 November, 1922, was put aboard the *SS Finland*, bound for New York.

Given Bechet's success in London it is no wonder he had wanted to stay on. After he finished his tour of duty with the SSO he played with a variety of groups, by now featuring the straight soprano saxophone he had bought in 1920 in Wardour Street, and of which he was to become the supreme exponent. To earn extra money he took on pupils, he appeared as a featured soloist with café orchestras, and he became known to the London *cognoscenti* as "the King of Jazz". A far cry from the *de facto* segregation of musicians and the contemptuous term "race music" of his native land. Three years after his ignominious return to that land, Bechet signed up to appear with the pit orchestra of *The Black Revue* for its European tour, beginning in Paris in October 1925.

The star of the show was Josephine Baker. Many years later she recalled that on board the liner bringing then to France she had voiced her fears about the Revue's possible reception of Bechet, and "my spirits lifted when he talked about Paris. I shouldn't be afraid he said. Parisians didn't notice people's skins" (1978: 46). In fact, negritude in twenties France, especially Paris, was a positive advantage.[3] The rapturous reception of Josephine Baker herself gave her a status she could never have enjoyed in the United States. As for Bechet, once the tour was over he stayed on as he had in London, playing with various groups. He also paid visits to Frankfurt and Moscow, although by autumn 1928 he was once again in Paris, and once again he became involved in a fracas that led to imprisonment followed by an order to leave France.

In *Treat It Gentle* Bechet provides a fairly muddled, not to say opaque, account of the episode, in which he emerges as the innocent victim of others' deviousness. Chilton makes what sense he can of the drunken quarrel at a Montmartre cafe which culminated in Bechet aiming to shoot a banjoist and in the event hitting a pianist in the leg. (Banjoists are a frequent butt of Jazz jokes but shooting them is going a bit far.) The judge ordered Bechet to prison for fifteen months, although he served rather less than a year. When he came out he moved to Germany, where he played with what by all accounts

was a succession of second-rate bands (1987: 86-87). Within a year he was back in the United States.

But if Bechet made something of a mess of his attempts to find settled work in Europe, other black musicians were more fortunate. Among those who lived in France for extended periods during the 1930s were the trumpet man Bill Coleman, and Coleman Hawkins, after he broke away from the Basie Band. In his monograph on Hawkins, Burnett James speculates about why a musician of Hawkins' stature should choose to move to France, particularly as he would be certain to find himself surrounded by inferior musicians:

> One reason was that he was not the only expatriate among jazz musicians. Other Americans were around, notably in Paris, including Benny Carter and Bill Coleman. In addition, many American musicians, like Dicky Wells, were visitors in Paris and recording there. Beyond that again, the Europeans were learning their business, and a number of good bands were emerging and [...] were quite capable of providing substantial support for their natural superiors. And there was at least one European Jazz musician of unquestioned originality, the Belgian guitarist Django Reinhardt, with whom Hawkins recorded in the mid-1930s. (1984: 35-36)

Astonishingly enough, James never considers the possibility that Hawkins chose to work in Paris because he had heard from other American musicians that the Parisians he would be likely to meet were non-racist and were enthusiastic and discriminative lovers of jazz. But then he is at a loss to explain just why Hawk returned to America at the end of the 30s. Was it "because of the now inescapable threat of war in Europe or some more complex reason" (1984: 45). Complexity be blowed. I would have thought the Nazi threat to black musicians who played "decadent" music would be quite enough to explain why the Hawk packed his bags for America.

And to say this helps to explain why black musicians coming to Europe in the inter-war years favoured France above all other countries, and Paris above all other cities. Paris was quite simply the most tolerant towards them as human beings, as well as being the most consistently appreciative of their music. These matters need some amplification.

