

MUSIC PRACTICES AS SOCIAL RELATIONS:
CHICAGO MUSIC COMMUNITIES
AND THE EVERYDAY SIGNIFICANCE OF PLAYING JAZZ

by

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
List of Figures.....	v
Abstract.....	vi
Chapter	
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Working in Jazz in “The City That Works”: A Brief History	52
3. Playing Standards on the North Side: Effortless Virtuosity, Professional Identity, and Mainstream Jazz.....	98
4. Rebuilding My Father’s House: The Negro League Café Jam Session	159
5. Communities, Clubs, and Festivals: The Many Layers of Chicago Jazz.....	209
6. Conclusion	268
Bibliography	277

List of Figures

Figure

3.1	Jim Pierce and the band at Basta Pasta.....	98
3.2	Robert Shy and Scott Earl Holman	104
3.3	Jon Bany at The Chambers.....	105
3.4	Floor Plan of Delaney and Murphy's	128
3.5	Dave Po and Dave Hibbard	132
3.6	George Bean playing from his table.....	135
4.1	Cecile, Aki, and Theodis on stage at the Negro League Café.....	159
4.2	Barbers' gathering	168
4.3	Aki at the door	175
4.4	Negro League Café floor plan	176
4.5	Woody Bolar	194
4.6	Cleo is in the house.	195
4.7	Birthday Balloons.....	199
4.8	Eternal Sound Family Post Card - front	200
4.9	Eternal Sound Family Post Card - back	200
5.1	Phyllis's Musical Inn.....	218
5.2	A slow Monday night.....	219
5.3	Al Carter-Bey making announcements	230
5.4	"Someone You Should Know".....	231
5.5	Audrey and her family.....	232
5.6	Al, Coop, and Grady.....	233
5.7	George Freeman at the Tropical Den	236
5.8	Miss Marie, proprietor of the Tropical Den	237
5.9	Edwina Smith and George Freeman at the Tropical Den.....	238
5.10	Eugene Rainey singing with George Freeman	239
5.11	Jon Allen having a snack at the bar	241
5.12	The view from my barstool	242

Abstract

Scholars often consider jazz in terms of its most innovative performers, exemplary recordings, and groundbreaking performances. Yet most jazz is played by little-known musicians who rarely record or perform at major venues. This study, written against the monolithic history of jazz, argues that musical meanings are deeply connected to specific, local, face-to-face social relations, that these face-to-face musical practices contribute to the intersubjective construction of individual and community identity, and that face-to-face communities use general musical practices, broad social identities, and urban space to achieve local social goals.

This dissertation depicts the social and musical practices of several distinct communities and is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2004 and 2006 at jam sessions and performances held at The Negro League Café, The Chambers, and other Chicago venues. Detailed narratives show how musical practices and social relations are connected at fundamental levels. For example, different approaches to harmonizing jazz standards determine not only which notes are played, but also which players are welcomed to the bandstand. Ethnographic accounts portray musicians as they construct racial, gender, artistic, and professional identities that draw on grand narratives, while firmly rooted in local social relations. Considering jazz as a variety of face-to-face musical and social practices complicates understandings of individual and communal identity, and challenges the notion that jazz has a single authentic history or that it

unproblematically represents “America’s music,” “African American music,” or other broad social formations that are, in Benedict Anderson’s terminology, “imagined communities.” Deep connections between jazz practices and local social relations suggest that such connections also exist in other musical communities and among amateurs and professionals engaged in other artistic activities as well.

Music need not be ‘great’ in order to do the kinds of social work so important to musical practice. People play jazz in many ways to many different ends, none truer than the others, each true to the particulars of their time and place of performance. Musicians create deeply felt identities, social bonds, and aesthetic values through virtuosic and amateur performances alike, and they need not change musical history to change their own.

Chapter 1

Introduction

“Musics do not have selves; people do.”
—Christopher Waterman, *Juju*

Sometimes, music seems to have a life of its own. Songs spread globally; styles develop historically, sounds follow a trajectory shaped by economics, technology, politics, and religion. Jazz, no less than any other music, seems to live a life larger than any single person or musical moment. It is “black music” (Baraka 1968), “race music” (Ramsey Jr. 2003), “America’s music” (Ward and Burns 2000b), even “the infinite art of improvisation” (Berliner 1994). Grand stories about jazz tell important truths, but jazz, like any other music, is continually resounded in the everyday practices of musicians and listeners, bounded by time and space, meaningful for particular flesh and blood people and communities, even as the specific meanings they enunciate intersect with other meanings that transcend local, personal lives. Many scholars tell grand stories about jazz. In this dissertation, I tell smaller stories—stories of a few people and communities who play jazz in Chicago in the first decade of the twenty-first century. I tell stories about how they make “the infinite art of improvisation” their own through their everyday practice of jazz.

My interest in the significance of everyday local jazz practices grows out of my own experiences playing jazz. I first began thinking about this project in the fall of 1998. At that time, I was working as a guitarist, and I had a steady gig at a place called Watson's Bistro in Rogers, Arkansas. While on break my band mates and I were at the bar weighing the pros and cons of college jazz programs. I was trying to convince my friend Keefe Jackson that a music degree would be good for his career, but even I found many academic jazz books uninteresting. The stories they told seemed to exclude most of the working musicians I knew. Keefe (who later moved to Chicago and makes an appearance in Chapter Five of this dissertation) asked me what I hoped to accomplish in graduate school. I told him it would be interesting to write something about what he and I and other working jazz musicians actually do.

I didn't know then that such a project was possible, but I had begun reading contemporary accounts of jazz that inspired me with their careful attention to musical, historical, and social details. Scott DeVeaux's *Bebop: A Social and Musical History* convinced me of the importance of understanding jazz as both art and work, and Ingrid Monson's *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* and Paul Berliner's *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* demonstrated the importance of ethnography for jazz research (DeVeaux 1997; Monson 1996; Berliner 1994). Monson's accounts of jazz interaction, in particular, resonated with my scholarly interests and with problems I encountered on the bandstand. Her work not only changed the way I think about scholarship and research, it also changed the way I play. This dissertation is an amplification and extension of the work of scholars like DeVeaux, Monson, and Berliner who demystify the practices of jazz musicians by attending carefully to the details of

musical and social practice, and who test cultural and music theory in the laboratory of ethnographic experience and writing.¹

While jazz scholars write mostly about star players, stylistic developments, landmark recordings, and the loftiest achievements in jazz, most jazz musicians live closer to the earth. Addressing Bruno Nettl's claim that improvisation is "an art neglected in scholarship" (Nettl 1998), scholars have delved with greater vigor into improvisational music. But rank and file jazz musicians still live well below the academic radar. Of the hundreds of jazz musicians I have known and played with during my life, few resemble the illustrious virtuosos who people the pages of jazz lore, criticism, and history. Most jazz musicians lead different lives—they work day jobs, they play with pop and rock bands, and they teach in music stores and community colleges. They play jazz as much as they can—often for free, sometimes to empty rooms. Their music is a labor of love that is deeply meaningful for themselves and their musical communities. Jazz scholars often

¹ Jazz continues to fascinate researchers who have employed a variety of interpretive techniques. Many scholars, seeking to understand the importance of jazz as a cultural sign or metaphor analyze jazz music, iconography, fashion, and culture in terms of literary and cultural theory, and their essays have been collected in a number of important anthologies including *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture* and *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies* edited by Robert G. O'Meally and *Representing Jazz and Jazz Among the Discourses* edited by Krin Gabbard (O'Meally 1998, 2004; Gabbard 1995a, 1995b). Ethnographers, too, have contributed to new understandings of jazz and music research. In addition to Paul Berliner's monumental ethnography *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* see *Club Date Musicians: Playing the New York Party Circuit*, by Bruce A. MacLeod, *Music Grooves* by Charles Keil and Steven Feld, "Searching for Swing: Participatory Discrepancies in the Jazz Rhythm Section" by J. A. Progler, *Metal, Rock, and Jazz: Perception and the Phenomenology of Musical Experience* by Harris M. Berger, "Contemporary New York City Big Bands: Composition, Arranging and Individuality in Orchestral Jazz" by Alex Stewart, *Monk's Music: Thelonious Monk and Jazz History in the Making* by Gabriel Solis, and *The Coordination of Action: Non-verbal Cooperation in Jazz Jam Sessions* by Nicholas Dempsey (Berliner 1994; MacLeod 1993; Progler 1995; Keil and Feld 1994; Berger 1999; Stewart 2004; Solis 2008; Dempsey 2008).

disparage everyday players. Performer and theorist Anthony Braxton classifies most musicians as mere “stylists” and “traditionalists” as opposed to those he calls “restructuralists”—musicians who change music and create the styles that stylists and traditionalists only recreate (Szwed 2000, pp. 83–84).² But considering these musicians as the flotsam and jetsam that bob along in the wake of innovation misses the significance of what they do. Though inaudible in the story of jazz transcendent, their music making is tremendously innovative in their individual and communal lives; blowing their horns and singing the old songs, they breathe fresh life into the music, recomposing themselves and their musical communities each time they play. As I write this, I am reminded of when, as a sixteen year old guitar student, I learned my first Charlie Parker tune, “Scrapple from the Apple.” I felt rhythms and heard notes that were nowhere in my favorite Led Zeppelin recordings. As I played “Scrapple”—a tune already thirty years old—I experienced my body and emotions in new ways, and I dreamed new dreams about who I was and would become. Innovators like Duke Ellington and Charlie Parker may be the tip of the jazz iceberg, and sunlight shining down through that tip may color the ice below, but everyday face-to-face musical practices make up the invisible

² Anthony Braxton explains his aesthetic philosophy in his 1985 publication *Tri-axiom Writings* (Braxton 1985). For discussions of Braxton’s music and philosophy see *New Musical Figurations: Anthony Braxton’s Cultural Critique* by Ron Radano and *Blutopia: Visions of the Future and Revisions of the Past in the Work of Sun Ra, Duke Ellington, and Anthony Braxton* by Graham Lock (Radano 1993; Lock 1999). While I am critical of the neglect of everyday jazz practice in accounts that focus on the history of stylistic change and innovation, Lock makes the important point that understanding the historical significance of jazz, particularly understanding music as “an alternative form of history” is an important way of bearing witness to African American history that has often been neglected or misrepresented (Lock 1999, p. 1). For an example of how American history and ideology can be reimagined in terms of jazz styles and innovations see *Going for Jazz: Musical Practices and American Ideology* by Nicholas Gebhardt (Gebhardt 2001).

base hidden below the surface of history, without which the pinnacle would sink, melt, or drift away.³

Understanding jazz as communal practice raises a number of theoretical questions. While scholars have written of the jazz community, few have questioned the concept of community itself. This critical gap results in equivocal understanding of the levels and structures of social organization produced through jazz practices. For example, although Ingrid Monson argues vigorously for “the relevance of insider voices,” her often brilliant study, *Saying Something*, seems to imply that the voices of a handful of elite, professional jazz musicians, mostly based in New York, adequately account for the insider perspectives of all jazz musicians, thus conflating the community practices of her interviewees with the practices of other face-to-face communities and the imaginary

³ For a recent account of everyday jazz practices see *Do You Know...?: The Jazz Repertoire in Action* by Robert R. Faulkner and Howard S. Becker (Faulkner and Becker 2009). Faulkner and Becker look closely at the social processes that are at work in the development of a musician’s repertoire. Drawing heavily on their own experiences as jazz musicians, their book includes many vivid accounts of communication on the bandstand. They explain musical concepts like harmony, song form, in non-technical vocabulary and illustrate them with accounts from their own musical lives. Since Becker was most active as a performer in the 1950s the book includes many examples of how jazz musicians learned and practiced their art in the past, such as stories about learning tunes from “air shots” or buying early black market fake books from the trunk of a salesman’s car. Like this dissertation, they emphasize that there are many ways of being a jazz musician. Repertoire, learning methods, and even what it means to know a tune vary among players, instrumental roles, and playing situations. Faulkner and Becker look at the interpersonal processes that produce jazz repertoire and practice, and they look at these processes as they occur in everyday jazz practices that are often neglected in much jazz scholarship. I develop similar ideas about everyday jazz practice, but I focus more specifically on how these processes are not just ways of negotiating repertoire and getting through a gig, but also ways of enacting particular local communities and their unique modes of sociality. In this dissertation I am interested in the ways particular communities enact musical practices to perform their social relationships rather than the ways that musical and social processes work generally in jazz.

community of jazz musicians in general (Monson 1996, p. 215).⁴ The concept of community in fact has a long history of competing views and interpretations. In this chapter I briefly examine that history and how considerations of the jazz community fit into broader theoretical discourses of social organization.

Attempting to portray face-to-face jazz communities in all their distinctive and diverse liveliness also raises questions about appropriate modes of writing and representation. Facts and analysis are crucial, but data and analysis alone provide only an abstract account of community life, an account that tends to master the data so that a community appears uniform and whole, and thus misses the diversity of living communities and their fluctuating incompleteness. I argue that narrative based on ethnographic participation contributes a richness of detail that can include a variety of independent perspectives, minimizing reduction of differences and inspiring not just knowledge but also a vicarious and empathetic experience of the communal practices in question. I also argue that, because I am concerned with how people come to experience themselves as particular selves and members of particular communities through musical practice, and because of my own long involvement in various jazz communities,

⁴ Monson quotes Ralph Peterson, Jr., who dismisses college jazz teachers as “players that couldn’t *hack* it,” and criticizes their “narrow-mindedness.” Monson agrees saying “most of us who teach music history and ethnomusicology...have compromised our musical development” (Monson 1996, p. 216). I am sympathetic to her recognition of the difference between academic and professional jazz practices, but these examples, nevertheless, illustrate the limits to the vernacular voices that Monson is willing to hear. Few jazz musicians achieve the professional status of Monson’s interviewees, and many more earn a substantial part of their living at day jobs that include teaching. Hearing only the voices of a few and taking that small community as representative of all jazz, while remaining deaf to so many, fosters dreams of jazz authenticity that run contrary to the goal of ethnography which is to hear not only the loudest most elegant voices, but also those voices that otherwise quickly fade into silence.

reflections on my own personal experiences in fieldwork are not only appropriate but contribute to the understanding of the communities and practices studied.

In this dissertation I foreground local individual and communal construction of meaning, but it is important to remember that individuals and communities do not operate in isolation, free from the influences of larger economic and cultural forces. Identity and meaning are constructed intersubjectively face-to-face and across temporal and geographic distances. In Chapter Two, I briefly discuss the history of jazz in Chicago and how the city provides a rich musical milieu into which the communities I studied are already thrown.

In Chapter Three and Chapter Four I present detailed ethnographies of two musical communities in Chicago. In Chapter Three I write about a community of white professional jazz musicians who gather at North Side jam sessions hosted by Scott Earl Holman at a bar called Delaney and Murphy's and by Jon Bany at a restaurant called The Chambers. I examine how ideas about professionalism, class, race, and gender influence improvisational practices, repertoire choices, and social interactions. In Chapter Four I examine the jam session hosted by Theodis Rodgers and Aki Antonia Smith at the Negro League Café, a South Side restaurant and nightclub. At the Negro League Café questions of neighborhood relationships, racial identity, gender, and changes in the global and local economies contribute to the participants' conception of jazz practices. I focus on jam sessions because they are recurring events in which the same people participate together week after week and develop shared practices. People attend performances at clubs and festivals less regularly and their visits to clubs and festivals rarely lead to the multi-stranded social connections found among jam session participants. Jam sessions also cost

little to attend and allow for various kinds of participation, thus accommodating long-term, in depth ethnography.

The sessions described in Chapter Three and Chapter Four comprise only a small portion of the jazz life of Chicago. There are many other session-based jazz communities, as well as communities of musicians who never attend sessions, and there are other kinds of musical and social practices that occur at jazz clubs and festivals. In Chapter Five, I discuss several other sessions in which I participated and in which participants pursue different social goals that shape their jazz practices. I also look at several other communities that do not gather at jam sessions. Many of these communities serve very small populations operating in small bars and restaurants outside of the network of famous jazz clubs and festivals in Chicago. In Chapter Five, I also look briefly at other levels of musical and social organization that are more closely linked to commercial practices and the national jazz scene. Clubs and festivals, I argue, draw on communities of musicians and patrons that are distinct from the other local face-to-face communities I examine. They serve goals different from the goals of sessions and involve different kinds of jazz practices.

Sara Cohen observes that an ethnographic approach to popular music “raises the problem of typicality—whether the small part studied can represent the whole” (Cohen 1993, p. 125). While I argue that it is typical for musical practices and social relations to be deeply connected, I do not argue that the communities I study represent any larger whole. The people I write about in Chapter Three do not represent the majority of white musicians, male musicians, or jazz musicians living on the North Side of Chicago. Similarly, the people I write about in Chapter Four do not represent all black musicians,

or jazz musicians living on the South Side. The communities I write about are notable, in part, because they are not typical of jazz as it is most commonly conceived. Communities of locally famous white musicians or jam sessions led by black women that welcome local amateurs as well as professionals exist at the margins of academic jazz discourse. Ethnographies of these communities highlight the valuable musical and social work that is done at the margins of the jazz. It seems strange to write about jazz margins, when jazz has largely been marginalized music played by a marginalized community of African American musicians. The work of much jazz scholarship has been to celebrate and recover the cultural achievements of jazz musicians. But my research reveals that centripetal and centrifugal forces are always at work in the production of culture. Marginalized cultural practices, in their struggle for recognition, can create their own margins. The creation of center and periphery is not a power dynamic that we will finally overcome, but one that scholars should constantly consider at all levels of culture formation.

My ethnographies of everyday local jazz practices in Chicago contribute to our understanding of music in three main ways: I show how jazz functions not only as art, but as face-to-face social practice, how participation in musical practices contributes to the intersubjective construction of individual and community identities, and how local face-to-face communities appropriate general musical practices, broad social identities, and urban space in order to make them meaningful in terms of local social relations.

Considering jazz as social practice allows us to better appreciate and understand the many different musical activities that people think of as jazz, and it emphasizes that considering jazz in terms of musical genius, stylistic innovation, or authentic tradition

misses much of the important work that jazz (or any music) does.⁵ Also, considering jazz as social practice allows us to consider how seemingly abstract and impersonal musical and aesthetic categories are deeply linked to social relations. Harmonic principals, for instance, control not only what pitches we include in a chord, but which players we welcome to the bandstand. Defining jazz in terms of authentic tradition or genius is more a way of drawing boundaries; such definitions often describe jazz as we want it to be rather than how it actually is, and they exclude those musicians who don't measure up to those externally imposed technical, professional, or social standards. Thinking of jazz as social practice restores the place of everyday musicians, invites participation, and focuses our attention on what everyday musicians actually do.

Secondly, considering jazz as face-to-face practice helps us to understand how music and identity are created intersubjectively. We perform music and self with already given vocabularies. Mastering those vocabularies connects us to others. By acquiring musical vocabularies we learn to perform and experience music and ourselves in new ways that are deeply connected not only to musical techniques, but also the face-to-face social relations that those techniques entail. But this is not to say that we are merely interpolated into new subject positions foisted upon by because of rigid linguistic

⁵ A number of other authors have recently considered how jazz is plural and how accounts of a unified jazz tradition can exclude important voices. Sherrie Tucker writes about the “all-girl” bands of the 1940s and how they were written out of jazz history, David Ake writes about a variety of different communities in jazz including communities of competing black and Creole musicians in New Orleans, and Gabriel Solis writes about the struggle of different jazz communities to claim the legacy of Thelonious Monk (Tucker 2000; Ake 2002; Solis 2008). Such particular understandings of multiple jazz communities stand in contrast to generalized understandings of jazz as a unified, boundary erasing music, such as Paul Austerlitz’s notion of “jazz consciousness” which emphasizes that “the consciousness of the jazz community has articulated an aesthetic of inclusivity and an ethos of ecumenicity” (Austerlitz 2005, p. xiii).

structures. Influence in face-to-face social relations flows in both directions, and meaning is constructed dialogically between participants rather than transmitted whole.

Finally, for me, this dissertation has been a way discovering how local communities of musicians appropriate and personalize the given world of relatively impersonal racial, national, and gender identities, urban structures, and economic realities. In the popular imagination musical roots and authentic traditions are important, and such imaginings no doubt help people feel more at home in the world. But such imaginings also cast people as the pawns of history, politics, and religion, and those scenarios are less comforting and no less imaginary. As Michael Jackson writes, culture, “cannot be set over or against the person. It is, rather, the field of a dialectic in which the sedimented and anonymous meanings of the past are taken up as means of making a future, and givenness transformed into design” (Jackson 1996, p. 11). In the musical communities I study, people embrace “sedimented and anonymous meanings” of race, gender, musical tradition, and the concrete reality of Chicago itself, and remake them through everyday practices that address local needs and desires.

I argue that local face-to-face communities pursue specific local goals and that local conceptions of jazz and jazz practice—choices of repertoire, ways of improvising, appropriate behaviors on and off stage, etc.—are shaped as much by the identities and goals of individuals and communities as they are by musical considerations. However, I also maintain that identity is not fully constituted by participation in any single community or practice. Rather, I assert throughout this dissertation that musicians often participate in a variety of communities and that how they play and how they understand themselves changes according to who they are playing with at any particular moment.

Identities and jazz practices, constantly reinvented and renegotiated, exceed the borders of communities I describe and the stories I tell.

The Problem of “Community”

“That’s how I view bands. As communities that reach into other communities, that reach yet into other communities. We have different types of communities. I have my family community, my business community. Some overlap; some are exactly the same; some are not. But I have a social group that has nothing to do with these guys.”

—Dave Hibbard, Chicago jazz musician

Community—it is an ideal form of human sociality. More often than not, idealized community evokes and valorizes almost primal feelings of home, hearth, and the comfort of family, friends, and neighbors. But community is a troubling, equivocal term that has a long tradition of theorizing and a rich history of everyday use. While defining “us,” it covertly pits “us” against “them,” giving rise to terror in the face of difference, impurity, and isolation. Since the earliest years of jazz, scholars, fans, and musicians have often tried to understand jazz in terms of its communal implications. For the most part these attempts speak as though the terms “jazz” and “community” are unproblematic, allowing notions of authentic jazz music, players, and values to be taken as given rather than objects of investigation. These moves can function as conscious or unconscious attempts to separate “us” from “them,” reaffirming particular visions of home, hearth, family, and friends while reinforcing the boundary between self and other. By writing of jazz communities I enter into dialogue with essays like Merriam and Mack’s “The Jazz Community” and Stebbins’ “A Theory of Jazz Community” (Merriam and Mack 1960; Stebbins 1968), but I refer not to community but communities, a

plurality that challenges understandings and assumptions about “jazz” and “community” as single, fixed things or ideas.

Theories of Community

Since the mid-nineteenth century sociologists, philosophers, anthropologists, and others have questioned the concept of community, theorizing the notion from multiple perspectives and gathering evidence from using an evolving array of methodologies. Monographs, such as Graham Day’s *Community and Everyday Life* (Day 2006),⁶ present the question of community as a richly nuanced debate that unfolds over hundreds of texts, and then only looking back as far as the writings of Ferdinand Tönnies (Tönnies [1887] 1955) and Emile Durkheim (Durkheim [1893] 1964). Yet even Day’s detailed history of community only touches on many aspects of a debate that have received hundreds of pages of analysis elsewhere. A dissertation on Chicago’s jazz communities is not the place for an exhaustive discussion of the history of community. However, questions of music and community in general and jazz and community in particular have always involved questions of who is or is not an authentic member of a particular social configuration and often, quite literally, whose voice gets heard. Questions about the nature of community, as Graham Day points out, “raise fundamental social questions about inclusion and exclusion, the privileging of some social relationships over others, and the formulation of particular as opposed to general interests. Activity conducted in the name of community poses issues of power, leadership, and representation,” issues always near the heart of any discussion about jazz (Day 2006, p. x–xi). Also, given the

⁶ See also A. P. Cohen *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (Cohen 1985).

nature of academic politics and disciplinary boundaries—two forces which tend to steer even ethnomusicologists (not to mention historical musicologists, jazz scholars, and jazz critics) away from these questions—it is worthwhile to review the broader outlines of the debates about “community.”

For the purpose of understanding the links between conceptions of jazz and community, it is useful to consider four general approaches to “community” typical of the theoretical literature: the first envisions community as the proper mode of human sociality; the second seeks to explain community as an effect of larger structural forces; the third seeks to understand community in terms of human imagination and action, and the fourth attempts to replace the concept of community with more circumscribed conceptualizations of social organization in keeping with the contemporary social sciences. Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses that are relevant to different ways of understanding social organization, and jazz scholars often embrace one or another of these approaches, depending on which vision of jazz they wish to espouse. But human sociality exceeds the grasp of any one concept of community. New modes of sociality continue to emerge leading to continual reemergence, modification, and combination of these various approaches. Understanding the communal implications of past and developing jazz practices requires that we understand the various meanings and uses of the concept of community.

Longing for Community

Nineteenth century sociologists Ferdinand Tönnies and Emile Durkheim began theorizing about community as industrial capitalism seemed to be destroying older forms

of rural sociality (Tönnies [1887] 1955; Durkheim [1893] 1964). They regarded community as a spatially located social structure which endured over time, one whose members had multi-stranded face-to-face relationships that provided for stable identities and associations. Such relationships were regarded as good and natural, particularly in contrast to ensuing urban social conditions characterized as transient, impersonal, and alienating. Durkheim understood the community as “organic solidarity” while regarding new urban forms as “mechanical solidarity” (Day 2006; 3). Similarly, Tönnies contrasted *Gemeinschaft* or community with *Gesellschaft* or association (Day 2006, p. 5). *Gemeinschaft* referred to enduring forms of living together sustained by people working toward the common good. *Gesellschaft* on the other hand, signified “calculated action on the part of individuals who engage in ‘artificial’ relations for what they can get from one another” (Day 2006, p. 5). Thus, in addition to theorizing and describing existing social structures, early theorists also implicitly valorized rural, preindustrial social structures, or, more accurately, they valorized myths of pre-industrial sociality in the face of threatening new social structures resulting from industrial capitalism and urbanization.

Few scholars would still argue that community is rooted in blood and soil, yet discussions of community continue to harbor secret nostalgic longings for a return to some imaginary pre-lapsarian Eden and fears that, in the face of capitalism, urbanism, and other unsettling developments “all that is solid melts into air” forgetting the hope Marx saw in that possibility (Marx and Engels 1978, p. 476). Recently, scholars have been trying to revive notions of community that look back to older forms while attempting to avoid overt nostalgia by providing richly detailed accounts of the contemporary declines and revivals of community. Robert Putnam’s bestseller *Bowling*

Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community (Putnam 2000) provides a wealth of data on the status of American communities, the benefits they provide, and the challenges they face. Studies, like Eric Klinenberg's *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago* (Klinenberg 2003), add more grist to Putnam's mill for Klinenberg shows that one of the major determinants of who would die in the 1995 Chicago heat wave was not race, age, or class as might be expected, but level of social isolation. The works of sociologists like Putnam, Amitai Etzioni and others have fostered a movement known as communitarianism.⁷ Sometimes referred to as a movement of the "radical center" communitarians advocate the growth of what Putnam has called "social capital," i.e., the multistranded connectedness of individuals in flourishing communities. They also seek to strike a balance between individual rights and social obligations, and they argue for community values. In fact, community is understood as an important source of values. These positions sometimes put communitarians at odds with strong advocates of individualism, free markets, and absolutist values, yet other communitarian works, like Alan Ehrenhalt's study of community change in Chicago, *The Lost City: The Forgotten Virtues of Community in America*, are more unabashedly backward-looking. "If it is true to say of 1950s America that it was a world of limited choices," he writes, "it is also fair to call it a world of lasting relationships" (Ehrenhalt 1995; 12).⁸ Ehrenhalt expresses a commitment to community so blatantly nostalgic it seems reactionary. He writes longingly of 1950's Chicago, when Mayor Daley's machine controlled the city and racial

⁷ Etzioni's popular and influential books include *The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities, and the Communitarian Agenda* and *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (Etzioni 1995, 1997)

⁸ For a critique of family relations in the 1950s and the contemporary nostalgia for that time see *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* by Stephanie Coontz (Coontz 1992).

segregation was the rule of the day. In a passage of moralizing forgetfulness, he dismisses contemporary victories (partial as they are) against government corruption and organized crime, and he seems to think that the supposed benefits of life in the 1950s were worth the cost of those social ills.

Is Chicago a sinful city? By the standards of the 1950s, the level of sin has declined substantially. The Democratic machine, if it can still be said to exist, [most Chicagoan's I spoke with had no trouble saying it did.] is no longer free to stuff ballot boxes; nobody has to bribe an alderman to get a driveway built in front of his house; respectable businessmen do not get stuffed in the trunks of cars because they made the mistake of associating with the Mob. That sort of evil has all but disappeared. But are the schools better, the streets safer, the local government more responsive to the day-to-day concerns of the residents? Virtually everybody realizes that the answer to these questions is no. (Ehrenhalt 1995, p. 57)

Chicago's streets can indeed be dangerous, Chicago schools often do a poor job of educating students, and Chicago's government can be unresponsive to local needs, but there is no reason to suppose that a return to the repressive conformity, racial segregation, and large-scale corruption of the 1950s would solve any of these problems.

Putnam argues that social capital can be bridging capital which crosses divisions of difference, or it can be bonding capital, which increase community cohesiveness while potentially strengthening the otherness of the other (Putnam 2000, pp. 22–24). This is an important distinction that some communitarians like Ehrenhalt would rather forget. Ehrenhalt's positive evaluation of community in the 1950s rests on the success of "bonding capital." Considering the ways that communities in the 1950s failed as "bridging capital" certainly challenges any evaluation of a community based only on its ability to unite its members.

Many regard communitarianism as a flight from the challenges of pluralism (Day 2006, p. 351), and David Harvey finds much to worry about. "But it is hard," he writes,

“to stop the slide into parochialism, myopia, and self-referentiality in the face of the universalizing force of capital politics in which respect for others gets mutilated in the fires of competition between the fragments. And, it should not be forgotten, this was the path that allowed Heidegger to reach his accommodation with Nazism, and which continues to inform the rhetoric of fascism” (Harvey 1990, p. 351). Putnam is not like Heidegger who found justification for the Third Reich in the blood and soil of the Black Forest (Heidegger 1959). But Harvey points to the communitarian rhetoric of the contemporary French fascist politician Jean-Marie Le Pen, and we might also look to the balkanization of Europe, resistance to bilingualism in the U.S.⁹ and other trends to see that the fears of communitarian repression aren’t always ideological paranoia.

Where others saw with fear, the eclipse of community and the rise of alienated, impersonal, and rootless individualism in the modern city, researchers from the Chicago School of Sociology affirmed the growth of new urban communities. Classic studies like Paul Goalby Cressey’s *The Taxi-Dance Hall*, W. Foote White’s *Street Corner Society*, and Elliot Liebow’s *Tally’s Corner* told the stories of relatively small, geographically located, and more or less self-contained groups coalescing on street corners and dance halls, neighborhoods, shooting parlors, and work places (Cressey 1932; Whyte 1955; Liebow 1967). During the Chicago School heyday (1930s–1970s), Chicago sociologists produced many wonderful ethnographies based on intensive participant observation. Their work revealed a richness and cohesiveness in urban sociality that many thought to be impossible. However, observations about Chicago did not necessarily carry over to

⁹ Resisting bilingualism seems a far cry from physical violence, but a bumper sticker I saw in Feb. 2009 gave voice to its violent potential. It read, “If you can read, thank a teacher. If you can read in English, thank a soldier.”

other cities. Also, restudies of various groups showed that many social formations were more porous and transitory than the classical definition could account for. And finally, critics argued that the Chicago School ethnographies often proved to be wonderfully descriptive while failing to show links to larger social structures. Yet, the Chicago School continues to inspire sociologists and ethnographers, and researchers there continue to produce studies of Chicago communities that are ethnographically grounded and now more successful in their attempts to link community and structure.

Community as an Effect of Structure

Scholars following the lead of Durkheim and Tönnies either mourn the loss of community or venture into the world looking for signs that is not yet extinct; others view the entire notion of community with suspicion. They look at modern urban sociality with its ever-changing heterogeneous mass of impersonal and mainly instrumental human relationships and wonder if community is now possible or if it was ever anything more than the epiphenomenal effect of larger material and economic conditions. In urban life they see people in relationships with strangers, mass rather than communal culture, models of individual consumption driven by anxiety rather than collective bonding rituals of agricultural production.

Much of this critique takes its cue from the work of Karl Marx and other nineteenth century post-Hegelian materialists¹⁰ who argued that the reality of individual and collective identities was class identity. Other identities they maintained were cover, a veil to shield people from the reality of their exploited labor; they were false

¹⁰ Proudon and Engels, for example.

consciousness, the “opium of the masses.” So, from this perspective, ethnography seems to reveal little of the source of social structure, and perhaps runs the risk of reinforcing bourgeois fantasies of autonomy and agency. “Marxist explanations,” concludes Day, “would always begin from the analysis of the economic organization of society” (Day 2006, p. 134). But the notion of community persists in both scholarship and popular discourse and few Marxist/structuralists are content with explanations of social structure that appeal solely to distant economic manipulations. For example, Marxist sociologist Manuel Castells sees something like community in the rise of social movements for those movements do provide identity and social capital for their members. They seem to accommodate both the forces of structure and the subjective motivations of individuals while also allowing for social change—something crucial to Marxist social theory but difficult to account for in classical understandings of stable self-contained communities (Day 2006, pp. 137–140). Harvey argues that while urban spaces are shaped and reshaped by the logic of capital accumulation, “forces which transcend the wills of individuals, or even social groups,” urban spaces shape identity in ways that feel like community (Day 2006, p. 143). A number of Marxist theorists have sought an alternative to community in the notion of location in order to understand better the changes wrought by the logic of capital on particular geographically specific groups of people without invoking the stability, continuity, and reactive resistance to change implied by community (Day 2006, p. 149).

Marxist and structuralist approaches to community effectively do away with romantic notions of folksy togetherness and they provide detailed accounts of the connections between economics, geography, power, and local social structures. But they

rely too often on mechanistic models that fail to account for the varieties of human behavior. Processes of interpolation and articulation may offer satisfying accounts of behavioral trends, but are less satisfying when we attempt to account for the actions of individuals and smaller groups. Claims that studies of local communities are unnecessary because external forces can predict local social conditions often prove to be false. We might look to the model of evolutionary biology, itself a very theory driven approach, yet scientists never stop looking for empirical evidence, since each new fossil leads to continual refinement of the theory, which constantly flows from the data.

Roughly speaking, the communitarian and structuralist impulses are the two main approaches to the classical notion of community. Both tend to understand community as a relatively all-encompassing, stable, geographically situated, homogenous social grouping. Those with communitarian sympathies believe, more or less, that community is the proper and originary social organization for people, that it is threatened, and that the work of sociologists, anthropologists, and other is to mourn its passing and to seek out and nurture remnants of community in an increasingly anti-communal world. Those with Marxist and structuralist sympathies believe, more or less, that community is the effect of capital rather than a source of meaning and sociality, it isn't really threatened because it never really existed as a determining structure, and the goal of sociologists, anthropologists, and others is to pull away the veil revealing the logic of capital as the source of social organization, meaning, and oppression and further reveal community as, at worst, a link in the chain that binds. For the most part, jazz discourse celebrates community, often uncritically. But the history of jazz in Chicago demonstrates that economic developments have a profound effect on the characteristics of jazz

communities (see Chapter Two), and my fieldwork shows that economic developments continue to shape jazz communities and that people join together in communities in order to actively engage with the economic forces that affect their lives (see Chapters Three, Four, and Five).

Community as an Act of Creative Imagination

Rather than understanding community as either a relatively complete social unit rooted in blood and soil or as the effect of the distant and impersonal logic of capital, some have argued that community can be understood as a kind of mental construct. Building on the insights of phenomenology and American pragmatism, this move brackets questions about the actual ontological status of community, casting community not as an all-encompassing social structure foisted upon individuals by either mysterious tradition or the logic of capital, but as an act of individual and collective imagination. What matters is the meaning individuals ascribe to community. As such, a community depends upon the active engagement of its members who must maintain and shape its nature in continuous dialogue, imagining and reimagining communities, identity, and traditions in the present. Creatively imagined communities exist both at the level of face-to-face local relationships and among people who are connected mainly through shared symbolic systems. As I show in my comparison of different jazz communities (see Chapters Five), locally and distantly imagined communities operate differently and create different meanings, even when their memberships overlap.

Locally Imagined Communities

Anthony Cohen is one of the leading theorists of the social and symbolic construction of community. He focuses his attention on revealing key interpretive acts that sustain the sense of a particular community for its members. Meanings and how members express them constitute community. He states:

[E]ven within a state [Britain] so tightly integrated by the media of power, economy, communication, and mobility, the similarity of social forms—kinship, neighbouring, and sect—in different places is more apparent than real. The forms acquire their significance from the meanings which their *own* members perceive in and attribute to them (Cohen 1982, p. 9)

This understanding is particularly pertinent to defining musical communities where modes of expression are so obviously at the heart of communal feelings. Jazz, so often thought of as a national music, needs to be reconsidered in terms of local practices and meanings. As I argue in the following chapters, musical forms and practices as well as social forms have distinctively local significances. Cohen, along with others in the symbolic constructionist vein, also maintains that communities are points of conflict as well as harmony. They may be regarded as collections of people who come together to argue about some key meaning. The manipulation of key symbols helps control divisions in the community while helping to distinguish that community from other similar communities (Day 2006, p. 159). For Cohen, communities “are constituted by processes occurring close to the experiences of everyday life” (Day 2006, p. 159). He argues that broader identities like nationality or ethnicity are categories that take their content largely from face-to-face interactions in local communities (Day 2006, p. 158; Cohen 1985, p. 13). His work helped justify a return to ethnography. However, unlike the Chicago School, social constructionist ethnographers seek not to provide exhaustive accounts of self-contained communities in the context of larger urban social structures. Rather, they

are interested in how particular collections of people symbolically maintain their sense and feeling of community (Day 2006; Ake 2002).

Cohen offers a pointed critique of structuralist accounts of community, particularly the ways in which people, in face-to-face relationships, turn the concrete realities of structure to their own ends like so many skateboarders “grinding” across the front steps to some seemingly monolithic corporate skyscraper. But, some might argue, Cohen’s critique of structuralist accounts of community goes too far, and neglects the role of structure altogether. To amend Thoreau, only that symbolic day dawns to which we are structurally awake. Many sympathetic to Cohen have argued that community must include accounts of its material resources and obstacles (Day 2006, p. 169–180). As I will discuss, it is difficult to conceive of different jazz communities without considering material conditions, the many miles of concrete freeways, urban designs, and the capitalist modes of production and military might that they were built to serve.¹¹

¹¹ It might seem extreme to consider military might as a factor in jazz or the layout of Chicago, but, in 1887, Sheridan Avenue was built specifically as a quick route for transporting troops from the newly constructed Fort Sheridan to the city center following the Haymarket Square bombing and related civil unrest (D'Eramo 2002). Leading Chicago capitalist, Marshall Field, along with the Chicago Chamber of Commerce, provided the land for the fort. I sometimes travelled on Sheridan Avenue on my way to jazz clubs in Evanston. It is also true that from the time when James Reese Europe led his regimental band during World War I and into the present day, the United States military has provided training, employment, and even instruments for musicians playing jazz and related styles of music. Also, as Eric Lott and Scott DeVeaux have shown, the experience of African Americans during World War Two, shaped their attitudes about themselves, their music, and the way jazz was made and delivered through both live performances and recordings (Lott 1995; DeVeaux 1997, pp. 236–269)

Distantly Imagined Community

While Cohen focuses on the microsociology of the symbolic construction of local communities, Benedict Anderson focuses on the ways macrosociological entities like nations are constituted through collective acts of imagination by people connected not through face-to-face relations but through their consumption of shared media. Anderson is less concerned with the symbolic construction of the national community and more emphatic that it is imagined in a particular way in a particular historical situation. “It is *imagined*,” he argues, “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 1991). Unlike Cohen, Anderson links the possibilities for imagining community to historical and material conditions. Where members of earlier religious communities could be linked through a shared unique sacred language such as the Latin of the Catholic mass (Anderson 1991, p. 13), modern nations are linked by the media of novels and particularly newspapers. Printing was one of the earliest modes of capitalist production that came into being with the invention and development of the printing press and newsprint. The success of print commodities required a relatively uniform market of readers, thus it ushered in a leveling of the linguistic field by a new medium of communication made possible by a new logic of production. “What, in a positive sense, made the new communities imaginable,” Anderson argues, “was a half-fortuitous, but explosive, interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity” (Anderson 1991, pp. 42–43). And all this was done not face-to-face, but face-to-print. Day argues that Anderson’s conception of

imagined community does not account for division and contestation of the meaning of a national community (Day 2006, p. 183). Day's judgment should not serve simply as critique but as recognition that national as well as local communities are points of contestation as well as harmony, and that the work of symbolic construction at each level is to make difference and community manageable at different and sometimes-competing levels of social organization. What is also important to note is that imaginatively constructed communities occur in face-to-face relations and in mediated relationships providing for the possibility of multiple overlapping layers of micro and macro community affiliations.

Post-modern alternatives to community

In many ways the classical understanding of community fails to account for contemporary urban social organization. The heterogeneity of the city has not led to the often-dreaded disintegration of social bonds but to the interpenetration of multiple social worlds. Commenting on the literary representations of this pluralistic world, David Harvey observes, "Characters no longer contemplate how they can unravel or unmask a central mystery, but are forced to ask, "Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?" (Harvey 1990, p. 48). Similarly, scholars of social organization no longer assume that they are uncovering a simple community but an interconnected and overlapping web of human connections where people have multiple affiliations, roles, and selves. Researchers have come up with a number of models to describe these emerging limited, flexible modes of social organization. "Networks" and "Lifestyles" talk about social organization as occurring at intersections. "Neotribalism"

and “urban villages” describe attempts to revise older community models and apply or create them in the pluralistic urban environment. Scholars of new social movements explore how something like communities emerge from people coming together to confront social issues forming communities of environmentalists, right to lifers, and supporters of private schools. Among these configurations can also be counted Howard Becker’s “art worlds” which do not describe communities but rather how different sorts of social configurations intersect in the production of arts (Becker 1982). One characteristic these models share is an emphasis on the ways in which people belong to multiple associations and have multiple social selves, some of which generate feelings of both identity and belonging similar to the feelings generated by community. What is more, these modes of association function in face-to-face relations but also intersect quickly with global networks of various kinds.

Jazz Communities

Scholars and critics have long understood jazz as the product, sign, or unifying practice of a clearly recognizable community, theorizing about it as American music, African American music, black music, or the music of people living in a particular time or place. Ralph Ellison, himself an astute observer of the social significance of jazz, warns of the overly sociological approach to the music. Critiquing *Blues People*, Amiri Baraka’s (then LeRoi Jones’s) history of black music in America, he quips, “The tremendous burden of sociology which Jones would place upon this body of music is enough to give even the blues the blues” (Ellison 2001, p. 123). Yet, Ellison himself, as Robert O’Meally observes, “saw the jazz artists as having a high calling and as

candidates for community leadership, heroes, and heroes-in-training” (O’Meally 2001, p. xiv). In *The Other Side of Nowhere*, Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble go so far as to claim that “jazz and improvised music have, in their most provocative historical instances, been largely about building purposeful communities of interest and involvement” (Fischlin and Heble 2004a, p. xv).¹² As such, the practice of jazz affords us the opportunity to examine communities and our ideas about them. However, most people write as if there is something already clearly denoted by the label “the jazz community,” and the notions of “community” and “jazz” remain largely unquestioned, vaguely defined containers into which writers often pour their readymade assumptions about what the music is, who plays it, and what constitutes actual human social organization.”¹³

Understandings of jazz communities often reflect disciplinary interests and academic fashions as much as they account for actual communities of jazz musicians. Sociologists from the University of Chicago focus on communities of jazz deviants (Merriam and Mack 1960), scholars concerned with feminism and gender write of women musicians and cross-dressers in jazz (Middlebrook 1998; Tucker 2000), and some African Americanists write of jazz as black music do to its essence, history, or social function (Baraka 1968, 1963; Murray 1976; Ramsey Jr. 2003). The work of these scholars is of unquestionable importance, but they often find what they are looking for. Few look at jazz communities and see who is actually there. The examined jazz

¹² For accounts of purposeful community building by jazz musicians see *A Power Stronger than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* by George Lewis, *Point from which Creation Begins: The Black Artists’ Group of St. Louis* by Benjamin Looker, and *The Musical and Social Journey of Horace Tapscott* by Horace Tapscott (Lewis 2008; Looker 2004; Tapscott 2001).

¹³ Some scholars such as David Ake have attempted to understand jazz in the plural, but most have not (Ake 2002).

communities are of different kinds—face-to-face, imaginary, metonymical, and hoped-for. The equivocal nature of the term “community” allows scholars to jumble together various kinds of communities as if they were the same, when, if we look carefully, they clearly are not.¹⁴ Everyday practices of people engaged in more mundane communities draw fewer academic ogles. The danger is that we will focus on the abstract questions dearest to us and leave unnoticed those people, communities, and practices that fail to intersect with the academic fetish du jour. In the following section I will examine some of the ways that notions of community have been applied to the practice of jazz. I want to make clear just how the social constellations I write about count as communities, and I want to be clear about how our understandings of community entail assumptions about identity, subjectivity, and musical practice.