III

I earlier noted how Sidney Bechet's performances with the SSO made him into something of a hero for Londoners who went to hear him play. No less an authority than Edward J. Dent of the *Athenaeum* was struck by Bechet's performance of "Characteristic Blues", and although Chilton is surely right to remark that the SSO did not play a great deal of jazz, there is no doubt that what it did play centred on Bechet, and that as a result he became the musician to attract most notice, nearly all of it highly favourable (1987: 38-39). Yet the approval of the SSO's music did not spill over into widespread acceptance of black musicians. Chilton tells us that Bechet found a place to live in Bloomsbury, which adjoins Soho,

> and for the next few months most of [his] life, at work or at play, was spent within this square mile. Had [he] tried some other hotels in London [he] would certainly have encountered racism. Even during the early 1930s black entertainers such as the Mills Brothers, Louis Armstrong and the Peters Sisters found difficulty in booking rooms. The black clarinettist Rudolph Dunbar wrote of his experiences in London during that era: "In most lodging houses where there are "rooms to let" signs, if a black man should apply the reply will be "I am sorry but that room I had vacant has just been let"". (1987: 36)

Nor was this racism dead by the end of the thirties, as Chilton rather optimistically implies. I have heard that when the great guitarist and blues-singer Big Bill Broonzy came to Nottingham in the mid fifties, where he was due to appear at the city's Rhythm Club, the owner of the hotel into which he had been booked came out to greet him with the words "No coloureds here".

It is probably true that had the hotelier known Broonzy was a jazz musician he would have behaved in a more civilised manner. To say which is in no way to excuse his foul behaviour, but it does serve to remind us that from the late 1940s interest in "classical" jazz was running high in the UK —out of it came many local "revivalist" bands— and that as a result black musicians, especially those who could trace their roots to the Storeyville of "balconies, flower-baskets and quadrilles/ Everyone making love and going shares", in Philip Larkin's words, were granted iconic status. They gave interviews on the BBC, their early records were re-issued, their later performances, often accompanied by the starry-eyed British bands who had

brought them over, were in huge demand, and they were written about in reputable newspapers and journals. Francis Newton, a.k.a. Eric Hobsbawm, had a weekly column devoted to jazz in the *New Statesman*, and Philip Larkin reviewed jazz records for the *Daily Telegraph*. *The Melody Maker*, *New Musical Express*, *Jazz Journal*, which all sold in respectable numbers, were eagerly read by the jazz world, and by 1957 Rex Harris's *Jazz*, first published as a Pelican Special in 1952, had gone into its seventh edition. The Notting Hill Riots make plain that in the 1950s racism was, as it still is, a prevalent feature of English life, but for all that, jazz was both widely accepted and highly reputable.

In 1920s Britain jazz also enjoyed a certain reputation. But although home-grown musicians and composers were increasingly fascinated by it, the intellectual and social climate of the 1930s between them depressed the opportunities for black musicians to play or, even more important, to want to play in the UK. By the end of the decade the Musicians Union had instituted a ban on overseas orchestras or groups, and while individual musicians were occasionally allowed to tour, they had to be accompanied by British musicians. You could hear Fats Waller, but not his rhythm, Louis Armstrong, but not his orchestra. Both musicians came to Britain in the latter 1930s. Neither much enjoyed the experience.

Leave the fact that they could not tour with their own musicians out of it. Both Waller and Armstrong were billed as "entertainers", with all that implied of racist assumptions about "nigger minstrel" shows. The music itself did not matter to the agents and managers who hired them. That this should be so tells us a good deal about changed perceptions of the music in the 1930s. In the previous decade jazz had been seen by those who thought themselves in any way progressive as part of a new wave of energy, of radical creativity. But in the 1930s intellectuals, especially left-wing intellectuals, scorned it. Far from being progressive, it was commercial, decadent, debased. So at least the party line on the left ran, and it ran in tandem with that of the right.

There were exceptions to this rehearsed response, the most eloquent perhaps being Constant Lambert's. In his *Music Ho!* (1934) Lambert devotes over twenty pages to an account of jazz, in the course of which he writes sympathetically but critically of Louis Armstrong as "one of the most remarkable virtuosi of the present day", who "enthralls us at a first hearing, but after a few records one realises that all his improvisations are based on the same restricted circle of ideas", a remark which can only be understood if we conclude that Lambert had been listening to the wrong records. They will

have been the "showman" waxings Armstrong was forced to make in the 1930s, not the early recordings of the Hot Five, Hot Seven, nor the work with King Oliver, which between them represent some of the greatest music ever made by jazz musicians. Those classic recordings were not easy to obtain outside America. The recordings Armstrong made under the "guidance" —that is, pressure— of his mafia-installed manager of the thirties, Joe Glaser, are a different and vastly inferior matter, for all their moments of individual genius. I do not blame Lambert for finding them limited in scope.

With Duke Ellington, on the other hand, Lambert is wonderfully perceptive. It has to be said that Ellington's recordings were easier to come by, and as he was not being run by the Mob —his music and image were not as commercially exploitable as Armstrong's— he was therefore free to record more or less as and what he liked. From tracks Lambert lists, we know he had heard some of the best of the Duke's music. Ellington is, he says, "a real composer", and then he goes on:

> The real interest of Ellington's records lies not so much in their colour, brilliant though that may be, as in the amazingly skilful proportions in which the colour is used. I do not only mean skilful as compared with other jazz composers, but as compared with so-called highbrow composers. I know of nothing in Ravel so dexterous in treatment as the varied solos in the middle of the ebullient *Hot and Bothered* and nothing in Stravinsky more dynamic than the final section [...].
>
> The exquisitely tired and four-in-the-morning *Mood Indigo* is an equally remarkable piece of writing of a lyrical and harmonic order, yet it is palpably by the same hand. How well we know those composers whose slow movements seem to be written by someone else —who change from slow Vaughan Williams to quick Stravinsky and from quick Hindemith to slow Cesar Franck. The ability to maintain the same style in totally different moods is one of the hall-marks of the genuine composer, whether major or minor. (1948: 155-156)

There is more in the same vein and although it is a pity that in the last sentence quoted Lambert seems to be hedging his bets, his remains one of the very best pieces of writing about Ellington that I know.[4]

Edward Crankshaw had presumably read Lambert's book when he contributed his essay on "Music" to Geoffrey Grigson's *The Arts To-day* (1935). At all events he cites it in his short list of "Books to Read". But he has nothing to say about jazz. Perhaps he thought Lambert's enthusiasm for

it an amiable eccentricity. Those on the left were liable to be far less accommodating. Here, for example, in his *Marxism and Poetry*, is the classical scholar George Thomson, offering advice to young poets to cultivate the lost tradition of folk song and ballad:

> Poetry must be reunited with music. Poetry recitals are at present unattractive to the people, because they are unfamiliar; but they can still be drawn to song recitals. Moreover, there is a serious shortage of contemporary British working class songs. Having regard to these two circumstances, I would recommend a young poet seeking a popular audience to try his hand at making new songs for the people —either new words to a new tune, if he can find a composer to work with, or new words to an old tune. Then, having had his words performed at some demonstration or rally or even an ordinary branch meeting, let him call as many as possible of his listeners together and ask them how they liked it and how they think it could be improved. If he does that, he will soon find that many of them have a genuine feeling for poetry. (1941: 78)

This is characteristic of much marxist writing of the 30s. Thomson takes for granted that "the poet" will not come from "the people", but will have to act as their instructor and guide. They receive what he alone can offer. He must take them by the hand and lead them away from the debased expressions of popular culture on which they rely. And what are those expressions? Why, "jazz and other forms of commercialised music" (1941: 80).

Thomson undoubtedly took his line from Moscow, via the Communist Party of Great Britain's offices in King Street. There, disapproval of jazz went with dismissal of western cinema. Both were assumed to be commercialised expressions of decadent, capitalist culture, an assumption to be in the course of time turned into specious argument by Theodor Adorno, for whom jazz created the "*illusion* rather than the reality of free creation, and thus revealed its location in mass culture" (1989: 155). As Kathy J. Ogren rightly notes of this in her impressive *The Jazz Revolution: Twenties America and the Meaning of Jazz*, "Adorno was not informed nor was he sensitive to the origins of jazz in black music and he regarded the use of popular song in jazz compositions as evidence indicating its commercialisation" (1989: 155). Still, never let ignorance of your subject stand in the way of a good theory about it.