Jazz Community and the Chicago School

Sociologists have been attracted to jazz musicians since those musicians were so often imagined in terms of their community affiliations. Following the model of the Chicago School of Sociology, Howard Becker, William Cameron, ethnomusicologist Alan Merriam and Raymond Mack, and Robert Stebbins (Becker 1951; Stebbins 1968;

¹⁴ Confusion regarding kinds and levels of communities allows for outlandish claims. William Parker, for example, writes of his composition “The Peach Orchard,” “the main force in playing this music is having the ability to feel the pain of all who suffer.” He goes on to claim that he, through his music, speaks for several Native American cultures. “In this composition,” he asserts, “you can hear the massive blanketing of America by Europe; you can also hear the voice not only of Manuelito, but of Nana, Geronimo, Wovoka, Sitting Bull, Kicking Bird, Kicking Bear, and all of the others” (Fischlin and Heble 2004b, p. 6). A muddling of communities, at least in part, allows for Parker’s improbable and self-serving claims, and enables him to appropriate other cultures giving a ring of exotic authenticity to his work. Surprisingly, Fischlin and Heble, are only too happy to see this ventriloquism as a sign of jazz community.

Cameron 1954; Merriam and Mack 1960) all sought to understand the jazz community in terms of the traditional notion of community as “a complete system of social interaction” (Stebbins 1968, p. 319). They conceive of community as a core or dominant center and a periphery; the jazz community exists at the periphery of a larger dominant. A model of deviance holds sway, and jazz musicians are characterized as illiterate, adolescent (Merriam and Mack 1960, p. 214) and on par with narcotics addicts, homosexuals, bohemians, and others at the fringes of society (Stebbins 1968, p. 331), all of whom fascinated Chicago School sociologists interested in mapping urban community structures where none were thought to be.

These assessments of the jazz community suffer from failings common to the Chicago School. On one hand, sociological accounts of “the jazz community” rarely depict any community of jazz musicians in rich and specific detail, while on the other, they make broad claims about the jazz community in general based on their thin descriptions of actual musicians and practices. This is a curious choice, since Howard Becker, for example, worked as a jazz pianist and certainly experienced more about specific jazz communities than he ever included in his ethnography. In sociological accounts of jazz musicians from the 1950s and 1960s, it is hard to tell if the subjects are part of a single local community or composite sketches based on interviews with jazz musicians from a variety of locations and statuses. The subjects observed by Becker, Stebbins, and the others may well have been maladjusted deviants, but as Scott DeVaux and Eric Porter have convincingly argued, some jazz musicians functioned as

intellectuals, artists, social critics, and professionals (DeVeaux 1997; Porter 2002).¹⁵

Presuppositions about deviant communities, attempts to generalize from insufficient data, and, in some cases, reliance on secondhand participant observation led to an overestimation of insularity and deviance among jazz musicians. The strength of the Chicago School is its commitment to groups of neglected people and denigrated forms of social organization. They took jazz musicians seriously, but they too quickly leapt from *a* jazz community to *the* jazz community. Many contemporary jazz scholars have begun to explore the variety of jazz communities. Nevertheless, expensive hardcover copies of Ken Burns' homogenizing and problematic account of jazz continues to outsell John Szwed's more balanced and much cheaper history and many other jazz books according to sales rankings at Amazon.com, indicating that totalizing accounts of jazz still loom large among some scholars and the listening public (Ward and Burns 2000b; Szwed 2000; Amazon.com 2009).

¹⁵ Other writers have also countered the understanding of jazz musicians as deviants. Albert Murray sees jazz musicians as heroes, while Alfred Appel, Jr. considers Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, and other jazz musicians to be artists and modernist equal in importance to Henri Matisse and James Joyce (Murray 1998b; Appel 2002). Those who teach others to play jazz have long appreciate jazz musicians as artists and intellectuals. Their writing and research focuses mainly on the actual improvisational and compositional techniques of jazz musicians. Jamey Aebersold's one hundred and twenty-seven volume collection of play-along books and recordings functions as both a comprehensive training repertoire and critical edition of jazz composers, often including not only melodies and harmonies, but also horn backgrounds, alternate harmonies, and information about classic recordings of many tunes. (For more information on these publications see www.aebersold.com.) Jazz theorists have long considered jazz musicians as artists who create complex and demanding art worthy of careful and detailed consideration. See, for example *The Jazz Piano Book* and *The Jazz Theory Book* by Mark Levine and *Inside the Score* by Rayburn Wright (Levine 1989, 1995; Wright 1982). Though jazz musicians have written hundreds of books discussing how they do what they do, this literature is rarely mentioned scholarly literature on the history on cultural significance of the music.

Jazz Community, African Americans, and African Tradition

Discussions of jazz and community necessarily entail discussions of African American community and the links between African and African American culture. The sounds and practices of jazz are certainly shaped by the music of Africa, and many of its greatest performers are African American. These truths stand as monuments to African American culture, but great monuments also cast great shadows where other stories lie hidden. As certainly as jazz stands as a monument to the culture and achievement of African Americans, jazz criticism and scholarship also gives voice to a longing for *Gemeinschaft*—a return to an authentic community. The account of jazz as black music with African roots is crucial to our understanding of jazz, but it tends to give short shrift to the diversity of African musical communities, the diversity of African American musical communities, and the many other communities of self-identified jazz musicians making music around the globe. It is a difficult task to respect the obvious and important place of African Americans in jazz while at the same time recognizing the current diversity among jazz musicians and their musical communities. Yet, it is important to recognize that talk about music is always, in part, involved in constructing myths about community that can be both edifying and toxic.

Early writers on jazz clearly identified the music with African Americans but to very different ends. For instance, Langston Hughes heard:

One of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America: the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul—the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile (Hughes 1999, p. 56).

But Anne Shaw Faulkner heard, “The accompaniment of the voodoo dancer, stimulating the half-crazed barbarian to the vilest deeds.” She warned:

The weird chant, accompanied by the syncopated rhythm of the voodoo invokers, has also been employed by other barbaric people to stimulate brutality and sensuality. That it has had a demoralizing effect upon the human brain has been demonstrated by many scientists (Faulkner 1999, p. 34).

Today, it is easy to laugh at Faulkner and her fears of jazz and the virulent contamination of primitivism, but her paranoia clearly illustrates the dangerous turn a fascination with originating communities can take. Most early white jazz writers did not share Faulkner's fear of jazz primitivism. They believed in jazz's primitivism, but they imagined that the supposed primitivism of jazz and the African American community was a source of nobility and authenticity providing an infusion of authentic culture and humanity untainted by the artifice of modern urban life (Delaunay 1936; Blesh [1946] 1958; Panassié [1936] 1970, [1942] 1960; Goffin 1944). If they had been German sociologists, it is easy to imagine that they might have dismissed commercial jazz white or black as just so much *Gesellschaft*. The rise of swing music, bebop, and other sophisticated styles, and the dominance of African American musicians as leading professionals and artists challenged fantasies and fears of black primitivism, but the longing for authenticating community did not disappear.

Countering depictions of jazz rooted in primitive cultures and practices, other scholars look back to Africa and find sophisticated musical practices at the roots of African American music (Hurston 1981; Snead [1984]1998; Floyd 1995; Wilson 1983). Among those scholars interested in the African roots of African American culture, it is Henry Louis Gates who has had the greatest impact on jazz researchers. In *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, Gates describes the African American vernacular linguistic practice of signifying, which is "repetition and revision, or repetition with a signal difference" (Gates 1988, p. xxiv). In mimicry and the will to

adorn (practices that Zora Neale Hurston argues are central to African American expressive practices), Gates finds a critical and creative practice. He traces the presence of signifying in African American folk tales back to Yoruba trickster stories, and he explores how signifying functions as a central trope in African American literature. Finding examples of signifying in jazz, he writes, “There are so many example of signifyin(g)¹⁶ in jazz that one could write a formal history of its development on this basis alone” (Gates 1988, p. 63). Most jazz musicians place a high value on originality and are critical of imitators, so it is likely that they would be suspicious of a theory that describes jazz as primarily an art of repetition. In fact, dozens of improvisation method books present improvisational techniques and theories that are intended to free improvisers from repeating “licks.” Even so, Gates provocatively claims, “Improvisation, of course, so fundamental to the very idea of jazz, is ‘nothing more’ than repetition and revision” (Gates 1988, pp, 63–64). Although Gates obviously oversimplifies improvisation, the idea of signifying opens a new and richly rewarding perspective on jazz practice that many scholars have applied with illuminating results (Monson 1996; Tomlinson 1991; Floyd 1995). Gates carefully traces the transmission of the trickster trope from Yoruba stories, through other cultural reincarnations, to the Signifying Monkey stories of African Americans.

Searching for the African roots of African American practices can be very productive, but that search sometimes draws as much on fantasy as fact. The myth of Africa as one organic *gemeinschaft* can lurk the shadows. For example, John Miller Chernoff all too easily titles his book *African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics*

¹⁶ Gates brackets the final “g” in signifying, to more clearly distinguish the African American vernacular practice from other understanding of “signifying.”

and Social Action in African Musical Idioms even though his fieldwork is mainly limited his experiences with two drummers in Ghana (Chernoff 1979). Kofi Agawu argues that rhythm has long been the mark of Africa's otherness (Agawu 1995, p. 381). On a continent of over four hundred million people, writing of "the African" or "traditional African" draws a veil over a diverse collection of constantly emerging and evolving practices. "There is," Agawu suggests, "an unwillingness to lift the veil that now enshrouds Africa, a fear that doing so might have a civilizing effect on the discourse of the West, thus depriving its practitioners of one of their most cherished sources of fantasy and imaginative play" (Agawu 1995). Although Gates writes carefully about Yoruba culture, the term Yoruba itself can refer to myth as well as reality. Christopher Waterman argues that the idea of Yoruba culture in contemporary Nigeria is, at least in part, a legacy of colonial domination, a fiction whereby the British colonizers unified diverse tribes into a unified and more easily governed people (Waterman 1990). Understanding the history and transmission of cultural practices is crucial if we are to understand their contemporary significance. However, as scholars have shown, appeals to roots and tradition are sometimes cover for totalizing accounts that may serve some interests while failing to coincide with those of people deemed "traditional" (Hobsbawm and Ranger [1983] 2002; Cantwell 1996; Rosenberg 1993; Vlastos 1998; Misztal 2003). Consequently, we must carefully consider any attempts to explain contemporary practices through appeals to original traditions or communities.

Jazz and the National Community

To link African American music to the master tropes of the Yoruba community is to foreground conceptions of African community. Others link African American music to conceptions of a national American community. National communities, as Benedict Anderson argues, are imaginary. Conceiving of jazz, as “America’s music” (Ward and Burns 2000b) or as “American classical music” (Sales [1984] 1992; Tirro 1993; Taylor 1986) connects jazz to an imaginary community of people united through their shared participation in media, such as jazz magazines and jazz recordings.

Linking jazz to the American nation serves several purposes. Calling jazz America’s classical music valorizes jazz musicians by identifying their creations as the sign of a distinct national identity. Calling jazz “America’s classical music” necessarily includes African Americans at the center of American identity, while placing African American musicians on the high art pedestal alongside art music icons such as Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart. Ken Burns continues to link jazz innovators to the innovators of European concert music, but he also extends the reach of jazz by calling it simply “America’s music.” In his account jazz is both high art, and the music of all Americans. By depicting jazz in this way, he hopes, perhaps, that even the whitest Americans, might learn to recognize other tints and hues coloring the kaleidoscopic spectrum of their psyches.

The formation of imaginary communities serves the purpose of uniting diverse populations to achieve political and social goals; concealed and suppressed difference is the price of this unity. Seeing jazz as America’s music turns a blind eye toward the many differences that exist within this imaginary community. Burns, for instance, mostly

ignores not only white musicians, but also African American jazz musicians like Sun Ra and members of the AACM who are too threatening to harmonious notions of American and African American inclusiveness. Burns also gives short shrift to musical variations related to region, gender, age, class, and he leaves little room for jazz originating in Europe, Africa, or Asia. Understanding jazz as local musical and social practice will enable us to better understand the many variations in jazz practice in their own right, rather than as curious but relatively insignificant departures from the core jazz tradition.

Scenes and Pathways: Avoiding the Problems of Musical Communities

Music scholars have acknowledged the limitations of the concept of community and have sought to understand the social organization of musicians and listeners in other ways. Will Straw seeks understand the relations between local music making and global structures by using notion of “scenes” (Straw 1991). Straw theorizes about the “diversity of musical practices unfolding within particular urban centres,” and how that diversity undermines “claims as to the uniformity of local musical cultures” (Straw 1991, p. 368). His discussion of scenes is also a critique of a particular approach to ethnomusicology. “Those encountering ethnomusicological studies for the first time after an apprenticeship in the hermeneutics of suspicion may, like myself,” he warns, “be struck by the prominence within them of notions of cultural totality of claims asserting the expressive unity of musical practices” (Straw 1991, p. 369).¹⁷ Straw attempts to understand the diversity of local musical “scenes” as the effects of global economic and political

¹⁷ This dissertation, for example, began as an attempt to discover self-contained micro-communities of jazz musicians in Chicago following the models provided by Anthony Seeger (Seeger 1987) and Steven Feld (Feld 1982).

structures that comprise “an increasingly universal system or articulation” (Straw 1991, p. 369). For Straw, the idea of a music community implies a relatively stable social structure and a limited number of idioms rooted in a specific place and history, but a scene is “that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization” (Straw 1991, p. 374). Straw is concerned with how styles circulate and with questions of stylistic progress. I share his concern with the ways ethnography has sometimes foregrounded the appearance of unified and self-contained communities. As Graham Day argues, “it will not do to suppose that communities are formed simply through the accumulation of a host of independent local decisions and choices, even if this is a comforting perspective for those who believe that they are shaped ‘from below’, by action at the ‘grassroots’” (Day 2006, p. 126). But, neither will it do to suppose that musical communities and social configurations are only the articulated effects of global structures, without local agency or the possibility of resistance.

Ruth Finnegan’s metaphor of urban pathways offers an alternative to the model of scenes that accounts for multiple porous urban communities in a single location as well as for structural forces and agency (Finnegan [1989] 2007). The model of pathways depicts a musical world where musicians travel routes already laid down by others but that are maintained and altered through constant use. These pathways shape and are shaped by those who travel along them. Unlike concepts of community that often imply a single, comprehensive, geographically-based set of social relations, the metaphor of pathways imagines social relations as a net of intersecting routes, dispersed over space and

requiring travel. Although Finnegan does not address the question of globalism in depth, the metaphor of pathways also provides a way of imagining connections between the local and the distant. We need not think that the national or international jazz community is simply an imaginary community where people are connected through the global distribution and passive consumption of music commodities. Given the access to resources and transportation many musicians travel circuits that connect neighborhoods across the globe through face-to-face musical practices as well.

Finnegan's metaphor of pathways traversed and shaped by the practices of musicians illustrates well the notion of productive consumption developed by Michel de Certeau (de Certeau 1984, p. xii). De Certeau paints a picture of the modern city where all space is organized to facilitate the consumption of commodities. The city appears to be a terrain dominated by the strategic exercise of power where consumers must make do with the limited options commodities offer them. The ways in which people make the city their own often operate behind or within accepts of seemingly passive consumption.

De Certeau writes:

The "making" in question is a production, a *poiesis*—but a hidden one, because it is scattered over areas defined and occupied by systems of 'production' (television, urban development, commerce, etc.) and because the steadily increasing expansion of these systems no longer leaves 'consumers' and *place* in which they can indicate what they *make* or *do* with the products of these systems. To a spectacular production corresponds *another* production, called "consumption" (de Certeau 1984, p. xii).

But de Certeau, like Finnegan, focuses on practices rather than commodities, revealing the ways people make do, and how they make the given world their own. De Certeau distinguishes between strategic and tactical practices. Strategic practices operate from a position of authority and power; as the articulation of the proper, strategies preserve the

territory of those who rule. Tactical practices operate from a position of powerlessness.

De Certeau declares:

The space of a tactic is the space of the other... the 'proper' is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time—it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing.' Whatever it wins, it does not keep" (de Certeau 1984, p. xix).

One of de Certeau's most evocative metaphors is that of poaching—the act of seizing on the wing, the practice of productive consumption. "Everyday life invents itself by 'poaching' in countless ways on the property of others" (de Certeau 1984, p. xii). De Certeau elsewhere argues that strategy is analogous to grammar, but enunciation is a tactic. "The speech act," he asserts, "is at the same time a use of language and an operation performed on it." He finds the enunciative model of tactical action in a host of everyday practices like shopping, cooking, and walking.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, De Certeau opens the chapter "Walking in the City" with a description of the totalizing panoramic view of New York City as seen from the observation room atop the World Trade Center. From this summit the grid of the city appears to him as a readable text inscribed by the grammar of the powerful (de Certeau 1984, pp. 91–92). "The ordinary practitioners of the city," however, "live 'down below,' below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk—an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thick and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it" (de Certeau 1984, p. 93). But, according to de Certeau, walking puts an enunciative spin on the urban grammar. Walkers never own the space of the sidewalk, but they wear their unique

pathways as they travel through the space and time of the city (de Certeau 1984, pp. 97–102).

Walking enunciates. Playing music does so even more. As described in the chapters that follow, time and again during my fieldwork in Chicago I witnessed and participated in the tactical reenunciation of commodified urban space through musical practices. Musicians traveling multiple intersecting pathways met in bars and nightclubs. These places exist within the logic of capital as place to exchange food and drink for cash. But musicians gather to play. They drink and smoke; they put their feet on the chairs; and they leave their instruments on the tables. If tactics are temporal, the common rhythm section practice of “playing time” can allude to more than steady tempos. And perhaps it is also telling that when jazz musicians solo, they don’t build a solo, they “blow” and “take a ride.” They don’t notate compositions, they “tell it” on the fly. They walk in, they blow, and then they leave. They may have convinced the club owner that this would be profitable. They may believe it themselves. But profitable or not, the time they spend playing temporarily transforms a business into a session, allowing players and listeners a chance—for a short time—to enunciate that space as their own.

Walking in Rhythm

The concept of community is fraught with equivocation that masks myths and dreams of idealized human sociality or fears of its collapse or irrelevance. Yet I, nevertheless, use the term for the four musical and social configurations that I write about. They felt like communities to me. Joining them, I thrived on their recognition, and I felt an increase in my selfhood as I expressed myself in their musical and behavioral

vocabulary. And at least some of these face-to-face interactions were multi-stranded. Simple musical interactions turned into affections and hatreds. We ate, drank, and played together. We complained about others together. We borrowed money for beer from each other. We visited each other's homes. We became obligated to one another to uphold our end of the musical and social activities.

Community provides a person with identity. Participating musically gave me identity as a player and as a particular kind of player. (I also confirmed my identity as an ethnographer.) I became a member of the group and not one of those other people—the folks in the other room watching the game, the people who couldn't blow, the people afraid to come into the city, the gangbangers on the corner who scared them away. These identities were confirmed by what I did, but also by how I was recognized by others in the different communities I passed through. And I was not alone in experiencing this. Others too were aware of the ways participation and recognition bolstered their identity. That's what community does.

But I also understand community against the grain—in order to highlight the limitations of the concept. The groups I studied did not provide for all the needs of their members; members belong to many other social groups, as did I. Communities, as many contemporary studies show, are porous and they include divisions drawn along lines of gender, age, class, and even instrumental roles. I write about jazz communities rather than *the* jazz community to foreground these divisions and to locate jazz practice in these face-to-face encounters. Attempts to speak of the jazz community indicate a lust for what poet and jazz theorist Nathaniel Mackey has called “predatory wholeness” (Mackey [1994] 1998, p. 621), while music functions as “wounded kinship's last resort” and “a

complaint and a consolation” that reminds us of absence, loss, and incompleteness while inspiring utopian imaginings of personal and communal wholeness and what those might feel like (Mackey [1994] 1998, p. 603).

The term community is a noun, and the implication that community is a thing follows, but as I use the term I want to emphasize that I am referring to communities of practice and as practice. Music, too, is motion—a way of communing. The people about whom I write walk together in rhythm through the city, through the club, through the form of the tune, to be together, to experience their bodies moving together in time, counting off a tempo, a swinging motion that transforms rationalized space into lived space. In the seemingly fractured and impersonal space of the city, music is one way of establishing through shared practice a fleeting moment of felt wholeness where musicians can experiment with performances of self that can be refashioned as they musically enunciate the city.

Methodology

Scholars who write on jazz often focus on the biographies of famous players and famous recordings in order to track landmark musical achievements and to document the development of jazz styles in a broad context of American life and music. However, contemporary scholars have enriched the musical, biographical and historical accounts of jazz and jazz musicians with more ethnographic approaches to living musicians and current jazz practices. Following the lead of earlier jazz ethnographers (are there specific ones you are following), this dissertation relies heavily on ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in Chicago beginning in September 2004 and continuing until March 2006. During this time I attended performances at jazz clubs, coffee shops, and community

centers. These performances included informal get-togethers, casual gigs, and concerts.¹⁸ During most of my fieldwork I also participated in weekly jam sessions held by four different communities of musicians. I attended between three and five events each week, mostly in the evenings, at locations in Chicago proper and in the Northern and Western suburbs. Ethnography in clubs is expensive, and, as I ran out of funding, I supported myself playing gigs and doing other kinds of related work much like any other jazz musician in the city. I worked as a guitar instructor at a suburban music store and at Harold Washington City College; I also worked at the Center for Black Music Research at Columbia College.

I was open about my research interests and many musicians were eager to talk with me about my project. Other musicians were aware of my research but seemed to regard me as another musician with an unusual day job. Though I report data from my research and I explore a variety of theoretical issues, I rely heavily on narrative accounts of my fieldwork, and I at times figure as an important character in some of my stories. Reflexive narrative in ethnography rightly raises concerns about rigor and focus. Aware of these concerns, I have not chosen these methods lightly. They are central to the issues of the intersubjective constitution of self and community that I explore, and they illustrate well the specificity of face-to-face jazz practice about which I write. I believe that the insights gained by these techniques offset the risks of self-indulgence or frivolity.

¹⁸ Casual gigs or dates are performances in which jazz musicians are hired primarily to provide background music. Such performances sometimes feature bands that have an ongoing stable membership, but often the musician who gets the gig simply calls people he or she knows and they form a “pickup band” that exists just for that performance.

Story Telling: Vivid, Vicarious, and Non-Authoritative Experience of Others

Jazz refers to so much; individual and local practices disappear in the shadows of monumental histories, styles, and stars. However, contemporary writers have shown that ethnographic methods can uncover the flesh and blood of jazz practices. In *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*, Ingrid Monson draws on her experience learning to play the drums, interviews, and linguistic analysis. Though her fieldwork is not extensive, she brings an ethnographer's ear to the analysis of musical recordings, hearing them as recordings of social practices wherein players construct jazz performances through conversation-like interactions that draw on African American speech and sociality (Monson 1996). Relying on in depth fieldwork, Paul Berliner portrays the great effort and long, consuming commitment of jazz musicians in the learning, practice, and perfection of their art (Berliner 1994). Monson and especially Berliner offer exhaustive accounts of jazz practice and one might wonder what is left to say. Each writes comprehensively about jazz, yet they both rely heavily on accounts of jazz played in New York City in the last decades of the twentieth century. No doubt such accounts are crucial since, as Berliner observes, New York is the world's largest jazz community (Berliner 1994, p. 5). Insights derived from ethnography of jazz musicians in New York certainly tell us something about the ways musicians practice jazz anywhere. But, most jazz musicians live and practice somewhere else, outside of New York. "Ethnomusicology as it had been traditionally practiced..." writes Monson, "did not fully fit an urban, heterogeneous jazz scene crosscut by media, multiple ethnicities, and the recording industry" (Monson 1996, p. 5). In this dissertation I seek to answer this challenge and continue the work of scholars like Monson and Berliner, by applying

ethnographic methods to other communities of jazz musicians and communities still neglected in scholarship.

Following the lead of other ethnographers (Finnegan [1989] 2007; Duneier 1992; Jackson 1995; Seeger 1987; Geertz 2000; Kondo 1990), I try to tell stories from a clear point of view and rich in details and subjective impressions. Vivid, sometimes personal accounts of fieldwork are increasingly accepted in anthropological ethnographies, but are still rare in writings about jazz. I include these kinds of stories to more vibrantly portray the specific everyday practices of small, face-to-face, living communities in the hope that such writing will allow those communities to better stand out against the background of generalized jazz practices. In ethnographic participation and observation, researchers not only gather data on others, they also submit themselves to the transforming ways and gaze of others, experiencing a provisional transformation of self. Stories invite a similar transformation in readers through their vicarious participation. “The story does not express a practice,” argues Michel de Certeau. “It does not limit itself to tell about a movement. It *makes* it. One understands it, then, if one enters into this movement oneself” (de Certeau 1984, p. 81). Writing similarly of narrative ethnography’s ability to put the reader in the place of the Other, Ruth Behar writes, “It’s the detail and sensuality with which they [writers] evoke an elusive *beingthereness*” (Behar 2009). Such aspirations are high in a dissertation, and I often fall short. Nevertheless, by telling stories I hope to allow readers to imaginatively enter into the unique flesh and blood lives of the unique communities I study, inspiring empathy as well as understanding.

I tell stories also as a way of limiting my own authority. This is particularly important in the realm of jazz where on the one hand fans, scholars, and musicians alike

often seek to assert a kind of mastery by separating authentic jazz from fake. Hughes Panassié, in 1942, went so far as to title his book *The Real Jazz* and the leading contemporary jazz fake book is called simply *The Real Book* (Panassié [1942] 1960; *The real book* 2004). Most stories I tell are from my perspective, but I also include other perspectives as well. A story's point of view implies that others exist. And the telling of stories reminds us that there is listening, too, and that there will be the next story. The truth of narrative lives between people listening, telling, and retelling, not in an archive of complete and authoritative data. "Stories give meaning to the present and enable us to see that present as part of a set of relationships involving a constituted past and a future," writes Edward M. Bruner. "But narratives change, all stories are partial, all meanings incomplete" (Bruner 1986, p. 153). This dissertation, especially as an argument against the possibility of complete understandings of jazz practice, will remain incomplete, but it will contribute new details to existing stories and perhaps continue the conversation inspiring new and better stories from other scholars and from the people about whom I write.

But that won't happen if the people I write about can't recognize themselves in my account of their lives. "When I think of my own progression as a writer," states Ruth Behar, "I believe I have gone from trying to write for my teachers to trying now, in the most recent phase of my work, to write for my mother so I could write for the world" (Behar 2009, p. 111). I still write for my teachers; ethnography without the critique of experts risks becoming travel or fan literature. And I, too, want my mother to read this, but I do want my ethnography to be accessible to other audiences, particularly those people whose lives and music I discuss. Their responses, as much as the responses of

scholars, will offer a valuable critique of my work, and will suggest new projects and stories as I continue my fieldwork among Chicago jazz musicians.

Some scholars see seemingly objective ethnographies overtly laden with technical terminology as attempts to control others through symbolic subjugation that goes hand in hand with the physical and economic subjugation of colonialism and post-colonialism (Rosaldo 1989; Jackson 1998; Abu-Lughod 1993). Describing narrative as a critique of social analysis, Michael Jackson writes:

Life stories are the connective tissue of social life and call into question many of the category distinctions that anthropologists construct for purely instrumental reasons—to systematize their fieldwork experience, identify themselves professionally, and promote the notion that while the world may not be subject to administrative order, it can at least be domesticated and subjugated through logic, theory, and academic argot (Jackson 1998, p. 33).

Echoing Abu-Lughod, he further argues that “the return to narrative is a political act” that undermines illusory authority and metaphysical dreams of objective and complete theoretical mastery (Abu-Lughod 1993, pp. 16-19; Jackson 1998, pp. 33-35). In writing about jazz, where so often writers have attempted to construct a definitive account of jazz, and particularly since these accounts have often been white men speaking of and for black musicians, it is particularly important that I am clear about the limitations of my accounts of jazz musicians and practices in Chicago.

Reflexivity: Ethnographer as Observer, Reporter, and Sample

Ethnographers participate in their ethnographies on several levels. They gather information through interactions with other people and they report on those experiences. The quality of their interactions, information, and questions about which they write are shaped by who they are and how they get along with people in the field. Consequently,

ethnographers often reflect on themselves and their involvement in the field, so that readers might better understand the perspective that shapes their ethnographies. Charlotte Aull Davies writes that some forms of self-reflexivity are regarded by critics as relatively harmless and unavoidable (Davies 1999, pp. 5–7). Reflecting on one’s participation in the writing of fieldnotes and noting how gender, class, or ethnicity affects one’s relationships in the field seem clearly necessary rather than detrimental to our attempt to understand other people through ethnography. However, reflecting on oneself is a slippery slope. Once an ethnographer steps there, he or she can quickly slide away from the others she hopes to understand toward the hall of mirrors where narcissism and epistemology meet to provide the ethnographer with fascinating reflections of himself looking at himself.

Though writing about oneself in ethnography risks a distracting turn away from the people who are the purported topic, and an exasperating, self-aggrandizing display of spurious epistemology, it can also provide the most vivid and direct access to the forces in the field that constitute subjectivity. Ethnographers cannot take the objective God’s-eye point of view. He or she is not someone radically separated from the people in the field protected from the radiation of social interaction by the lead walls of academe. In *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace*, Dorinne Kondo powerfully describes how local identities are forged through intersubjective social action. These forces are all the more powerfully displayed when we see them at work on her:

As I glanced into the shiny metal surface of the butcher’s display case, I noticed someone who looked terribly familiar: a typical young housewife, clad in slip-on sandals and the loose, cotton shift called ‘homu wea’ . . . , a woman walking with a characteristically Japanese bend to the knees and a sliding of the feet. Suddenly I clutched the handle of the stroller to steady myself as a wave of dizziness washed

over me, for I realized I had caught a glimpse of nothing less than my own reflection (Kondo 1990, pp. 16-17).

Kondo's account, with its rich description of her own objective and subjective situation, clearly reveals the specific, local, intersubjective mechanisms and techniques whereby a self is constructed, and it invites us to vicariously enter into the powerful experience of those forces at work. Kondo's work also illustrates another aspect of contemporary ethnography. Unlike earlier ethnographers who observed people of cultures quite distant from their own, Kondo has closer ties to the people she studies. She is a Japanese American woman studying Japanese women. Her ethnography is both a move toward a distant other and a move toward her own family history, and this complicates the distance between the observer and the observed.

My dissertation is self-reflexive in that I rely on accounts of Chicago jazz communities based on my own experiences of those communities, but I also often reflect on my own subjectivity in ways similar to Kondo's. I do this for two reasons. First, I am interested in how identities are constructed through social musical practices, and how people construct multiple identities through participation in different urban communities. Paying attention to my own subjective experiences is one way of exploring these processes in action, and accounts of my own changing subjectivity may, like Kondo's communicate more than just the dry data about such experiences. Also, like Kondo, I am, in many ways, quite similar to the people I study. I grew up in Milwaukee, a city much like Chicago, in a working class and musical family much like the families I encountered in the field. Also, unlike many ethnomusicologists whose knowledge of jazz is based primarily on listening, music lessons, limited amateur performance, and interviews with practicing professional musicians, I have been involved with playing jazz for over forty

years. Much of my childhood and adolescence involved music lessons and venturing into Milwaukee to study or sneak into jazz bars. As an adult I have, in part, supported myself as a musician for decades. Through my involvement, I have participated in jazz communities in Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Fayetteville (Arkansas), Grand Forks (North Dakota), and Ann Arbor (Michigan). It was my involvement in these different jazz communities that aroused my interest in local jazz practices neglected in scholarship, and alerted me to subtle differences in the practice and significance of jazz in different face-to-face communities. Aware of how I have been made and remade through different but related musical relationships and practices, I believe that accounts of my own experiences in the field are relevant to understanding how Chicago musical communities construct identity and meaning.

Conclusion

The histories and ethnographies that follow are necessarily partial accounts of jazz practice, since jazz—always plural and developing—exceeds any particular account. These stories are also partial since they depend heavily on my own point of view as a participant and observer. Though I have tried to include other voices, they are heard through my ears and shaped by my desires as a player and a scholar. Nevertheless, these stories give a taste of how people and communities, walking together in rhythm, make jazz their own, and how people construct selves and communities through musical practice.

Chapter 2

Working in Jazz in “The City That Works”: A Brief History

In the 1950s, during the early years of Richard J. Daley’s administration, Chicago became known as “The City that Works” (Spinney 2000, p. 220). Since the mid-nineteenth century, Chicago has been a destination for workers from around the world, drawn by its thriving manufacturing sector, the Union Stock Yards, and other industries that have provided jobs for Chicagoans. And since the early decades of the twentieth century jazz musicians too have been a part of Chicago’s growing labor force. The city’s densely populated urban center and constantly growing metro area have always provided an audience for live music of many kinds, including jazz, an audience that less populated areas have been unable to offer. Although shifting demographics and changes in manufacturing in the last half of the twentieth century have led to greater unemployment in core areas of the city (Wilson 1996), the current metro population of around nine million people still sustains a demand for jazz musicians of various stripes. Similarly, Chicago’s large population has produced many outstanding players who have helped to grow audiences, nurture young players, and draw outstanding and ambitious musicians to the city from around the world. New York has certainly become the primary destination for players who seek careers as touring and recording artists, but Chicago continues to be a city where a musician can work with other highly-skilled jazz musicians while also

finding non-jazz music work with dance bands, recording studios, music stores, and schools. As a result, Chicago is a city where professional jazz musicians can earn comfortable livings, own homes, and raise families while pursuing their muse. The history of jazz in Chicago shows that the jazz communities found at Delaney and Murphy's and The Negro League Café (see Chapter Three and Chapter Four) are part of an ongoing process of community fusion and fission. This process is not unique to jazz or to present day musical activities.

Chicago Jazz: The Early Years

The origin of Chicago jazz is a popular story. African American musicians, so the story goes, left New Orleans in 1917 when the U.S. Navy Department closed Storyville, New Orleans's vice and nightclub district (Kenney 1993, p. 3). While New Orleans' declining sex industry is the most romanticized aspect of the Crescent City's musical exodus, the closing of Storyville is only a small factor contributing to that northward migration. Musicians left New Orleans mainly to pursue more lucrative markets and escape the city's crushing racism. Joe "King" Oliver and Louis Armstrong rode the riverboats north, or so goes the tale, bringing jazz to Chicago. Some musicians certainly did work on riverboats, but as William Kenney affirms, accounts of travel on the river are highly romanticized, which is obvious when we consider that the Mississippi does not flow to Chicago (Kenney 1993, p. 3). Nevertheless, during my fieldwork, fans often repeated this story to me, so the facts of early jazz in Chicago bear repeating.

The influence that New Orleans musicians like Louis Armstrong had on music in Chicago cannot be underestimated, but it is also a mistake to underestimate the importance of Chicago's already rich musical life in the first place, which drew musicians from the Crescent City to the cold shores of Lake Michigan.¹⁹ The city's warm reception of Joe Oliver, Jelly Roll Morton, Louis Armstrong, Nick LaRocca, and others implies that local audiences were already accustomed to enjoying similar music and were eager for the sounds and innovations of the New Orleans jazz players.²⁰ Jazz historian John Szwed and Chicago jazz chronicler John Steiner have argued that our current understanding of jazz's origins focuses on horn bands, and that we might instead find the precursors of jazz in piano styles such as ragtime and boogie-woogie. Indeed, many ragtime pianists such as Glover Compton, were active in Chicago before the arrival of the New Orleans horn players (Szwed 2000, 88-90; Steiner 1959). Ragtime pianist and composer Scott Joplin visited Chicago in 1893, and performed in local clubs and taverns until 1894. During that time, he heard and admired two local pianists, Arthur Marshall and Louis Chauvin, who performed in the Levee, Chicago's red-light district (Travis

¹⁹ For an account of music and other commercial entertainments on the South Side preceding and including the arrival of jazz musicians from New Orleans see *Building the South Side: Urban Scape and Civic Culture in Chicago 1890–1919* by Robin F. Bachin, especially Chapter Five (Bachin 2004). For brief accounts of music in Chicago in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also see *Images of America: Chicago Entertainment Between the Wars 1919–1939* by Jim and Wynette Edwards and *Making Music Chicago Style* by Robert L. Brubaker (Edwards 2003; Brubaker 1985).

²⁰ As Kathy Ogren has pointed out, in the early decades of the twentieth century the term “jazz” had not yet come to clearly denote a particular style of music. Many kinds of music, dress, and activity were thought of as “jazzy” (Ogren 1989). Gerald Early similarly offers a reevaluation of 1920s band lead Paul Whiteman. Contemporary jazz critics often dismiss Whiteman whose orchestra included strings and played largely composed “sweet” or “symphonic jazz,” but as Early observes, Whiteman was one of the most influential band leaders of his time, and Whiteman's music certainly was jazz as people understood it in the 1920s (Early 1995).

1983, 7–8). Homegrown boogie-woogie pianists were also already popular before the main influx of Crescent City horn players. Consider Jimmy Yancey, who was already one of the city’s most popular performers by 1915 (Williams 1959, p. 98).

By the second decade of the twentieth century, Chicago was also caught up in the national craze for social dancing. The city boasted many dance orchestras and fans, and these orchestras would eventually provide work and audiences for jazz musicians from New Orleans and elsewhere. On the North Side, Edgar Benson and Jules Stein ran rival agencies that provided white dance bands in Chicago and throughout the Midwest. Benson booked symphony orchestras, brass bands, dance orchestras, jazz bands, novelty bands, and a variety of instrumental soloists and vocalists (Sengstock 2004, p. 11). His stable of musicians included the popular orchestra of Isham Jones, whose composition “It Had To Be You” has become a jazz standard; his grandnephew, Rusty Jones, is a jazz drummer and important performer in the city today. African Americans, too, were a part of the pre-jazz Chicago music industry. By 1914, Dave Peyton, a leading African American musician and journalist for the *Chicago Defender* (the city’s most important African American newspaper) was booking black dance bands out of his South Side music store (Sengstock 2004, p. 15).²¹

The way we tell the story of jazz tends to imply that jazz—“America’s music”—was the music at the heart of American life (Ward 2000). However, jazz developed

²¹ Peyton’s *Chicago Defender* column, “The Music Bunch,” is sometimes cited as an example of opposition to early jazz, but it is also a testament to the diversity and demands of Chicago’s music scene. In 1928 he wrote, “The trouble with most of our orchestras today is nonversatility” and he exhorted musicians to develop the broad range of skills that were required of professional performers working in Chicago at that time (Peyton 1999, p. 57).

alongside many styles that had roots elsewhere but underwent unique American transformations. Jazz musicians worked in a world of many musical practices, often participating in many different genres, and nowhere has this been truer than in Chicago, where musician of many nationalities and ethnicities engaged in many different musical practices. In 1891, Chicago businessman Charles Norman Fay convinced America's leading conductor, Theodore Thomas, to move from New York to Chicago and establish The Chicago Symphony Orchestra, thereby turning Chicago into one of the great centers of elite musical practice in the United States (Crawford 2001, p. 311). The city also became the center of various ethnic and popular genres. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Francis O'Neill, Chicago's police chief and a collector of folk music, published *O'Neill's Music of Ireland* (1903) and *O'Neill's Dance Music of Ireland* (1907), as well as several other compilations. O'Neill didn't collect these tunes in Ireland, but in Chicago, where musicians playing regional styles from every county in Ireland were now brought together as they fled famine and political oppression in their homeland (Krassen 1976, p. 10). Though this might be hard to imagine, the city and its massive Union Stockyards were also a center for cowboy culture and early country and western music. Many rodeos were held at Soldier's Field, and Essanay Movie Company filmed hundreds of Bronco Billy westerns at its Chicago studios. By the 1930s, Chicago radio station WLS was home to the WLS National Barn Dance, broadcast throughout the Midwest every Saturday evening from the Eighth Street Theatre; the show featured such stars as Red Foley, George Goebel, Roy Rogers and Gene Autry (Edwards 2003, 45-56, 121). These were just a few of the many musical activities occurring in Chicago during the decades around the turn of the century: clearly, the advent of "Chicago jazz" was not

an isolated phenomenon. When Louis Armstrong stepped off the train in Chicago, he was entering the city along with professional musicians from across the nation and the world. Drawn to the city's relatively lucrative music industry, the many immigrant performers initiated innovations across the musical spectrum and gave rise to many kinds of American music. Chicago's population was large enough and diverse enough to support these musical activities, and the city's economy was vibrant enough that even new and relatively impoverished immigrant groups like the Irish or African Americans could find work and income that allowed for listening, dancing, and other leisure activities. Chicago was a city that drew musicians from around the country and beyond, by offering audiences, work, opportunities for professional advancement, a decent income, and a comfortable home. In the twenty-first century Chicago continues to support a wide range of musical activities, and the musicians I write about in the following chapters benefit from this as they work in a variety of musical styles in addition to playing jazz.

The New Orleans Contribution

While Chicago was already home to several lively music communities by the early twentieth century, the arrival of players from New Orleans added a special fire to the city's music, which in turn set the course for the development of jazz throughout the nation and abroad. Many of the black musicians who moved to Chicago from New Orleans came with the Great Migration that started after 1910 and continued into the 1920s, when 170,000 Southern blacks settled in the city (Spinney 2000, p. 168). African American pianist and composer Jelly Roll Morton was working in the city by 1914 and

Joe “King” Oliver was playing Chicago gigs shortly after that.²² White musicians from New Orleans also established an early presence in Chicago starting with Ray Lopez and Tom Brown who brought their group to Lamb’s Café in 1915 (Sudhalter 1999, p. 3).

The history of jazz is a history of different attempts to define what jazz really is and whom it really represents. However, even the earliest history of Chicago jazz indicates the existence of several different communities of musicians who identified their musical practices as jazz. Though not all jazz musicians and fans are equally invested in this debate, many overlapping communities of musicians who identify themselves as jazz musicians still exist in Chicago, and many Chicago musicians can trace their lines of musical development and even their family histories to these early divisions.

Among African American musicians from New Orleans, at least two different styles of jazz were being performed. In September of 1926, Morton began recording with Jelly Roll Morton’s Red Hot Peppers for the Victor recording company. They produced landmark recordings, including “Black Bottom Stomp,” “The Chant,” and “Grandpa’s Spells.” Though Morton compositions left little room for improvisation, his Victor recordings of the mid-1920s are thought to represent an earlier style of jazz as it was performed in New Orleans, emphasizing ensemble playing rather than virtuosic soloing.

Louis Armstrong, who moved to Chicago in 1922 (a relative latecomer to the city), also began recording in 1926 with his groups, the Hot Five and the Hot Seven. (He

²²As David Ake points out, Morton identified himself not as black, but as Creole (Ake 2002, p. 12). The migration of musicians from New Orleans to Chicago contains at least three strands: blacks, Creoles, and whites. Moving to Chicago rearranged the divisions at least between blacks and Creoles. Contemporary musicians moving to Chicago from around the nation and the world find themselves forming new, previously unimagined, alliances as they look for work. For instance, Grazyna Auguscik, a polish jazz singer who relocated to Chicago, has drawn Chicago jazz musicians into the community of Polish musicians as she enters into the Chicago jazz scene.

also recorded in 1923 with King Oliver's band.) The sides recorded by Armstrong and his band (which incidentally included some of the members of the Red Hot Peppers) showed a style of jazz that was moving away from the ensemble style associated with New Orleans. This new way of playing opened more opportunities for soloists.

Much has been said about Armstrong's musical genius and virtuosity, but the development of jazz as a medium for soloists also goes hand-in-hand with the increasing musical professionalism developing in Chicago. For many musicians in New Orleans, music work often supplemented work of other kinds. A legendary jazz cornet player in New Orleans, Buddy Bolden cut hair when he wasn't blowing his horn. Those who moved away from New Orleans were among the city's best players. They left the city to better themselves and earn their living as full-time musical professionals in more lucrative markets. Often they first found work on Mississippi river boats where they were expected to read music and perform many different styles. Upon arriving in Chicago, they found work in the cabarets playing for elaborate floorshows. This work was a far cry from playing at fish fries on the shores of Lake Ponchartrain. The work in Chicago required more training, skill, and discipline; these demands undoubtedly fostered the development of virtuosic players such as Louis Armstrong who were eager to put their virtuosity to the test as soloists.