We might perhaps detect something rather more disreputable than ignorance at work here. Fredric Jameson apparently thinks Adorno must have

had in mind the music of Paul Whiteman, which bears about as much relationship to jazz as formica does to marble, but Peter Brooker convincingly argues that this is unlikely, given Adorno's references to jazz's African roots (1996: 211). It is at least possible that what motivates Adorno's criticism of jazz is an unstated racism or, perhaps, a feeling that jazz's roots in a kind of *ur*-peasant society makes it unacceptable in an enlightened socialist culture. Either way, it is clear that what we might call the Stalinised response to jazz was very different from that prevailing in 1920s Moscow which, as we have seen, Bechet visited in 1926, and where he and other black musicians seem to have been welcome guests.

According to Chilton, at least two black bands were in Moscow in the spring of that year, and "the musicians soon linked up socially". Bechet became deeply interested in "serious" music: contemporary work and Tchaikovsky. At that time Monday was a work-free day in Russia, and one of the musicians recalled that "Monday night was the time for all musicians and actors and dancers to meet at various clubs. We had a wonderful time in Moscow. The women loved Sidney" (1987: 77-78).

They loved him in Germany, too, which he briefly visited in 1928. But neither Germany nor Russia would have loved him in the middle of the following decade. Hitler and Stalin were as one in their condemnation of the music Bechet played.[5] As for Italy, Mussolini banned all jazz. Hence, the importance of France —well, Paris— for jazz musicians, especially black ones. Because quite apart from the city's characteristic racial and sexual tolerance, and the informed delight that many took in jazz, Paris had one great advantage over most other capital cities of the twenties and thirties: the kinds of clubs where the music best thrives.[6]

Berlin certainly had such clubs in the 1920s, and as is well known they tolerated sexual transgressiveness. Hence, of course, Auden's going there in search of boys. Tony Jackson, Lester Young and Billy Strayhorn would all have felt at ease in Berlin, especially as, according to John Willett, in Weimar Germany "a new spirit permeated all the arts [...]. One model here certainly was the "production art" which had evolved out of Soviet Constructionism; another was the Anglo-Saxon mythology of jazz, sport, easy humour and a hard-headed respect for facts" (1984: 567). But although Willett reports that Paul Hindemith first heard American jazz in 1921 and found it "a model of economical orchestration and dynamic drive", and despite his reproducing photographs of the Bauhaus jazz band and a 1927 painting by Carl Hofer of a "Six-Man Band" (1984: 99), I am not convinced that jazz ever made the impact in Germany it undoubtedly did in France. And this is less

because Hofer's painting shows a front-line of saxophonist and violinist (unlikely but by no means impossible) than because as far as I know American jazzmen simply did not go to Germany as frequently or with such enthusiasm as they did to France. Clubs there might be: in Berlin, in Frankfurt, in Bonn, at least until Hitler closed them down, but where were the German musicians who really understood about jazz?

By contrast, London had a number of good musicians but lacked the clubs. That is to say, such night spots as there were typically lacked drinking licences and were liable to be raided by the police looking for illegal liquor and/ or drugs. Then why bother with London when Parisian night clubs were so much more attractive than London's? For one thing, Parisian policemen were on the whole less likely to come crashing into a club, especially as clubs were mostly licensed, so that you could drink in comparative freedom and comparatively cheaply. For another, the drink was of better quality, and it could be drunk for longer hours. By the late twenties the Bar Gaya had "lost out to another fashionable *boîte de nuit*, *Le Boeuf sur le Toit*" (1968: 155), but there were plenty of other clubs where you could go to hear or play jazz, among them *Les Ambassadeurs*, *Chez Florence*, *Bricktop's*, *Les Trois Matelots*.