Johnny St. Cyr, A Typical New Orleans Musician in Chicago

The career of Johnny St. Cyr is typical of the African American musicians who moved from New Orleans to Chicago. St. Cyr was born on April 17, 1890, and at an early age he began playing his mother's guitar with his older brother's friends, Jackie Dowden

and Jules Batiste. They called themselves the Consumers Band, since Dowden and Batiste both worked for Consumers Brewery in New Orleans (St. Cyr 1958, p. 7). During this time, St. Cyr also worked as a plasterer's apprentice. His playing improved, and he became part of a distinctly Creole music scene. New Orleans was home to "two distinct African-diasporic communities—the Francocentric *gens du couleur*, or "Creoles of color," and the English-speaking slaves and their descendants" (Ake 2002, p. 10). The Creole community identified itself with French culture and embraced middle-class values, and Creole musicians thought of themselves as schooled professionals—they could read music, had well-developed instrumental tone and technique, and were trained in the European art music tradition. They distanced themselves from Uptown black players who, in the eyes of Creoles, were untrained and relied on improvisation, special effects (like trumpet growls), and enthusiasm. St. Cyr and his fellow Creole musicians performed at many "functions" including downtown balls, Saturday evening dances, and Sunday picnics at Lucian's Pavilion, Little Alice's, and other camps along the shores of Lake Ponchartrain. On Saturday afternoons, he performed atop wagons in the streets of New Orleans, promoting the weekend festivities. Like his colleagues, he performed many styles of dance music, including quadrilles, schottisches, and waltzes (St. Cyr 1966, pp. 6–7). St. Cyr played guitar and the six-string banjo-guitar with many outstanding New Orleans bands: the Superior Brass Band, the Olympia Brass Band and groups led by A.J. Piron, Kid Ory, and Oscar "Papa" Celestin. As St. Cyr recalled in a 1966 interview, the Creole musicians he worked with were often serious trained musicians who prided themselves on their technique, reading skills, and professionalism. They rarely worked with the non-Creole African American players who had little formal training and mostly

performed blues-based repertoire in the city's uptown bars (St. Cyr 1966, p. 7). Their commitment to musical professionalism enabled St. Cyr and his colleagues to earn what they considered a respectable amount of money for their performances. As St. Cyr told *Jazz Journal* in 1966:

A musician was paid \$1.00 for riding on a truck and playing for five hours \$2.50 if he played a ball, from 8 p.m. until 4 a.m., with one-hour intermission. House parties paid \$1.50 to \$2.00 and you played about five hours. (St. Cyr 1966, p. 7)

This was more money than musicians playing in Storyville ever made. (St. Cyr 1966, p. 22). But the money earned from music was seldom enough and most musicians also needed day jobs to make ends meet, so St. Cyr continued to work as a plasterer during the day while he played the picnics, parties, and clubs of New Orleans on nights and weekends.

The riverboats were the next stop for musicians who, like St. Cyr, sought to increase their musical skills, professional standing, and income. The Streckfus line transported passengers up and down the Mississippi in comfort and style, stopping in New Orleans, St. Louis, Davenport, and other thriving river towns and providing elegant music for dancing and listening. Riverboat musicians had to play many styles very well, and they were expected to be excellent readers, since publishing companies provided the riverboat orchestras with their latest arrangements as a way of promoting their music (St. Cyr 1958). The Streckfus brothers hired demanding bandleaders. Many African Americans from New Orleans sailed with pianist and bandleader Fate Marable: New Orleans's musicians referred to playing with Marable as "going to the conservatory," because Marable worked with them to improve their reading and playing skills. St. Cyr and his band mate and friend George "Pops" Foster continued their studies by working

through method books together between sets aboard ship (St. Cyr 1958, p. 16). Riverboat work also broadened St. Cyr's musical horizons by exposing him to great musicians in other Mississippi River port towns. He tells of sitting in with bands in St. Louis, where legendary ragtime pianist and composer, Tom Turpin, treated him to a macaroni dinner. St. Cyr and his Crescent City colleagues may very well have also crossed paths with Bix Beiderbecke while docked in Davenport, Iowa. Riverboat work was demanding; the hours were long and the music was difficult, but the financial rewards were high. "At first," St. Cyr told one interviewer, "We got New Orleans pay, \$30.00 a week in St. Louis, then later the union got us the proper scale of \$52.50" (St. Cyr 1966, p. 6). So, at least for a while, St. Cyr was able to leave the plastering business behind and devote himself to music full time.

In 1923, St. Cyr was back in New Orleans when Joe "King" Oliver offered him a job playing with his band in Chicago. Like Louis Armstrong and others, St. Cyr answered Oliver's call and headed north. Chicago represented yet another step up professionally (and not just an escape from racism and the collapsed music market in Storyville). In Chicago, St. Cyr no longer played gigs on top of furniture wagons. New Orleans musicians shed their country-style high-top shoes and box-back coats and became leaders of fashion. For the growing South Side African American community they came to represent the peak of professional achievement. They often performed in lavish ballrooms, where, clad in tuxedos, they entertained elegantly dressed dancers who glowed with urban sophistication and bathtub gin. St. Cyr, for instance, worked with Joe Oliver at the Lincoln Gardens (first known as the Royal Gardens Café), where the dance floor held nearly 500 couples. Though St. Cyr calls the Lincoln Gardens a "black and

tan” (St. Cyr 1967), the club was a neighborhood dance hall that was supported by the Chicago Juvenile Protection Association, and it catered mainly to African Americans (Kenney 1993. p. 20). A large venue like the Lincoln Gardens could generate large profits, which in turn led to relatively high pay for musicians; St. Cyr started at \$75 a week, significantly more than he could earn in New Orleans or on the riverboats (St. Cyr 1967). He and other jazz musicians also performed at “black and tans” like the Dream Cafe, where a large number of whites went in order to experience dancing to jazz with African Americans ” (Kenney 1993, 24). So jazz musicians from the South fulfilled the needs of the current social dance craze; they inspired racial pride for African Americans; and they provided an opportunity for the voyeuristic crossing of racial boundaries for whites and more edifying contact between black and white musicians. For blacks and whites alike, jazz musicians signified urban license and sophistication, while simultaneously evoking romanticized Southern black folk culture denoted by their backgrounds, club names like “The Plantation Café,” and song titles like Lil Hardin’s composition “King of the Zulus” and Jelly Roll Morton’s tune, “Mississippi Mildred.”

In the 1920s, music publishing and the new media technologies of recording and radio broadcasting provided additional opportunities for Chicago musicians to increase their popularity, professional standing, and income. Melrose Brothers-Publishing, which became known as “The House that Blues Built,” published compositions and arrangements by many jazz and blues musicians, Jelly Roll Morton and Kid Oliver among them. They also published *50 Hot Choruses by Louis Armstrong*, probably the first collection of transcribed jazz solos (Wang 1997, p. 39). Players like St. Cyr, though they didn’t compose or publish, also gained fame, professional standing, and income by

performing on many landmark recordings, including Jell Roll Morton's Red Hot Pepper's recordings and Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and Hot Seven recordings. His recording work more than likely made St. Cyr's live performances more attractive to bookers and audiences. Many other musicians benefited from live broadcast from ballrooms and radio studios. Guy Lombardo, with his orchestra specializing in slower and sweeter music than the hot jazz of New Orleans (it was directed more to the radio listeners than a live audience), was perhaps the most successful on live Chicago radio (Sengstock 2004, p. 41), but black musicians also benefited from air time. Duke Ellington's 1929 broadcasts from the Congress Hotel in the Loop are particularly noteworthy (Steiner 1959). Today, radio rarely serves local musicians in Chicago. Broadcasts are dominated by music produced by the national and international recording industry and this industry depends on distribution of its products far beyond local markets to insure its profitability. Nevertheless, local jazz musicians and fans have shows on small, locally-broadcast stations, and they continue to play locally made jazz recordings, though these broadcasts certainly don't have the same impact of Duke Ellington's broadcasts from the Congress Hotel.²³

White Jazz Musicians in "Jazz Age" Chicago

Looking back, black jazz musicians were clearly leaders in the development of Chicago hot jazz, and their predominance tends to eclipse other early jazz practices in the city. Along with these black jazz musicians, though, there were also several communities of white musicians, including white musicians from New Orleans, who were playing jazz

²³ For more information on local jazz radio in Chicago see Chapter Five.

or closely associated styles of modern dance music. There were great divisions between white and black communities in Chicago, which included divisions between white and black musicians. Nevertheless, many white Chicago players greatly admired and respected their black counterparts. For some hearing black jazz musicians was, in fact, a life altering experience (Levine 1998, p. 39). Certainly, some black musicians also had high regard for white players. As Elijah Wald points out, Louis Armstrong admired Guy Lombardo's orchestra, which performed in Chicago throughout the 1920s (Wald 2007).

Just after the turn of the century, musicians in Chicago began forming modern dance bands; the growth of the dance-band industry was fueled in large part by the popular interest in social ballroom dancing; the musicians in these bands were further supported by a concentration of music publishing firms in Chicago, growth in local musical theater, and the development of live radio broadcasts. Increased work opportunities for musicians and the growing community of skilled performers went hand-in-hand with the development of vaudeville booking agencies based in Chicago (Sengstock 2004, pp. 9–37). While histories of music emphasize the benefits New Orleans musicians brought to Chicago, these musicians clearly gained a great deal from the city as well.

Social reformers in Chicago had a long tradition of using music as a tool for social change (Clague 2002; Vaillant 2003). Middle-class suburban high schools, like Austin High, appeared to support student musicians by allowing them to play for school socials and other events (Sudhalter 1999, p. 189).²⁴ Poorer students living in the city

²⁴ Band directors at Austin High School, Cray High School, and other suburban white schools do not appear to have actively trained young white jazz musicians the way Walter Dyett famously molded young African American musicians at DuSable High School on

center had access to training in local settlement houses like Hull House. Jane Addams, the founder of Hull House, believed in the ameliorative value of music education and included both classical and popular music in Hull House programs (Sudhalter 1999, p. 191); the Hull House Boys' Band trained several prominent jazz musicians, including pianist Art Hodes and clarinetist Benny Goodman. The Chicago Daily News Band and the Chicago Defender Boys Band also provided musical training for Chicago's boys and produced a number of leading jazz musicians: trombonist, Joe Rullo, drummer and vibraphonist Lionel Hampton, and bassist Milt Hinton, to name a few (Steiner 1959).

When white New Orleans musicians like Nick LaRocca arrived in Chicago, they found a thriving professional community of white musicians along with a burgeoning group of young players eager to embrace the innovations that the southern players were bringing to the city. On April 29, 1916, at LaRocca's Chicago premier, the New Schiller Café on Thirty-first Street had to turn people from the packed club. It didn't hurt that local social reformers opposed to the supposed immoral influence of jazz and alcohol had vowed on that evening to challenge moral depravity and "beard the devil from his lair" (Sudhalter 1999, p. 11). But this example demonstrates again that in Chicago, New Orleans musicians found venues, audiences, colleagues, and controversy that all but guaranteed success and excitement.

The convergence of musical styles is often a convergence of cultures, which produces a variety of results. Chicagoans first became acquainted with jazz that was performed by white musicians like the New Orleans Rhythm Kings who played at Friar's

the South Side, though little research has been done on the impact of Chicago's early white high school band directors.

Inn on Wabash Avenue, but ambitious young white musicians quickly sought out black players whom they regarded as the true representatives of authentic jazz.

For the most part, Chicagoans preferred the races to remain separate. The American Federation of Musicians had separate locals—Local 10 for whites and Local 208 for blacks. Local 10 worked to keep black musicians out of the Loop and North Side clubs, though they were not always successful (Kenney 1993, pp. 33–34). Many whites who did not reject black players embraced them instead as a mythic alternative to the white middle class. Chief among those who saw black culture as an alternative authenticity to suburban artificiality was Milton “Mezz” Mezzrow: a mediocre musician by most accounts, he was infatuated with the image of blacks as “simple and natural” (Kenney 1993, pp. 112–113). He wrote about black jazz and, for the most part, focused on music that was closer to real or imagined southern folk roots and ignored progressive, more sophisticated black musicians like Dave Peyton, Charles Elgar, and Erskine Tate. Tenor guitarist Eddie Condon took a position similar to Mezzrow’s; a charismatic personality, Condon continued to promote and perform rollicking, often liquor-driven music that emphasized collective improvisation that was closer to New Orleans performance practices than to the Armstrong recordings of the 1920s. He famously quipped, ““Beboppers flat their fifths, we drink them””(Sudhalter 1999). The music that inspired early twentieth century modernism had become, for these white players, a music that sounded an idealized camaraderie located in the past; in early jazz and its romanticized black past, they heard the cry of primitive authenticity and unfettered libido that sounded like liberation from their white middle-class super-egos.

The End of the Jazz Age in Chicago

In October of 1929 the stock market crashed, and the industries that ultimately paid for drinks, dancing, and entertainment collapsed right alongside. People who once lined up outside of the Lincoln Gardens and the Dreamland Café now stood in lines outside soup kitchens and shelters. By 1932, forty percent of Chicago's work force was unemployed, and those with jobs earned only a fraction of their former wages (Spinney 2000, p. 193). As a result, many nightclubs were forced out of business.

But even before the crash, reformers concerned with prostitution, liquor, and racial miscegenation worked to stop the freewheeling nightlife that drove jazz age Chicago. In 1926, the efforts of reformers led to changes in Chicago's liquor laws. These changes made it easier to prosecute individuals for violations of the Volstead Act and to shut down clubs where people carrying liquor congregated. Nearly all the jazz clubs that had successfully flouted prohibition for years were padlocked under the so-called "hip flask" ruling (Kenney 1993, p. 151–152). By May of 1928, two hundred and fifty cabaret entertainers and two hundred musicians were out of work (Kenney 1993, p. 155).

New technological developments led to further declines in jobs for musicians. Consolidation of radio stations led to a loss of work for black jazz musicians, as did the consolidation of booking agencies (Kenney 1993, p. 156–157). Sound movies replaced theater orchestras, just as jukeboxes replaced combos in small restaurants and bars. Charles Sengstock reports that as late as 1926, Chicago theaters still employed two thousand musicians, but by 1933 that number had dropped to a mere one hundred twenty-five (Sengstock 2004, p. 155–156).

These changes in the entertainment industry led nightclub owners to turn away from large floorshows and ensembles. Louis Armstrong and others left for better markets like New York. Those musicians who stayed often sought work with smaller groups. Johnny St. Cyr, for example, began working in a duo with a banjoist and singer named Dago. To find work, they had to travel more, playing at the dog track in Gary and then at clubs in Kenosha and Milwaukee (St. Cyr 1967). But his duo with Dago was short-lived, and St. Cyr eventually returned to New Orleans where he continued to perform part-time and returned to his day job as a plasterer.

Here, for some, the history of Chicago Jazz comes to an end, and jazz moves to New York. In this mythological account, repeated in the recent, popular documentary film and book by Ken Burns and Geoffrey Ward (Ward 2000a; Ward and Burns 2000b), jazz wanders like a minstrel across the United States. Born in New Orleans, the music reaches adolescence in Chicago and adulthood in New York, a single entity maturing and growing in self-awareness. But Burns and Ward are wrong: jazz isn't a single entity developing in just one way; it is a collection of practices that various people use in diverse ways to many ends. After the Chicago jazz style of that time faded in popularity, Chicagoans continued to play jazz; they formed various musical communities that responded to local social conditions and featured a variety of jazz practices and styles.

Developments on the Stroll

The Depression, stricter enforcement of the Volstead Act, the introduction of the talkies, and the waning of the social dance craze led to the closing of clubs and a loss of work for musicians in Chicago. But while the glory days of the musical practice known

as “Chicago Jazz” had passed and many of its most famous practitioners like Louis Armstrong had moved on to New York, many musicians continued to earn a living in Chicago and new clubs continued to open.

Housing for African Americans in Chicago was largely limited to the South Side neighborhood known as Bronzeville, a narrow strip of land that began just south of the loop and followed the lake southward: around 1900 it reached to Thirty-ninth street. By 1930, the “Black Belt” stretched to approximately Sixty-third Street (Cutler 2006, p. 163). This neighborhood was home to the thriving nightlife and commercial district known as “The Stroll.” On this section of State Street running from Twenty-seventh Street to Thirty-fifth Street, whenever they were in town, Louis Armstrong, Joe “King” Oliver and other jazz musicians played at clubs like the Pekin Inn, the Plantation Café, and Lincoln Gardens. As blacks continued to flock to Chicago following the Depression, their swelling numbers pushed southward against the borders of this segregated district. Soon African American businessmen began to develop a second commercial district around the intersection of Forty-seventh Street and South Parkway (now Martin Luther King Drive).²⁵ Even before the stock market crash of 1929, the Savoy Ballroom had opened (in 1927) and the Regal Theater had opened (in 1928). Adam Green points out that the African American neighborhoods of Chicago were small and densely populated; new African American clubs competed with older clubs, and black-owned businesses were pitted against one another, and this contributed to the post-crash failure of many older institutions and to the demise of the original black business district (Green 2007, p. 58).

²⁵ South Parkway was originally named Grand Boulevard. It became South Parkway in 1926, and was renamed Martin Luther King Drive on July 31, 1968.

Working within these changing parameters helped musicians forge new modes of musical practice. Indeed, following the arrest of Al Capone in 1931 and the repeal of the Volstead act in December 1933, the Capone syndicate's control over Chicago's nightlife loosened. This loosening led to the development a new nightlife district in the Black Belt (Green 2007, p. 59). African Americans took over or opened clubs around the intersections of Sixty-third Street and South Park and Sixty-fourth Street and Cottage Grove, an area that was growing due to renewed African American migration in the 1940s. This area included Joe's Deluxe Nightclub and El Grotto in the Pershing Hotel. East Garfield Boulevard (Fifty-fifth Street) also featured a number a jazz clubs including Dave's Café. Dave's was burned down, then reopened and in 1938, it was renamed Swingland. In 1940, heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis and his partner Charlie Glen purchased the club and changed its name to Rhumboogie. But jazz clubs didn't just prosper in the black belt. Clusters of jazz clubs blossomed throughout the city during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. The loop was home to a number of clubs including one in the Congress Hotel. During 1935 and 1936, the Urban Room of the Congress Hotel was home to a live NBC radio program that broadcasted performances of the Benny Goodman Orchestra to homes across the United States. In many ways, even while Chicago was—and still is—an extremely segregated city, African American musicians slowly found performance opportunities in the Loop's hotels and nightclubs, though some African American musicians still active today remember playing behind a curtain so they would not offend the white clientele.

Just north of the Loop, Rush Street was home to more jazz clubs. Musicians recall dozens of venues: from the 1950s through the 1970s, Rush Street's cluster of top jazz

clubs provided much work for musicians, and made it possible to hear and play with musicians from across the nation. It is still a thriving entertainment district today, catering to the carriage trade from the nearby Gold Coast condos, but only a few clubs still feature live jazz.

Many Styles 1930 – 1960

As in the early decades of the century, in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, many musical styles of jazz were performed in Chicago. But after 1929, no single player like Louis Armstrong and no single style like that heard on his Hot Five and Hot Seven recordings rose to dominate and claim the name “Chicago jazz.” Jazz musicians in Chicago lived in a polyphony of voices. Perhaps the lack of a dominant voice or a clear stylistic focus contributed to the decline in attention scholars and critics paid to Chicago jazz after Armstrong’s departure. Yet Chicago remained a city with a large audience for jazz, thriving communities of musicians, and a destination for players looking to pursue jazz as an art and a profession.

Although Louis Armstrong had left for New York City and other New Orleanians had returned to New Orleans during the Depression, “Chicago Jazz” continued to be heard in the city, often performed by white musicians who vigorously embraced and maintained the style. They were fueled by nostalgia for the music and the raucous lifestyle of the twenties, and they came to be known as “moldy figs.” Friar’s Inn, a tavern in the Loop that was a major venue for the New Orleans Rhythm Kings in the 1920s,

continued to feature “hot jazz.”²⁶ Photos show the club still in operation in the 1930s (Demlinger 2003, p. 85). The club’s influence continued to live on as evidenced by Chicago pianist Art Hodes’ 1972 Delmark recording “Friar’s Inn Revisited” featuring remaining members of the New Orleans Rhythm Kings. The Brass Rail, another club in the Loop, also continued to feature “hot jazz” and hosted a reunion of the Austin High Gang in 1941 (Back to Chicago 1941). The club continued to host hot jazz bands, but, in the 1950s, the club also expanded its offerings, presenting groups like Count Basie and his Orchestra (Demlinger 2003, p. 87). In addition to club work, hot jazz musicians performed in public jam sessions sponsored by organizations like the Chicago Rhythm Club, founded in mid-1930s. These sessions were often held in the home of Edwin M. “Squirrel” Ashcraft, a founding member of the club (Sudhalter 1999, p. 227).

While the popularity of social dancing peaked in the 1920s, dancing still remained a popular leisure activity, and dance bands continued to provide work for many musicians, especially if they were white. Charles Sengstock documents dozens of dance band venues that continued to employ musicians well into the 1950s (Sengstock 2004). Dance halls included mammoth ballrooms like the Aragon (now a major rock venue), and there was also dancing in nightclubs like Chez Paree, restaurants like Colosimos, and hotels like The Congress Hotel, as well as many smaller clubs and restaurants including The Green Mill, which continues to be one of the city’s most popular jazz venues. Some dance orchestras were jazzier than others, but even Wayne King (the Waltz King)

²⁶ The term “hot jazz” refers to the style of small group improvisational music associated with New Orleans. Hot jazz is the style played by Louis Armstrong’s Hot Five and Hot Seven and by the members of the Austin High Gang. Hot jazz was often contrasted with “sweet jazz,” which was less raucous and improvisational. Sweet jazz was played by larger dance orchestras like those of Paul Whiteman and Guy Lombardo.

provided income for players. Sengstock reports that many of the more popular orchestras like those of Wayne King and Guy Lombardo fared well and even grew in size during the depression years and in Chicago's small economic boom brought on by preparations for WWII (Sengstock 2004, p. 169–170). Several factors led to the demise of the big dance bands in Chicago, though: a new cabaret tax on dancing didn't help: club owners started removing their dance floors rather than pay the tax; and dance bands started having to compete with television and smaller cocktail lounges that favored small groups, solo piano players and the new Hammond organ. Some musicians benefited from these changes. Individual musicians had more improvisational freedom in small groups than they did playing the more thoroughly orchestrated music of big bands and orchestras. And because these small groups toured less, musicians were able to have more stable home lives (Sengstock 2004, p. 172).

Chicago earned a reputation as a tenor saxophone town. "In Chicago you have to be a tenor player," Dexter Gordon bemoaned, after a young Gene Ammons matched him lick for lick in a tenor duel (Porter 1994, p. 2). Gene Ammons, the son of boogie-woogie piano player Albert Ammons, is perhaps the best example and the inspiration for this tradition of tenor playing. Ammons was influenced by bebop and also by his father's earlier boogie-woogie style, and by the sounds of Chicago blues; and these can be heard in the swaggering exuberance of his improvisations as well as in his frequent use of riffs and the 12-bar blues form;²⁷ Ammons' hard-swing solos dominated the South Side's

²⁷ While Chicago's fame as a jazz center faded in some ways after the departure of Armstrong, its importance as a center of blues music is well documented and continues into the present (Keil 1991 (1966); Grazian 2003). While popular representations of blues musicians often situate these players in inelegant juke joints, they, in fact, often performed in the same venues as jazz performers: a 1941 photograph of Lonnie Johnson

lively bars and nightclubs, where he set the tone for partying and dancing. He reveled in tenor battles, and his recorded duel with Sonny Stitt, “Blues Up and Down,” is a classic example of this kind of playing (Ammons 1961). Ammons was certainly an inspiration for younger Chicago tenor players, but the tradition began even earlier. As John Steiner has observed, the tenor saxophone caught on earlier in Chicago than in New York City. The instrument was used in the bands of Elgar, Cooke and Joe Oliver, and it later replaced the trombone in the bands of Albert Ammons, King Kolax, Lee Collins, and others. While some refer to a Chicago tenor tradition, the style of Gene Ammons is not the exclusive model of Chicago tenor-playing. Later players like Eddie Harris and Anthony Braxton looked to different models of performance and played in very different ways. Some contemporary players voice doubts about this tradition and believe that current references to the tradition are more about marketing than about the sound of the music (personal communication with Bobby Broom). But modern-day Chicago tenor elders Von Freeman and Fred Anderson are regarded by critics as examples of a long-standing tenor tradition that includes Gene Ammons, Clifford Jordan, Johnny Griffin, John Gilmore, Eddie Johnson, Bugs McDonald, and Sonny Stitt (Corbett 1996). Even this short list includes very different sounding players, and this variety undercuts claims about a specific Chicago style of tenor playing while attesting to the long tradition of nurturing strong yet individually distinctive tenor players.

Chicago jazz musicians weren't just influenced by New Orleans jazz; by boogie-woogie, blues, and social dancing; by the commercial demands of a vigorous night life:

shows him performing in a posh South Side club in a white dinner jacket and bow tie for a crowd of well dressed listeners (Stange 2003, 208). Then, as now, the daily worlds of Chicago's jazz and blues musicians overlapped, and jazz musicians could often be heard working in blues bands.

Chicago jazz musicians were also influenced by musical experimentation inspired by considerations of black identity, spirituality, and eccentricity. No musician exemplified this more than Sun Ra. Born Herman Poole “Sonny” Blount in 1914, Sun Ra moved to Chicago in 1946. Even among jazz musicians, Sun Ra is often thought of as an oddity. Many know only that he claimed to come from another planet and that much of his music was a far cry from mainstream jazz. Thanks to reissues of his many recordings and the publication of two recent biographies (Lock 1999; Szwed 1997), there is a growing appreciation for Sun Ra’s experimentation and craft, his ambitious combination of music, dance, poetry, and ritual, and his impact on a generation of Chicago musicians such as Ari Brown and Von Freeman, leading improvisers in Chicago even today. Certainly Ra was highly regarded as a musician when he arrived in Chicago: he quickly found employment as Fletcher Henderson’s pianist during the Henderson Orchestra’s long-running engagement at the prestigious Club DeLisa. During this time, he also worked as the rehearsal pianist for the club’s dancers. After the Henderson band left Chicago, Ra stayed on at Club DeLisa for five more years, where he rehearsed the dancers, wrote shows, and backed up national stars who performed at the club (Szwed 1997, p. 59). Through the late 1940s and 1950s, Ra, like many other jazz musicians, earned extra income performing in strip clubs. He also developed his more experimental approaches to music during this time. In 1952, he organized the Sun Ra Band, staffed largely by students who had come out of Capt. Walter Dyett’s band program at DuSable High School. This band explored new musical territory and began experimenting with eccentric costumes and ritualistic chants. But the band also continued to work on more mainstream music; for two years, band members made up the house band at Birdland

(later renamed Budland) in the basement of the Pershing Hotel. There they backed up performers like Della Reese and Dakota Staton (Szwed 1997, p. 143). Ra and his band continued to be an important part of the Chicago jazz scene until Ra's departure in 1960. Though often dismissed as an eccentric, Ra demonstrates a commitment to exploring the boundaries of music while also embracing more mainstream musical practices and the business of earning a living in music—themes that members of the Chicago's avant-garde and creative musicians continue to explore.

Chicago steadily drew mainstream jazz performers. One notable example is Ahmad Jamal, who moved to Chicago in the early 1950s, and along with Israel Crosby and Vernel Fournier, was in residence at the Pershing Hotel throughout the late 1950s. The trio's Pershing Hotel engagement resulted in one of the most popular jazz recordings of all time, *Ahmad Jamal at the Pershing/But Not For Me*. This 1958 recording on Chicago's Chess/Argo label rose to number three on Billboard Magazine's "Hot 100" albums chart and remained there for one hundred and seven weeks. Jamal's fame spread beyond the world of the jazz cognoscenti, and his performances at the Pershing soon began to draw prestigious audiences, including stars like Billie Holiday and Sammy Davis, Jr.

Miles Davis also heard Jamal at the Pershing Hotel. He incorporated Jamal's use of space into his own playing, and he brought his pianist, Red Garland, to the Pershing to study Jamal's style. Jamal's influence can also be heard in the arrangements that Gil Evans composed for Davis's large ensemble recordings. "All of my inspiration," Davis once said, "comes from Ahmad Jamal. I live until he makes another record" (Waltzer 2001). This example shows how jazz musicians have been drawn to Chicago by its rich

collection of players, listeners, and venues, and how those influences reverberate in turn through the rest of the nation.

Chicago is home to a large and diverse population; even within the relatively small world of jazz it provides players, audiences, and work for many different kinds of jazz and any attempt to define a single style as “Chicago Jazz” inevitably fails to capture the complexity of the city’s musical life. Early in the twentieth century Chicago’s musical diversity was driven, in part, by immigration to the city. Following the Great Depression of 1929, immigration, as in the case of Sun Ra, continued to foster new styles of jazz in the city, but the increase in touring jazz musicians also brought new influences.

Musicians from New York City and elsewhere would come to town and play and record with local musicians. Charlie Parker played at the Pershing in 1950 with the Freeman brothers, Von, George, and Bruz.²⁸ These performances can be heard on the recording *Charlie Parker: Complete Pershing Club Sets*. Miles Davis, so famously influenced by Ahmed Jamal, often played Chicago, too. As Chicago guitarist Leo Blevins told me, local families often put up traveling musicians. Blevins fondly recalls hosting out of town musicians at his parents’ Bronzeville home. These kinds of arrangements helped Chicago musicians build personal and professional relationships with jazz musicians from around the country, bringing new styles to the city and bringing the city’s musical influence to the rest of the county.

Chicago produced strong homegrown players in many different jazz styles, and it generated audiences who supported and encouraged those players with their acceptance, enthusiasm, and cash. Chicago’s rapidly increasing population helped to make this

²⁸ Von and George continue to perform frequently around Chicago, and Von leads a long-running and influential jam session every Tuesday at the New Apartment Lounge.

possible. Chicago grew from a settlement of less than 100 people in 1830 to a metropolis of over 1,000,000 by 1900, and to a metropolitan area of nearly 9,000,000 people by 2001. Such a large population helped to guarantee that there would be at least a small-audience interest in live jazz. Chicago is also famous for its thriving businesses, restaurants, nightclubs, and concert halls, all providing leisure and nightlife entertainment and making the Windy City a fertile environment for jazz.

Early Jazz Education in Chicago

In the popular imagination (fostered by countless film noir soundtracks and pulp crime novels), jazz musicians are thought to live in a seedy underworld of brothels, drug addicts, and gangsters. This world of vice has often been romanticized and sanitized through a kind of Disneyland-like treatment, evident in the cartoon caricatures of a gangster and his flapper girlfriend in the logo of Andy's Jazz Club, a popular Chicago jazz venue just north of the Loop. In spite of evidence to the contrary, stories of the birth of jazz in Storyville, the famed New Orleans brothel district, still persist even among some musicians and fans I met during my fieldwork. Jazz clubs sometimes nostalgically exaggerate underworld connections. At The Green Mill, behind the bar, a bust of Al Capone looks out at the crowd. Even serious and sympathetic literary works, like James Baldwin's story "Sonny's Blues," associate jazz with vice and heroin addiction (Baldwin 1965). Early sociological studies of jazz musicians also portrayed jazz musicians as deviants (Merriam and Mack 1960; Stebbins 1968). Jazz musicians often helped perpetuate this understanding, celebrating drugs and vice in song titles like Louis Armstrong's "Muggles" (Armstrong 2002) and Art Pepper's "Smack Up" (Pepper 1960),

and in boastful tell-all (or more-than-all) biographies like Charles Mingus's *Beneath the Underdog* and Billie Holiday's *Lady Sings the Blues* (Mingus 1971; Holiday and Dufty [1956] 1992).²⁹

Vice makes for a spicy story, but community and public school music education have had a greater impact on the development of jazz in the United States. The music program at the Jones Homes for Colored Waifs in New Orleans gave Louis Armstrong his early musical training and inspiration; Cass Tech High School in Detroit has produced generations of jazz players, including Kenny Burrell, Donald Byrd, Paul Chambers, Ron Carter, and others; and Westinghouse High School in Pittsburgh produced such famous jazz musicians as Ahmad Jamal, Billy Strayhorn, Mary Lou Williams, Dodo Marmarosa, and Errol Garner. As Sherrie Tucker documents, music departments in black colleges in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s often ran popular dance bands that trained important jazz musicians. Erskine Hawkins started with the Alabama State Collegians, Horace Henderson led a dance band at Wilberforce University, and Charles Brown sang with the Prairie View Collegians. Many of these groups also produced "all-girl" bands like the Prairie View Coeds (Tucker 2000, pp. 99–100).

Chicago's public school and community music programs also nurtured budding jazz musicians. Members of the Austin High Gang, an early community of Chicago jazz musicians, got their started playing for school dances and community events in and around Austin High School on Chicago's West Side. White inner-city boys like pianist Art Hodes and clarinetist Benny Goodman received early musical training at Hull House (Kenney 1993, p. 94), and young black players like David A. Young and Lionel Hampton

²⁹ "Muggles" and "Smack" are slang terms referring to marijuana and heroin.

were educated by Major N. Clark Smith in the Chicago Defender Newsboy Band (Travis 1983, p. 488).

One of the most influential music educators in Chicago was the African American band director, Capt. Walter Dyett. Dyett, who died in 1969, taught classical, military, and jazz music from 1931 to 1961 at Wendell Phillips and DuSable High Schools, two South Side institutions serving Chicago's African American community. Even today, you can find people in South Side clubs who will gladly spend the evening telling their favorite Capt. Dyett stories from their school days. Twenty thousand students passed through Dyett's program, which included orchestras and dance bands. Among his students are Nat "King" Cole, Dorothy Donegan, Joseph Jarman, Dinah Washington, Johnny Giffin, Mwata Bowden, Eddie Harris, Jimmy Ellis, and Earma Thompson (Wang 2009; Zygmunt 2005). Many of the people interviewed for this dissertation studied also studied with Dyett. Some, like guitarist George Freeman, have become leading figures in Chicago jazz in the twenty-first century. Chicagoans continue to revere Dyett, and his memory continues to be invoked as part of the story of Chicago jazz. In 2007, the Jazz Institute of Chicago dedicated one of their Jazz in the City concerts to Walter Dyett. That concert featured performances by alumni of the Dyett bands. The Jazz Institute also bestows the Walter Dyett Lifetime Achievement Award at their annual gala. These events attest to both the strong influence of Dyett and other educators, and to the growing interest in memorializing the jazz tradition and recasting jazz musicians as heroes, community builders, and models of African American musical achievement.

Chicago's Changing Musical Market: Jazz after 1960

The Great Depression hurt the musical life of the Windy City, but jazz musicians rebounded with the economic gains brought on by industrial development as the nation prepared for the Second World War. By the late 1950s things were good for jazz musicians and fans of the music both in Chicago and abroad. "From 1945 to 1965," writes David Rosenthal, "jazz customarily attracted the ghetto's hippest young musicians.... During the late 1950s/60s hard bop was the basic idiom in the neighborhoods where such youngsters lived" (Rosenthal 1988, p. 51). The Chicago scene was lively enough that in 1957 *Ebony*, a magazine popular with African American readers, asked, "Is Chicago the new jazz capitol?" (Is Chicago the new jazz capitol? 1957, p. 96) John Steiner has documented dozens of jazz clubs on the South Side, the North Side, and in the Loop (Demlinger 2003). Concentrations of clubs could be found in the South Side business district at Cottage Grove Avenue and Sixty-third Street, in the Loop, and along Rush Street on the near North Side. The clubs continued to offer a wide variety of jazz styles. The London House and the Victory Club favored piano trios, swing, and New Orleans revival bands; clubs like the Jockey Lounge featured post-bop players and modern bands from New York (Radano 1993, 80). Work in Chicago's vibrant club scene provided a livable income for many musicians following World War II. As late as the mid-1970s, pianist Marshall Vente told me, he was able to earn a living working as a substitute pianist without ever leaving Rush Street.

But signs of a decline in jazz were on the horizon. The Blue Note, a major Chicago jazz club, closed in 1960. " 'With the coming of the '70s,' " Saxophonist Von

Freeman told John Corbett, “ ‘everything collapsed on the South Side, period’ ” (Corbett 1996, p. 29). While some musicians continued to earn a living playing jazz, others were forced to find work outside of music. Robert Shy, a Chicago drummer who toured with such luminaries as Sonny Stitt and Rahsaan Roland Kirk, was only able to earn \$40 or \$50 a night playing jazz in Chicago, and that income was not enough to support his growing family. He found a job driving a cement truck during the construction of the Dan Ryan expressway. In 1975, the significant club the London House closed its doors. By the early 1980s, most of the big clubs were gone (McDonough 1997). Many of the older musicians in Chicago today regard the 1970s as the end of Chicago’s most vibrant time for live jazz.

A number of factors account for the post-1970 decline of jazz as a profession in Chicago. During my fieldwork, musicians and fans told me stories of rising urban crime and the growing dominance of rock and other forms of popular music. And the audience for jazz simply got older: those older fans simply weren’t as interested or able to get out to hear the music. On the other hand, many younger musicians *were* becoming interested in jazz, but jazz as art, and they tended to play music that featured increasingly technical harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic vocabularies. This music appealed to connoisseurs and specialists, and was not as inviting to broad audiences only casually acquainted with jazz history or techniques.

The decline of jazz corresponds to other major developments in the demographic and economic make-up of Chicago. Following World War II, whites began leaving Chicago and moving to the suburbs. When they left, the industries and resources that served them followed. As Janet Abu-Lughod reports, the white population of Chicago

declined from sixty-eight percent in 1950, to fifty-one percent in 1960, to thirty-nine percent in 1970 (Abu-Lughod 1999, p. 220). University of Chicago sociologist William Julius Wilson reports that white flight was accompanied by a loss of jobs, citing that between 1967 and 1987 the City of Chicago lost sixty percent of its manufacturing jobs—a total of 520,000 jobs (Wilson 1996, pp. 29–30). New jobs have been created, but, from the 1970s into the 1990s, sixty percent of the new jobs created in the Chicago metro area have been created in the Northwest suburbs of Du Page and Cook counties where blacks make up less than two percent of the population (Wilson 1996, p. 37). While race is a key factor in the changing labor patterns in Chicago, both Abu-Lughod and Wilson point out that the processes of globalization and other large structural changes in the national and international economy also figure into this equation. What is important for the history of jazz in Chicago is that local jazz musicians' employment troubles appear to be related to the troubles faced by other laborers in the city, with those troubles experienced most acutely by African American workers.

Alternatives to the Club Scene

Getting Your Head Chops Together: Players go to College

Chicago jazz musicians active after 1960 took increasing advantage of educational opportunities made available at local colleges and universities. Roosevelt University, the venue for many of Joe Segal's early jam sessions, helped train saxophonist and composer Anthony Braxton, who attended college on the GI Bill as did many of his contemporaries (Radano 1993, p. 60; Szwed 2000, p. 169). Braxton also studied for a time at Wilson Junior College where he met other up-and-coming jazz

musicians, such as Jack DeJohnette, Richard “Ari” Brown, Henry Threadgill, Joseph Jarman, Malachi Favors, and Roscoe Mitchell—all of whom would achieve local, national, and even international fame as jazz musicians (Radano 1993, p. 54). The jazz program at the University of Illinois at Champaign also nurtured young players. Begun by John Garvey in the 1950s, this program trained many jazz players and educators including Jeff Lindberg, co-founder and Artistic Director of the Chicago Jazz Orchestra (Jeff Lindberg: in his own words 2005, p. 5).

The AACM: Jazz Collectives and Concert Halls

As Chicago entered the 1960s, many jazz musicians were working in a vibrant and diverse club scene supported by a robust post-war industrial economy. But that situation changed rapidly. White workers and employers were leaving the city. As blacks made up a greater percentage of the city’s population, new ideas about what it means to be black began to shape the activities of culture workers including jazz musicians. In this environment, younger musicians struggled to find work. Some black musicians saw this struggle as the result of racism, but white players also had trouble finding work. And changing musical tastes were drawing audience to new venues as well: jazz musicians were competing with rock musicians who were often willing to work for less money.³⁰ As a reaction to disappearing work and perceived artistic repression by the market place,

³⁰ My own experiences in the music marketplace indicate that then, as now, rock musicians probably had less training and were less organized as a labor force. Frequently young and without families to support, these musicians are often willing to work for less, displacing older more professionally oriented and financially obligated musicians. Though often portrayed as oppositional, rock musicians can be understood as part of the de-skilling and fragmenting of the labor force that that is a significant part of labor relations in industrial and post-industrial capitalism.

Chicago experienced a growth in various musician organizations and institutions that provided alternatives to the commercial music club scene.

The Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) is one of the most influential institutions to emerge out of 1960s Chicago, and it has received more attention than any other development in Chicago jazz since the 1920s (Radano 1993; Litweiler 1984; Wilmer 1977; Jost 1974; Radano 1992; Lewis 1996, 2008). The AACM grew out of a lack of venues for young African American musicians, a growing interest among those players in African music and spirituality, and a frustration with the perceived limitations imposed by both the Chicago club scene in particular and by general ideas about professionalism, functional harmony, and performance practices that AACM founders associated with European music.

In response to the limitations of the professional music scene in Chicago, members of the AACM instituted their own music network. Formed in May of 1965, founding members Muhal Richard Abrams, Jodie Christian, Steve McCall, and Phil Cohran held weekly open rehearsals where members played their own compositions. They also hosted concerts featuring AACM groups, and they provided music instruction to young people on the South Side. Members paid dues; they were required to participate in a minimum number of AACM events; and they were encouraged to give solo concerts. Many of these practices continue into the twenty-first century and still have an important impact on young Chicago musicians like Cory Brooks and Dee Alexander, who both received national attention for their strong and inventive continuation of AACM practices.

The AACM grew out of the Experimental Band begun by pianist Muhal Richard Abrams in 1962. That band was formed to play its members' compositions, and while the group was open to different styles, the ensemble came to favor long multi-sectional compositions, instrumental variety, sudden changes in rhythm, dynamics, and texture, and obscured tonality (Radano 1993, p. 79). But this was more than just another rehearsal band. Abrams exhorted members to develop themselves beyond music; he urged saxophonist Joseph Jarman to write poetry and he encouraged saxophonist Roscoe Mitchell to paint. "Abrams," writes Ron Radano, "led the young Chicagoans down a path of discovery, toward self-fulfillment, self-awareness, and self-respect" (Radano 1993, p. 81). AACM members were opposed to the commercialization of music. Nevertheless, they were concerned with finding ways for musicians to make a living from their art. Trumpeter Lester Bowie, the second president of the AACM, told Tom Livingston in 1988, "The first thing you have to do is learn to feed yourself with your horn" (Livingston 2001, p. 8). The AACM continues its musical and social mission to this day, providing training, performances, and support for its members.

The AACM has influenced the Chicago jazz scene in several ways. It provided training for young musicians; it introduced students to African musical practices that emphasize the collective enactment of music's ritual and incantatory functions; and it acquainted its members with the improvisational practices and concepts of European avant-garde musicians. The AACM not only nurtured local musicians, it also drew musicians to the city. Lester Bowie, for instance, came with his wife Fontella Bass, to work as R&B musician, but soon became an important member of the AACM. The influence that drew players also flowed out of Chicago, influencing a host of other black

musical collectives like the Black Artists Group in St. Louis, Strata-East in Detroit, and Boston's Society for the Creatively Concerned (Wilmer 1977, p. 114–115). This influence also extended to Europe, when several AACM groups, most notably The Art Ensemble of Chicago, took up residence in Paris in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The influence of the AACM was further enhanced by a series of AACM recordings produced by Chuck Nessa for Robert Koester's Chicago record label, Delmark Records. In the contemporary Chicago music scene, The AACM continues to be a vital force, training young players in terms of its musical approach. Mwata Bowden and other AACM leaders teach at the University of Chicago and other local colleges. AACM members participate in many local performances, most notably at The Velvet Lounge, owned by AACM member and saxophonist Fred Anderson. Pianist Jodie Christianson continues to perform and record, often with a band made up of young AACM players. During my fieldwork in Chicago, I often went to hear AACM founding member Kelan Phil Cohran perform at a Thai restaurant about a mile from my apartment.

Organizing Jazz: Institutes, Societies, and Festivals

While the AACM served the needs of African American modernists, the Jazz Institute of Chicago (JIC), founded in 1969, served a more diverse community. The Institute's co-founders included Joe Segal, owner of the Jazz Showcase; Harriett Choice, a music writer for the Chicago Tribune; Bob Koester, owner of Delmark Records; Art Hodes and Franz Jackson, long-time performers in Chicago; and Muhal Richard Abrams,

a performer and founding member of the AACM (*About the JIC* 2009).³¹ According to Richard Wang, the JIC grew out of the local “hot clubs” that fans and players formed in the 1930s and 1940s (Wang 1997, p. 42). The JIC continues to serve jazz fans and players in Chicago, hosting a wide variety of concerts and events that bring the music to fans who might not ordinarily seek out small jazz clubs or late night performances. In turn, JIC events continue to provide work for local jazz musicians. Today, though, many jazz musicians have no ties to the JIC. Although many of the fans I met were members, I also met several musicians who hadn’t heard of the JIC. Any idea why? The Institute currently programs the annual Chicago Jazz Fest and other highly visible events. These events draw tourists from around the county, they generate important revenue for the city, and they have led the JIC to forge important links to the city and to corporate sponsors.

More than likely, it was Joe Segal and his actions that led to the formation of the JIC. Segal and his brother, Wayne, began organizing public jazz jam sessions in the late 1940s. Joe Segal started with public jam sessions at his school, Roosevelt University.³² Segal ran jam sessions throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s at various locations including Roosevelt University: The Gate of Horn folk club, The Plugged Nickel, and Mother Blues. He and his son now run the Jazz Showcase, a club featuring nationally renowned jazz artists backed up by local rhythm sections. Segal and his son also run

³¹ Muhal Richard Abrams’ role in founding the Jazz Institute of Chicago is important to note. The AACM has been regarded as an African American separatist organization, but Abrams’ participation in the JIC demonstrates that African American musicians were interested in promoting ethnic solidarity and in reaching across racial divides.

³² Segal’s career is another example of how jazz musicians and promoters benefited from the G.I. Bill following World War II. Other Chicago musicians, like Anthony Braxton, were able to pursue music studies because they were eligible for GI Bill support.

Joe's Bebop Café, a restaurant on Navy Pier that features many local jazz musicians in a more casual, tourist-friendly setting.