In his beautiful, affectionate account of Bill Coleman, whom he knew well in that great trumpet man's later days, John Wain writes:

> Sometimes, now, I try to imagine the life that Bill Coleman, in his early thirties, lived in pre-war Paris. It was a Franco-American life, of course; many of his professional contacts were with fellow-Americans —fellow-blacks, for the most part— who spent a week or two in Paris and needed his services in getting their music up to the right pitch of energy and inspiration. But, after a week or two, they went back to America, to the security of their regular jobs and their regular surroundings, distasteful as these must always have been for the black man. They enjoyed Paris, breathed its more human air, and went home. Coleman stayed. He worked with French musicians like Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli. He played in Parisian clubs and recorded in Parisian studios. He had his regular drink in Chez Boudon, the chosen cafe of the jazz fraternity. He was happy, and he made wonderful music. (1986: 121)

And that, I think, says it all. For many engaged in the modernist enterprise "jazz" was a term that signified a variety of either virtues or vices. But for the men and women who performed it, jazz was what they did. This jazz would later be contrasted with "modern jazz". Philip Larkin's triple-headed horror,

Parker, Pound and Picasso, aligns post-1940s jazz with more mainstream modernism. Yet we have seen that from the moment it reached Europe, jazz, especially the "classic" jazz so loved by Larkin, was regarded by modernists as an art-form (could it be?) of which they had to take account. For those deeply involved in music, as composers, conductors, critics —Hindemith, Stravinsky, Ansermet, Lambert— this seemed an especially urgent matter. But for others, too, jazz was at the very least a phenomenon which required critical attention, if not endorsement. Meanwhile, the musicians made music.

NOTES

[1] Ansermet's article, which has acquired an almost legendary status in jazz history, has often been translated and made available in English versions, although many of them are abridgements of the original. The text I use, taken from Ralph De Toledano's *Frontiers of Jazz*, is the most reliable. For an excellent account of the *SSO* in London, see John Chilton's biography of Sidney Bechet, especially pp. 35-44 (see Works Cited).

[2] The perception among European musicologists and composers in the early years of the twentieth century that jazz was a radically new and energising form of music cannot be examined properly in an essay. What *can* be said is that during the interwar period, at different times, jazz began to affect most forms of music. For more on this, see Constant Lambert's *Music Ho!* and other texts in Works Cited. At first, jazz seems to have been thought of as coterminous with rag-time, but by 1919, as Ansermet's article makes clear, rag-time was properly understood to be one expression of jazz among many others. The "Shakespeherian Rag —/ It's so elegant/ So intelligent" of *The Waste Land*, as well as the syncopated talk of the characters in *Sweeney Agonistes*, is evidence of Eliot's reactionary modernism, his belief in jazz as a marker of decadence, although he is clearly, if grudgingly, fascinated by its rhythmic energies. For more on this see Lucas, *The Radical Twenties* (1997: 130).

[3] This is a complex matter and, as with the perception of jazz as radical music, not one to be explored within the confines of the present essay. But the late nineteenth-century discovery of "primitive" art, and its enthusiastic reception in Paris, is of considerable importance for artists, writers and musicians, and is discussed in Roger Shattuck's *The Banquet Years*, and in biographies and critical

studies of such important artists as Gauguin, Picasso and Matisse, as well as of Jarry and Satie.

[4] In a fuller account I would want to consider Lambert's discussion of what he calls "Symphonic Jazz" —that is, the use of jazz idioms by "serious" composers, including some named by Ansermet, as well as Hindemith and, a little later, Vaughan Williams. The other side of this coin is the wish of some jazz composers and musicians to be "serious", which in one expression leads to Gershwin's surely overblown "Rhapsody In Blue" —to name one example of many that could be cited— and in another to the misbegotten recordings made by, among others, Billie Holiday and Charlie Parker, in which jazz combos are accompanied by banks of violins. There is also the beyond-parody, "no expense spared", rendition —as it might be called— of "St Louis Blues" by Leonard Bernstein and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, which grotesquely intrudes into the film *Ambassador of Jazz*. The film, made in the mid-1950s and purporting to celebrate the genius of Louis Armstrong, is in fact a woeful piece of Cold War propaganda, intended to show that jazz is at once High Art and the Music of the People. Eat your heart out, Zhdanov.

[5] For more on the hardening Soviet hostility to jazz during the Stalinist period, see Marshall Stearns (1958: 202-203).

[6] It also of course played host to many whose interest in jazz spilled over into enthusiastic endorsement of the sources of jazz. Hence, in part, the inspiration for *Negro*, a vast anthology edited by Nancy Cunard and her black jazz-pianist lover, Henry Crowder, and published by Cunard's Hours Press in France —where else?— in 1935.

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