In the 1970s, musicians and music promoters instituted several annual concerts that developed into major jazz festivals; these concerts and festivals helped shape the meaning, practice, and consumption of jazz in Chicago. Huge festivals transformed the intimate interaction of musicians and listeners in small clubs into spectacles where massed audiences gazed up across relatively vast distances at musicians enshrined on elevated stages. The concerts often featured jazz stars with national reputations rather than local players, and they didn't just draw audiences from the local neighborhoods, but from the mostly white suburbs as well, and eventually from around the county and beyond.

In 1974, musicians and promoters came together to hold the first annual Duke Ellington Concert in the Grant Park band shell on the shore of Lake Michigan, a short walk from The Loop. The primary organizer of this event was Geraldine De Haas, an African American singer and concert promoter who continues to be an important force in Chicago. In 1978, a number of Chicago musicians collaborated with Chicago's Council of Fine Art to organize the first annual John Coltrane Memorial Concert, which was also held in Grant Park. In 1979, the JIC organized the first Annual Jazz Fair. The JIC and the Mayor's Office of Special Events also combined several smaller festivals in 1979, to form the first Chicago Jazz Festival, which was held at the Petrillo Music Shell in Grant Park. The first festival drew 125,000 people and featured one evening devoted to Duke Ellington's music and another devoted to John Coltrane's.

As David Grazian has argued, cultural products once associated with vice and otherwise marginalized people have become important elements in constructing Chicago as a culturally rich and diverse tourist destination (Grazian 2003, p. 197).³³ Grazian makes his points with blues music, but the governmental involvement in the Chicago Jazz Festival (as well as involvement of corporate sponsors) shows that this is also the case for jazz music. Indeed, the Chicago Jazz Festival draws many people to the Loop each summer, bringing a financial boon to local restaurants, hotels, parking ramps, and other businesses that serve the needs of festival goers who also patronize numerous after-festival concerts, parties, and local venues. The festival also makes Chicago appealing to well-educated, highly skilled professionals, thus encouraging the kind of work force that will keep Chicago viable in the growing global economy.

The official face of Chicago Jazz, represented by the Chicago Jazz Festival, has not gone uncontested. Geraldine De Haas, the founder of Jazz Unites, Inc., told me that the Chicago Jazz Fest mainly serves the interests of white Chicagoans living in the suburbs, and that it neglects the interests of African American South-Siders whom she feels have a greater claim on the music. She has continued to organize musical events that offer an alternative to the Chicago Jazz Fest. In 1981, she founded Jazz Unites, and she was instrumental in organizing the first Duke Ellington Memorial Concert in 1974. Jazz Unites sponsors the annual JazzFest Heritage Weekend at the South Shore Cultural Center. The Heritage Weekend tends to feature many South Side players and is attended

³³ In New Orleans, the meaning and history of jazz has also been reconstructed to serve the needs of tourism and civic boosterism. For discussions of this phenomenon see *Authentic New Orleans: Tourism, Culture, and Race in the Big Easy* by Kevin Fox Gotham and *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and the Transformation of the Crescent City* by Jonathan Mark Souther (Gotham 2007; Souther 2006).

by both local South Side residents and former residents returning to visit family and friends. Jazz Unites brings the music back to the neighborhood in a sense, but by its very name indicates that the organization participates in the process of reclaiming jazz in the process of manufacturing heritage and building and validating community.

Constructing a jazz heritage involves the construction of a jazz canon. Two annual concerts sponsored by Jazz Unites—the Duke Ellington concert and the Historical/Musical Tribute to Marian Anderson and Mahalia Jackson—certainly contribute to the process of canon formation. Chicago is also home to several repertory ensembles that also contribute to the process of canon formation in the city. Composer and conductor William Russo founded the Chicago Jazz Ensemble (CJE) in 1965: the CJE was the first ensemble other than the Duke Ellington Orchestra itself to perform scores by Duke Ellington. Russo’s ensemble continued its mission “to create and perform world-class Jazz (sic) in Chicago and internationally, by preserving and playing the historic contributions of past Jazz masters and by commissioning and presenting new works” (*About us* 2009). The CJE performs works by Bix Beiderbecke, for example, along with works by Jelly Roll Morton, Duke Ellington, and Gil Evans; it has reenacted Benny Goodman’s 1938 Carnegie Hall Concert, and the band has toured Europe under the direction of Jon Faddis. The organization continues its mission of innovation and preservation, performing new works and jazz classics at its annual American Heritage Jazz Series, the Made in Chicago jazz series at Chicago’s Millennium Park, the Jazz at Symphony Center series, and the Ravinia Festival. The construction of jazz as a national and a local heritage by Jazz Unites and the Chicago Jazz Ensemble domesticates the music and runs counter to the construction of jazz in some of the city’s clubs. For

example, a local club, The Green Mill, plays up the legendary connections between Chicago jazz and organized crime with its bust of Al Capone behind the bar. The CJE, as it describes itself, seeks “to entertain and inform diverse audiences with engaging and affordable concerts, discussions and special events, including family-friendly programs” (*About us* 2009).

In 1978, Jeff Lindberg and the late Steve Jensen formed a second repertory band in Chicago, the Chicago Jazz Orchestra (CJO). Originally known as the Jazz Members Big Band, this ensemble also presents works from the jazz canon, performing both original scores and transcriptions of classic recordings (Jeff Lindberg: in his own words 2005, p. 6). Like the CJE, the CJO often performs with jazz stars like Herbie Hancock, Kenny Burrell, and others at local festivals, national venues like the Kennedy Center for the Arts, and in Europe. Both the CJO and the CJE benefit from corporate and civic sponsors, but while both organizations provide work for a handful of Chicago jazz musicians, their impact on the everyday life and livelihood of most jazz listeners and players in the city seems negligible; they, like the large festivals, seem to operate in a sphere apart from the city’s regular club scene.

Radio and Recording

Volumes could be written on jazz recording and radio in Chicago, and jazz musicians have often benefited from the recording and broadcast industries in the city. Chicago has been a home for important jazz recordings throughout the history of jazz. These recordings include Louis Armstrong’s Hot Five and Hot Seven recordings released on the Okeh label in 1926 and 1927, the Duke Ellington recording sessions at Universal

Recording Studios in the 1950s, the ground breaking recordings of the Art Ensemble of Chicago on the Delmark label in the 1960s, and a host of contemporary recordings on Southport and several other smaller labels. In addition, Vee-Jay Records, Chess Records and a host of other smaller labels have provided studio work in other genres for jazz players.

Radio helped promote jazz and jazz musicians by growing local tastes for jazz and sometimes playing records of local musicians themselves. From the 1940s to the 1970s, Al “the Old Swingmaster” Benson brought blues and jazz into the homes of Chicagoans. At first popular among African Americans, Benson eventually became one of Chicago’s leading DJs. He worked with many Chicago musicians, recording them, broadcasting them, and presenting them in concert (Behling 2008).³⁴ Another important radio personality was Oscar Brown, Jr., who worked as a news announcer and radio actor. He also wrote poetry, plays, and lyrics, often set to famous jazz melodies like “Afro Blue” and “So What” (Brown 2005). Brown is still revered in Chicago, and local musicians, including his daughters Maggie and Africa Brown, continue to perform his songs.³⁵

Record companies and radio stations sometimes worked together to promote local musicians. Al Benson recorded local talent and played those recordings on his shows. In 1962, Leonard Chess, co-owner of Chicago’s Chess Records, went so far as to buy two radio stations—WVON AM and WHFC FM. These stations provided an excellent outlet for recordings made at Chess. The Chess label mainly recorded blues and rhythm and

³⁴ For more on African Americans in radio see *Voice Over: The Making of Black Radio* by William Barlow (Barlow 1999).

³⁵ For more information on Oscar Brown, Jr. see *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain’t: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties* by Scott Saul (Saul 2003).

blues music, but its subsidiary label, Argo, featured many Chicago jazz artists; even blues and rhythm and blues recordings include many local jazz musicians as sidemen (Cohodas 2001, p. 213–216).

Several radio stations continue to broadcast jazz in Chicago. Mike Jeffers, a Chicago drummer and the publisher of “*Chicago Jazz Magazine*,” plays local jazz recordings on WNTD AM, with his show also available as a podcast. Public Radio stations WBEZ FM and WDCB FM feature a variety of jazz programs, as does WNUR FM broadcasting from Northwestern University and WHPK broadcasting from the University of Chicago. WHPK often features local DJs who discuss and play recordings of local jazz musicians. In this way, radio broadcast has become an extension of the community of live jazz fans in the city.

Chicago Jazz at the End of the Twentieth Century

Trends that began in the 1960s and 1970s continued throughout the last decades of the century. Jazz now plays a larger role in colleges and universities. Music programs at Roosevelt University, Columbia College, Northwestern University, and other area schools continue to produce well-trained players even as demand for those players diminishes. These programs now offer specialized undergraduate and graduate degrees in jazz performance. Jazz has also entered the academy in other ways; the Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago opened the Chicago Jazz Archive in 1976, and Columbia College is home to the Center for Black Music Research where several important jazz collections are archived. These trends illustrate the continuing

transformation of jazz from a popular or underground music into an art form preserved and savored in recital halls, museums, and cultural centers.

In spite of its growing prestige as an academic subfield and a cultural artifact, jazz in Chicago, according to most local jazz musicians, is in decline. Famous mid-century clubs like The Plugged Nickel and The London House have closed; so have many others. By 1992, the Chicago Jazz Festival, which had grown to seven days, had shrunk to only two (Choice 1985; Reich 1992a), and programmers conceded to the demands of corporate sponsors by programming fusion groups like Spyro Gyra (Reich 1992). Decline in the popularity of jazz and a declining interest in live music continued to eat away at the jazz industry.

Nevertheless, throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and into the present, Chicago remains a good city for jazz musicians and fans alike, at least compared to smaller midwestern cities like Detroit, Ann Arbor, Minneapolis, and Milwaukee. And by 1993, things were looking better for the Chicago Jazz Festival. Programmers added a third day, returned it to its popular Labor Day slot on the city's festival calendar, and resumed their policy of programming avant-garde and mainstream jazz rather than fusion (Reich 1992b, p. 28). Corporate and governmental support continues to keep the festival vital, and the city and corporate sponsors also support concerts at the Chicago Cultural Center, museums, and community centers across the city. A number of jazz clubs also continue to thrive. The Green Mill and The Jazz Show Case still feature live jazz as they have for many decades, and Andy's has been presenting live jazz since the late 1970s. Other clubs like Pops for Champagne, which opened in 1985, and Pete Miller's and Green Dolphin Street, which opened in the 1990s, now present jazz almost every night. In addition, many clubs

offering a variety of musical genres, such as The Empty Bottle and The Hot House, include jazz performances in their regular schedules. Apart from Chicago's major music clubs, numerous coffee houses, corner bars, and restaurants also offer jazz from time to time. Fans in Chicago can hear live jazz any night of the week, and, between teaching, playing with rock bands, performing corporate gigs, and appearing at jazz clubs, many jazz musicians can still earn a living in "the city that works."

Chapter 3

Playing Standards on the North Side: Quiet Virtuosity, Professional Identity, and Mainstream Jazz



Figure 3.1 Jim Pierce and the band at Basta Pasta

In Chicago's northern neighborhoods and suburbs, musicians gather for weekly jam sessions: Monday nights at Bills' Blues, Wednesdays at Delaney and Murphy's, Thursdays at The Chambers, and every once in a while at Basta Pasta. Players make the North Side rounds. After his shift at the warehouse, Jim Pierce grabs his guitar and heads to Scott Holman's session at Delaney and Murphy's. He often attends the session at The

Chambers as well. He usually sits with his friend, trumpeter Dave Hibbard. Robert Shy—Scott’s regular drummer—usually drives down from the South Side and will be seen almost hidden behind his drums at Delaney and Murphy’s or Basta Pasta. Jarrod Buffe sits in on tenor when he can, but repairing instruments all day sometimes leaves him too tired. He always sounds great, but he complains that his day gig really cuts into his practice time. And Loren, retired after forty years of jingle work, has only missed one session that I know of—when he was in the hospital. Nick Tountas often stops by The Chambers later in the evening: it’s on the way home from his regular Thursday night gig. He doesn’t always feel like playing, but he likes to hang with the guys. Though most of the participants are instrumentalists (and men), Mary Ann LiPuma, Claudia Stephanski, and Mark Pompe sometimes sing at the Chambers and Lady T will sing with Jim Pierce wherever he happens to be playing. After day jobs and early gigs, sometimes after a quick dinner with the family or as a break from that life, they come, week after week, maintaining friendships and working relationships, hunting for gigs; each renewing that sense of him or herself as a particular kind of person and musician that, real or imaginary, can only be fostered by playing well with others. So for a few hours in the evening these musicians push aside some tables and swing, reconfigure space and time, affirm themselves, and make a little corner of the city their own.

The people I am writing about here all participate to some extent in a shared network of activities. Their connections, like those of my subjects in following chapters, are neither so all encompassing to constitute “worlds” nor even so constant to constitute scenes or tribe-like communities. Instead, they, in Ruth Finnegan’s word, travel a network of urban pathways, regularly gathering at the same intersections for brief

moments of collective activity (Finnegan [1989] 2007, p. 297–326). Like Michel de Certeau's walker in the city, Scott Holman, Robert Shy, Dave Hibbard, and the others travel these paths in their own way, turning them to their own purposes (Certeau 1984, p. 91–110). Walking in rhythm through Chicago these musicians construct individual and communal identities that are partial, fleeting, and intensified in the moments of performance. None of the people I am discussing here meet at every intersection, and all travel other routes every day, but on a weekly basis, most of these musicians will be found at several of the main intersections together playing into existence selves that are united in shared musical practices, repertoires, and professional commitments, as well as modes of emotional and bodily comportment, economics, mobility, and ways of social interaction.

Situated Musical Practice: Real People, Places, and Times

The musical practices uniting these participants occurred primarily at several locations on Chicago's North Side and the neighboring suburbs. My primary fieldwork sites were Delaney and Murphy's in the Arlington Heights Sheraton Hotel, The Chambers in Niles, and Basta Pasta in Edison Park, but the musicians I played with also participate in many other musical activities around the city. The most accomplished musicians also played at the main jazz clubs like Andy's and the Jazz Showcase in downtown Chicago, Green Dolphin Street and The Green Mill that were slightly farther north, and Pete Miller's in Evanston. Some of the less accomplished players frequented the jam session at Bill's Blues, which is also in Evanston, and several participants

frequented the Jazz Vespers at the Lutheran Church of the Resurrection in Niles. Most participants also worked outside of this informal network.

The musical practices I want to examine here are not clearly separate from other musical activities. Indeed, the pathways traveled by some of the participants are international while others are limited to the Chicago area. At the heart of my fieldwork on the North Side are the sessions at Delaney and Murphy's and The Chambers. As people travel further, either geographically or stylistically from those two intersections they enter into other situations that have their own local practices and meanings.

The participants in these events differ in some ways, but most share important characteristics. They are mainly white male instrumentalists between the ages of forty and seventy-five with at least some college education. Most have worked as professional musicians for many years. Others have been very active amateurs with periods of professional activity. They tend to be financially successful people with cars, homes, families, and jobs. Scott Earl Holman (the leader of the Delaney and Murphy's session) and Jon Bany (the leader of the Chambers session) personify these traits. Both have worked as musicians for most of their lives, they associate with many of the city's finest players, and they draw those players to their sessions. This, in turn, draws others looking to play with mature, highly skilled jazz musicians.

Modern ethnographers have sought to distance themselves from those who write about others in exoticizing and demeaning ways (Pratt 1986, p. 19). When ethnographers write about people who look and act much like themselves and their own families, there is less risk of writing exoticizing accounts of human behavior. But, in my account of white middle-class musicians, the possibility of exoticism still remains as a kind of

palimpsest beneath the assumptions of non-exotic normality. “It is typical,” observes Guthrie Ramsey, “for a musicologist, or in some cases even a music theorist, working on any form of black music to be considered at least ‘part’ ethnomusicologist” (Ramsey Jr. 2003, p. 19). Working with white musicians like myself, I faced the opposite problem: it was easy to forget that I was doing ethnography, and the danger in writing about these people was not othering them, but normalizing them, particularly in relation to other communities I write about in this dissertation. But these people do not represent the norm for early twenty-first jazz practice in Chicago and a sympathetic account of their practices should not be read as a special endorsement of those practices over and above the practices of other Chicago jazz musicians.

While white male instrumentalists are in the majority, non-whites, women, and singers regularly participate and in fact a few are key players in this community. Robert Shy, an African-American drummer is the primary percussionist at Delaney and Murphy’s, and he works regularly with Scott Earl Holman. Mary Ann LiPuma, an African American singer and Claudia Stephanski, another singer, both regularly participate in the session at the Chambers. There are no overt attempts to discourage women or blacks from participating in these events, and even though Bany’s session is listed as a NoAm/ProJam, a few weak players usually participated. Jon Bany and the regulars welcome singers and weaker players, but if there are too many of them, regulars do begin to grumble among themselves. When singers forget about the jam session protocols, Rusty will remind them, smiling and shouting, “Give the drummer some!” but usually players are more subtle about maintaining the session’s standards.

The musical and social practices I observed at these sessions do not represent jazz as “an infinite art,” or “America’s Music.” In fact, they do not even represent the activities of all white jazz musicians on the North Side of Chicago. There are other sessions with other musical standards, just as there are many musicians who belong to other communities and never attend jam sessions at all. The musical practice found at Delaney and Murphy’s and The Chambers are part of a geographically and historically specific moment. Most session regulars grew up with bebop and the American Song Book. They practice jazz in a time and place where blacks and women feel comfortable venturing alone into the community of senior white men. But it is not a time when women and blacks are comfortable or concerned enough to attend these sessions in numbers great enough to alter the gendered and racialized practices in play there. It is also a time when the leading participants are largely unaffected by post-bop jazz developments or the influences of rock, hip-hop and other recent popular music styles. It is easy to imagine that some day soon even the most committed mainstream jazz player will have some trace of hip-hop or rock in his or her playing, but in the early twenty-first century on the North Side of Chicago, this is not yet the case.



I first became acquainted with this community of musicians when I met Scott and Robert in September 2004; they were playing piano and drum duets at their regular Basta Pasta gig, and Scott invited me to his Wednesday night jam session at Delaney and Murphy's. Scott had started the session several months earlier. I continued to participate regularly until February of 2005 when Delaney and Murphy's stopped hosting the session. Scott continued to hold the session sporadically at Basta Pasta, and I continued to participate there until April of 2005. Scott had hosted sessions prior to the one at Delaney and Murphy's, including one at The Chambers. Shortly after learning of Scott's session I also visited The Chambers. At first I only went occasionally, but I began to go nearly every Thursday until March 2, 2006, especially after Scott's session ended. While Scott is not presently hosting a session, Bany continues to lead the jam at The Chambers. The participants in these sessions regularly met on Wednesdays at Scott's session and

Thursdays at Jon Bany's. Some players only went to one or the other, but many went to both. Some also met Monday's at Bill's Blues³⁶ and others played regular weekend gigs together.



Figure 3.3 Jon Bany at The Chambers

A Night at the Session

I woke up on Wednesday, October 6, 2004 already thinking about Scott's session that evening. He sent an email thanking everyone for attending the previous week and reminding us of the session that evening. The week before I'd screwed up my nerve and

³⁶ The session at Bill's Blues is quite different from the sessions at Delaney and Murphy's or The Chambers. While some participants are good players, the general skill level of participants is lower. The best players from Delaney and Murphy's and The Chambers do not attend this session.

attended, guitar in hand, but so had several other guitarists. Since they were well-known players, they had played first. Disappointed and relieved, I had another week to prepare for my initial participation. Scott prefers to have good musicians play; they please the crowd and their presence raises the status of Scott and his session. Though I had been sidelined on my first visit to Delaney and Murphy's, Scott was friendly. He even brought me a plate of food. I felt welcome to return with my guitar the following week.

While some of the players the week before were very good, I was encouraged to hear several players who weren't. Weaker players gave me a sense of comfort, a relief that there will be a place for me. Though the session's prevailing philosophy is that everyone is welcome to play at his or her own level, I, like other participants, was often keenly aware of my own rank, and found good players intimidating. This feeling would change as I continued to participate in jam sessions and I gained a better sense of how I would fit in and what my status would be. But establishing one's status is stressful.

Concerns over one's ranking are largely self-imposed. Other participants rarely comment or judge, except to say the obligatory, "Hey man, you sound good."³⁷ Sessions, unlike jazz performances at clubs, fostered interactions that brought participants into fellowship with one another. I attended dozens of performances at clubs like the Green Mill, Andy's, and Steve Millers, and clubgoers rarely reached out to me. At the clubs people either focused solely on the stage or they sat in a space made private, a circle of

³⁷ Musicians used phrases like "Hey man, you sound good" to encourage sociality in much the same way that other people often ask, "Hey, how're you doing?" The appropriate response is, of course, "All right. You?" Literal interpretation of the question followed by a litany of ills misses the point of the verbal interaction. The proper response to "Hey man, you sound good" is something like "Thanks. You too." One player, joking on the formulaic use of "Hey man, you sound good," became famous for saying, "Hey man, you sound good. How'd I sound?"

friends enclosed within the circle of candle light on their table. Only the wait staff moved about the room. Pathways in the club served as conduits along which waitresses transported drinks and cash between patrons and the bar, but these pathways did not connect patrons to each other. At Scott's session the layout was much different. People rarely arrived in groups. Instead they arrived alone, ready to join several larger groups already in play. These overlapping groups might be categorized as "Scott's friends," "jazz musicians," or "jazz fans." People already shared at least a few imaginary and face-to-face relationships. Real and imaginary connections led to a change in the room's geography. Tables were pushed together. New pathways were opened so players could move back and forth between their tables and the stage. These pathways facilitated social interaction and sometimes disrupted the path connecting customer and cash register.

On my first trip to the session at Delaney and Murphy's, when Scott brought me a plate of food, he was welcoming me, but also establishing himself as the person in charge. This gesture opened a door to interaction with others in the room. Sharing food is a gesture of fellowship that also presents an opportunity to enact new needs and obligations. With a dripping plate balanced on my knees, I had been welcomed but I was in trouble. Sam, recognizing me as a fellow jazz fan, a friend of Scott (and a person about to have a lapful of barbecue sauce) offered me a place at his table. So I sat with Sam and his wife Anita. We talked, ate, and listened together, and I began to learn the ways of this small musical community.

Sam and Anita are Italian Americans who have lived most of their lives in the Chicago metro area. Sam talks with the ruff and tumble bluster of a born Chicagoan, a way of speaking that I came to love for its humor, vitality, and lack of pretension. His

voice reminded me of my own grandfathers and great uncles who grew up in farming communities around Milwaukee and Chicago and went on to work in foundries, construction, trucking, and law enforcement. They were men who liked to dance, drink beer, and complain about politics; they liked to hang drywall, pour concrete, and usher in church.

Many have observed that jazz is a man's game in which the performance of African American masculinity and the suppression of the awareness of women's involvement figure heavily (Gabbard 1995; Tucker 2000; Early 2002). My own fieldwork on the North Side both supports and extends these observations. I learned that jazz is a man's game not only for players, but also for listeners. Sam is a good example of something I encountered several times—men perform authoritative masculinity by playing jazz, but also by displaying their knowledge of clubs, recordings, and players. Sam, for example, told me of his 300 78-rpm swing recordings,³⁸ and we talked about his memories of going to Chicago jazz clubs since the 1950s. He told these stories to show me who he was. I never mentioned my research; all I had to do was sit down. Sam talked at length about Chicago clubs asking if I knew this or that club. He told me of memorable events, like the time he went to hear George Shearing. While George was playing a loud group of people passed through the room, so he said into the microphone, "What herd was that, that just went by?" This story says a lot about how Sam understands himself.

³⁸ Perhaps the best example of masculine mastery of jazz through ownership and consumption of recorded music is Gunther Schuller who claims to have listened to 30,000 recordings as the basis for his monumental *Classic Jazz*. This also demonstrates how the imaginary community of jazz listeners has held sway in jazz scholarship and criticism. In Sam's case, we see how membership in imaginary and face-to-face communities exists simultaneously in the same person. We also see how Sam is in good company and how he participates in a long-standing mode of appreciating jazz and deriving status from the music.

He's a jazz fan, a guy who knows the cool clubs, has heard the cool players, and who knows how to behave and appreciate fine jazz. He's a person and not a member of the ignorant "herd." By telling me this story, he implied that I, too, was someone who knew how to behave and who could appreciate what George Shearing had said.

When Sam positioned himself as a knowing listener, he was not simply bragging (though in the same breath he noted proudly that he was a seventy-five year old man with an eight year old grandchild). Rather, he spoke warmly about his past, locating our evening of listening together within a long and happy life of being a jazz fan. Certainly there was some nostalgia in this: we didn't talk of waiting in line, getting bad service, arguing with others. Sam had edited loose ends out of the story, creating an idealized narrative of his life that gave him a sense of accomplishment, control, and belonging.

In some accounts of jam sessions, there is a sense that jazz fans and players are purists or that jazz is part of a deviant subculture (see Chapter One). However, as Sam and Anita demonstrate, attending shows and sessions is, for them, a family activity. They go out together, they drink moderately, and they chat with the people around them. And they don't just do this at jazz performances. Their enjoyment of jazz is part of their general enjoyment of going out together to listen and dance. Sam confided that he and Anita used to dance mostly to swing and mambo, though Anita also liked to polka. Sam wasn't as fond of polka, but he polkaed with Anita until he grew too old. Polka, of course, is an important music in Chicago (Keil, Keil, and Blau 1992) though it is mostly associated with Chicago's Polish community.³⁹ In this instance, Sam demonstrates the

³⁹ Though Chicago's Polish community is most closely associated with polka music, the city is also home to a number of Polish jazz musicians and several frequent the jam

limited usefulness of linking ethnicity and music in Chicago. He is an Italian American who loves jazz that is generally thought of as black music, and he dances mambo, associated with the Latino community, as well as the polka associated with the city's Polish community. While ethnic affiliations often say much about musical taste, urban environments like Chicago show that people choose the paths they travel and they are capable of traveling many different paths. Race and ethnicity make some paths more accessible, but they aren't necessarily the deciding factors.

Preparing for the Session

I woke up Wednesday morning thinking about the previous week and worrying about what I'd do at Scott's session that evening. Would I make any friends or convince the others that I was a real player? Would I get a gig out of the session? Would I know the songs called by Dave Hibbard or Loren Binford, two of the senior players? Would I even have the courage to lug my guitar into the bar? I had been welcomed, but actually sitting in still filled me with anxiety.

Not every player feels anxious about participating in these sessions. Well-established working musicians, and long-term participants like Nick Tountas and Rusty Jones feel at home. They have already achieved their status as musicians, professionals, and social insiders, a status that players in my position strive for. Even musicians with social and cultural capital in other communities worry about reasserting their artistic and professional identities in new situations, and they commit themselves to focused preparation for their participation in this new community just as I do.

session at The Chambers. Chicago's most famous Polish jazz musician is Grazyna Auguscik.

Preparation, as Ruth Finnegan explains, is part of a complex of three basic conditions found in most performances. “There has to be some audience wider than the performers themselves,” she writes. “The performance has to be set apart in socially recognized ways. And it has to be worked up to through a set of prior activities” (Finnegan [1989] 2007, pp. 143–144). Finnegan observes that, while these general conditions are widespread, their details vary widely. Understanding preparations for a performance reveals much about the meaning of that performance. Musicians construct their identities through their preparations, and the adoption of particular ways of preparing for performance also prepares them as members of a particular community. In other words, preparing to perform is another path that musicians travel on their way to performance.

That Wednesday, my trip to the session began when I woke up, made coffee, and got out my guitar. I can play many tunes, and I can read anything in *The Real Book*, but, as I had learned the week before, none of the players at Scott’s session used *The Real Book*. For them, knowing a tune meant memorizing that tune. I had memorized dozens of tunes, but one piano player told me he could probably play about five hundred songs without looking at a chart.⁴⁰ Knowing hundreds of tunes is the result of decades of playing jazz and is another indication of the age and experience of the participants. Most players were in their fifties, sixties, and seventies and had been playing professionally for most of their adult lives. The piano player who had memorized the five hundred-songs worked frequently accompanying singers, so he knew a specialized repertoire and could play any song in any key to suit the range of the singers with whom he worked. Songs in

⁴⁰ Jazz musicians usually refer to printed music as “charts.”

the body of pop tunes and show tunes know as “Great American Song Book” follow similar forms, so the five hundred songs in the pianist’s repertoire were based for the most part on a couple dozen basic structures like “rhythm changes” and the blues. Even so, the pianist’s repertoire was huge. But huge as it was, it wasn’t unusual. Most players at the North Side sessions seemed to know any tune called, and they took pleasure in calling the most obscure tunes.

On the Wednesday morning before the session, as I drank my coffee, I reviewed my own repertoire thinking of appropriate tunes to play, like “Stella by Starlight,” which is the kind of tune that would work at Scott’s session; it is harmonically complex, Miles Davis recorded it with his first quintet, and it feels good played “in the pocket.”⁴¹ People at the session often called tunes like “Stella.” For instance, at the previous session Dave Hibbard had called “It Could Happen To You.” I’ve heard that tune played by several more advanced players, so, rather than review my old favorite, “Stella,” I decided to memorize the tune Dave liked to call.

“It Could Happen To You”

“It Could Happen to You” is typical of the tunes heard at Scott’s session and a favorite among the participants. Composed by Jimmy Van Heusen with lyrics by Johnny Burke, this tune was first heard in the 1944 film *And the Angels Sing* and was a hit for both Jo Stafford and Bing Crosby that same year. At least a few participants at the

⁴¹ “In the pocket” refers to a time feel that has a strong swing feel. The rhythm section emphasizes beats two and four, soloist tends to play behind the beat. When someone says the feel is “in the pocket” they are referring to a relaxed feeling, yet one that also harbors a feeling of restrained energy about to burst forward. The Count Basie rhythm section is a good example of players who generate the “in the pocket” time feel.

session were old enough to remember these early appearances of the song. Johnny Burke has a special connection to Chicago. He grew up there, and he worked as a pianist and song plugger in the Chicago offices of the Irving Berlin Publishing Company until 1932. That was too long ago for any of the session participants to have met him, but several had parents and grandparents in the music business who had probably crossed Burke's path.

Participants were probably more familiar with Van Heusen's melody than with Burke's lyrics. Without a doubt they were well aware of the definitive jazz version found on Miles Davis's famous 1957 Prestige recording *Relaxin' With The Miles Davis Quintet*. This recording of Davis's famous first quintet features Davis playing with John Coltrane, Red Garland, Philly Joe Jones, and Paul Chambers. Unlike the ferocious drive of earlier bop or the down home feel of more blues based players like Stanley Turrentine and Shirley Scott, Davis and the first quintet play with a controlled mastery where elegance is as important as soul. This aesthetic is surely one of the models for the players at Delaney and Murphy's and The Chambers.

"It Could Happen to You" is a fine vehicle for the aesthetic of elegance and mastery that often hold sway on Wednesday evenings. In *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators, 1900-1950*, Alec Wilder writes that "Van Heusen had arrived at the time when sophistication and chance-taking had become a way of writing for those who chose to do it" (Wilder [1972] 1990, p. 444). His compositions were not simply show tunes or blowing tunes. "Van Heusen," says Wilder, "has maintained good taste ever since he started. His songs have never carried the acrid odor of cigar smoke. He has always been inventive and usually related to the world of the bands as well as the singers" (Wilder [1972] 1990, p. 442). The tune's quiet sophistication makes it less of a

vehicle for either emotionally cathartic performances or burning displays of physical dexterity. Perhaps this is why it is a favorite of older, seasoned professionals rather than those younger players eager to shout or show off.

Structurally, “It Could Happen To You,” is a fairly straightforward thirty-two-bar pop song following the ABAB’ form where the first B section ends on the dominant and the second ends on the tonic. It is usually played in E-flat major. The tune stays in that key for most of the form though it modulates briefly to nearly related keys. This is the kind of normal harmony that makes a tune good for a jam session tune in that it provides some predictability for people who might not be familiar with this call. However, Van Heusen complicates things because, as Wilder has pointed out, he likes chromatically ascending bass lines (Wilder [1972] 1990, p. 442). For instance, in the key of E-flat, the bass line ascends from E-flat, to E, F, and then F-sharp in the fourth measure. Bassist Paul Chambers plays this on the *Relaxin’* version of the tune. The chromatically ascending bass line of the first four measures implies two common harmonizations of the tune:

Harmonization #1: EbMaj7 / Edim7 / Fm7 / F#dim7

Harmonization #2: EbMaj7 / Gm7b5 C7 /Fm7 /Am7b5 D7

Both versions allow improvisers to use interesting chromatic material while maintaining the sound of E-flat major. Other interesting harmonies include the use of D-flat 9 augmented 11 as a substitution for a B-flat 7 in measures ten and twenty-six and a brief modulation to C minor in measures eleven and twelve. Improvising beautiful melodies over these colorful harmonies requires a solid grasp of music theory that has been tested in the furnace of performance. At the same time, the tune doesn’t easily lend itself to

displays of physical prowess. As Wilder points out, “It Could Happen,” like many of Van Heusen’s compositions, lends itself to a two-beat feel, and the *Relaxin’* version demonstrates this. The two-beat feel and chromaticism of the tune invite solos that speak through melodic craftsmanship and harmonic sophistication rather than chops. Here the demands of the tune and the strengths and aesthetic ideals of the players seem to call out to each other.

As I prepared for the Wednesday evening session I wasn’t aware of all this, but I was beginning to speak with a new accent, one shaped by the performance conventions of the community of musicians who got together at Scott’s session.

Preparing Tunes, Preparing Identities

During the ensuing months, my participation at Scott’s session inspired changes in my practice routine. In the past I had practiced technique and the “hip tunes” from *The Real Book*. Now, I found myself paying less and less attention to technique. For the most part, soloists at Scott’s session constructed their melodies out of eighth notes played at medium tempos; jumps into double time and flurries of sixteenth note runs were rare. These seasoned players had nothing to prove technically. Those players who favored long and rapid sixteenth note runs were quietly disparaged. I began to internalize this aesthetic (at least on Wednesdays). I practiced fewer scales and kept track of the tunes that were called. I discovered that many were not in my *Real Book*, so I acquired a compact disc that contained PDF files of a dozen different fake books. (This compact disc circulates widely among jazz musicians and I could always make a new friend when I shared it with others struggling to increase their repertoires.) I learned tunes with complicated harmonic

progressions, I learned older standards, and I learned tunes like “Careless Love,” a song I thought was simple and corny until drummer Rusty Jones counted it off at 320 beats per minute. (While musicians at the North Side sessions didn’t usually like to show off their technique, sometimes they did. It was good to be prepared.)

I wasn’t the only one worried about repertoire. I was surprised to learn that Dave Hibbard, with his wealth of professional experience, felt the need to shed tunes.⁴² He has performed all over the country, worked as a studio musician, and published numerous big band compositions; he had also just retired from running a jazz and commercial music program at a small college in Texas. Yet, when I asked if he had been nervous when first coming to sessions in Chicago, he said, “Are you kidding me? I was scared shitless!” Dave constantly worked on new material. (He convinced me to buy “Band In The Box,” a software program and practice aid that generates different styles of small group accompaniment based on chord progressions entered by the user.) While Dave had a sophisticated understanding of tonal harmony, he told me that he didn’t like to pay much attention to specific changes. He memorized a song’s basic harmonic form by playing along with simple harmonies he entered into “Band in the Box.” This helped him hear his way through tunes. He could change keys at the flip of a switch, which was important, since singers at sessions often called tunes in unusual keys. Dave also said that learning specific complex changes was counter-productive since pianists he worked with—people like Don Stille and Larry Novak—usually reharmonized tunes anyway. Knowing the basic harmonic structure was important, but it was more important to be able to go with whatever other people did to the tune. Good players improvised harmony based on a

⁴² “Shedding tunes,” and “Going to the woodshed” were common terms that referred to intensive practice sessions.

basic functional harmony skeleton. Those who relied on a particular harmonic elaboration were players who did not have a strong grasp of harmonic theory and harmonic improvisation.

Not all participants in Scott's session at Delaney and Murphy's have the same preparation concerns. In a way, most of us had been preparing our entire lives and this session catered to seasoned players rather than those who were just getting involved in jazz performance. Trombonist Loren Binford, for example had a long and distinguished career as one of Chicago's finest studio singers and trombonists. Loren, who is now in his seventies, started singing jingles and musical theater in 1958, when Chicago was a center for the commercial jingles business. In fact, Loren is glad to be out of the jingle and the musical theater business; and now one person with a digital keyboard, he complains, can put dozens of musicians out of work. But in his day, Loren appeared in thousands of television and radio commercials and he recorded with jazz musicians like Barrett Deems, Dave Remington, Les Hooper, and Bobby Lewis, and with pop stars like Curtis Mayfield and The Impressions. He rarely misses a Wednesday at Delaney and Murphy's or a Thursday at The Chambers—the only session I can think of that he missed was one when he was in the hospital. He knows all the words, melodies, and harmonies for most of the tunes and he is an elegant improviser. I don't imagine that Loren gets up on Wednesday morning shedding standards. Rather, his life in music has given him an encyclopedic repertoire; he is the man whose tune choices will stump the rest of us.

Like Loren, Scott's regular drummer, Robert Shy, has had a long and distinguished career in jazz. In his sixties, Robert had spent most of his life playing jazz. He has worked on the national scene with people like Eddie Harris, Sonny Stitt, James

Moody, Eddie Jefferson, and Rahsaan Roland Kirk, and he plays on two important Kirk recordings, *Prepare Thyself to Deal with a Miracle* (Kirk [1973b] 2002) and *Bright Moments* (Kirk [1973a] 1993). Though Robert eventually chose to raise a family rather than continue on as an itinerant jazz musician, he still plays with many of Chicago's most important jazz musicians, including saxophonist Ari Brown and pianist Willie Pickens, and he likes to hang out at the Jazz Showcase where he can meet up with friends playing there who are from out of town. Robert is also one of the few African American regulars at Scott's session. While racial lines are clearly visible, Robert demonstrates how one can be a central figure in both white and black jazz in Chicago. In fact, Robert's musical relationships illustrate that while race is an important way of categorizing jazz musicians, it is only one way of drawing borders around Chicago's jazz communities. Players with highly developed musical skills and greater professional standing appeared to have greater social mobility and more social contact across racial lines. Von Freeman and Ari Brown, two of Chicago's best tenor saxophonists and both African Americans, frequently played on both the North Side and the South Side with the city's best black and white musicians. While it was more common to see black musicians working with white musicians on the North Side, good white players also worked with black musicians on the South Side. For example, three of Chicago's best young white musicians—guitarist Mike Allemana, bassist Matt Ferguson, and drummer Michael Raynor—worked as Von Freeman's regular rhythm section. The examples show that in some circumstances, musical relationships are determined not by race but by shared musical training, skills, and professional standing.

Rusty Jones, another drummer and the main session drummer before Robert Shy took on that role, is also a veteran performer. He has toured and recorded with national figures like Marian McPartland and George Shearing, and he is often called to play with visiting stars at leading Chicago venues like the Jazz Showcase. He also performs with leading local players both in town and on tours throughout the U.S. and Europe. Like Loren and Robert, Rusty knows all the tunes, is comfortable in many styles, and is a great improviser. He works all the time and he sets the standard for the other session participants. His preparation for the session includes a lifetime of playing jazz at the highest levels. In a way, Rusty's preparation began before he was born—he comes from a musical family. His parents both worked as musicians and his great uncle is Isham Jones, the famous Chicago bandleader and composer of “It Had to Be You” and other songs that have become jazz standards. Among both black and white musicians, the roots of jazz run deep in Chicago, and the prevalence of so many second and third generation jazz musicians and their collective multi-generational preparation help to make the city's strong jazz communities what they are today.

Indeed, the main preparation for Scott's session is a lifetime spent playing jazz—a lifetime that includes private lessons, participation in high school and college music programs, professional gigs, thousands of hours of practice, and countless dollars spent on lessons, books, and equipment. Those musicians like Dave Hibbard and I, who had to do specific preparation for this session weren't learning to play jazz; we were learning the particular vocabulary that allowed us to participate in this particular community. This language was a collection of tunes, performance practices, and aesthetic values, more of a dialect than a language that we could only acquire because of our already extensive

knowledge of jazz. This again brings to mind Ruth Finnegan's metaphor of musical pathways: Chicago's musical communities are not like worlds that are complete and self-contained; neither are they "urban villages," for while they are small, like a village, they are neither isolated nor a part of a seemingly ancient tradition. But they are not simply the creation of individuals acting outside of history. Chicago's musicians travel well-worn routes; they choose these pathways and travel them over and over keeping them open, following them to living active intersections.

Pathways and Freeways

There were times in Chicago when the world of jazz felt more like an urban village, centrally located around clusters of clubs. In the 1920s a person could walk to dozens of clubs in Bronzeville. The same could be said of Rush Street in the 1950s and 1960s. Participants in Scott's session enjoy no such proximity to Delaney and Murphy's. That venue is part of a network dependent on freeways and privately owned cars. Delaney and Murphy's cannot be reached by public transportation: it is located in Arlington Heights, in the Sheraton Hotel near O'Hare International Airport just beyond the Northwestern edge of the city. Even the closest housing is a long walk away, and session participants all live elsewhere. The isolated hotel, which caters to business travelers, is nearly inaccessible to musicians who live on the far South Side, or those who can't afford a car, or those who might be uncomfortable in a place designed to make middle-aged white businessmen feel at home. This is not a trivial concern. When I first decided to be a musician, I, like many others, chose practicing rather than working a full-time job. For years, I couldn't afford a car. I walked or got rides. Casually attending a

session like Scott's would have been beyond my means. While in Chicago, I played with many musicians in similar financial straights.

Most players at Scott's session are middle aged white men from the North Side of Chicago and the city's northern suburbs. Robert Shy regularly makes the trip from the far South Side, but he is a rare exception. Others like Dave Hibbard make an equally far trip from the northern suburb of Gurney.

While it might seem odd to be concerned with transportation when thinking about local jazz scenes, jazz has often been associated with developing modes of transportation. Tailgate trombone is linked so closely to modes of transportation it takes its name from the trombone player's seat on the wagon. Both the development and spread of New Orleans and Chicago styles are linked to the training many players received on the Streckfus riverboat line. Trains and buses spread big bands and swing music across the country and the rationing of gas and rubber during World War Two helped hasten the big bands' demise. Songs like Billy Strayhorn's "Take the A Train" pay tribute to the transportation and location of various jazz musicians, and fantasies of intergalactic travel fuel Sun Ra's "We Travel The Spaceways." Transportation facilitated stylistic dissemination and development; it was a key to professional and artistic development (playing on the Streckfus riverboat line was considered "going to the conservatory" and a gateway to high paying gigs in Chicago); a marker of social status (the leader rode in the "Caddy" while the band rode in the bus); a sign of the times and places (marking the transition from carts and riverboats to subways); and a fantasy of escape and liberation (via the spaceways or the northbound train to the good times in Chicago, Kansas City, or Harlem). Musicians sometimes referred to the very act of soloing as taking a ride.

Going to Scott's Session

On Wednesday, as daylight turned to twilight, I donned what I hoped were my “casual-hip” clothes, grabbed my guitar and amp, walked down from my third-floor efficiency apartment, and headed to my car. Soon, my amp would be stored permanently in the trunk of my car, but I was still driving an 86 Volvo wagon that lacked a secure trunk. I liked to think of my stairs as the jazz musician's health club, and I was grateful I didn't play the drums as I trudged the two blocks to my car. Music is a ritualized practice, and as Christopher Small observes:

I do not mean just that in the ritual process we make extensive use of those activities which are known as the arts, though that is clearly true. Not only musicking and dancing, not only drama and movement, but also costumes, architecture and visual design, the displaying of images and other precious objects lovingly made, bodily adornment and decoration, cooking and the making and smelling of aromas are brought together in various combinations and as lavishly as can be afforded, to make their contribution to the occasion (Smalls 1998, pp. 105–106).

Smalls is concerned with the parallels between concert hall performances and religious rituals and how dressing, adornment, a glass of wine in the lobby, passing through grand entrances, and other aspects of ritualized concert behavior are not simply displays, but transformative psychological and bodily experiences. During ritual practices time is condensed and attention is focused. “During that concentrated time,” Small writes, “relationships are brought into existence between the participants that model, in metaphoric form, ideal relationships as they imagine them to be...participants not only *learn about* those relationships but actually *experience* them in their bodies” (Smalls 1998, p. 96). As I bathed, chose my “hip-casual” clothing, lugged equipment, and ate cheeseburgers in the car on my way to play with other musicians, I performed rituals that

prepared me for the session and made me feel like a working jazz musician and a potential member of the community I was entering. This ritualized journey was, in Michel de Certeau's words, a tactical practice, like walking in the city, whereby I temporarily transformed the city's network of streets and highways into a personalized and pleasurable route. As I complained to myself about heavy gear, crappy parking, and crowded freeways, I also felt excitement and joy. I wasn't just driving. I was driving to a session on the path to playing jazz and becoming a jazz musician in a new musical community.

My apartment in Ravenswood was a great location for someone who wanted to visit the city's jazz clubs. It was just a quick mile from The Green Mill in Uptown and it was about midway between Pete Miller's Steak House in Evanston and Andy's Chicago Jazz in the Loop. (I hadn't yet come to appreciate the importance and the sheer size of the South Side.) But my first opportunity to play with Chicago musicians would take place outside of the city, in the suburb of Arlington Heights. I made my way west on Irving Park Avenue to the Dan Ryan and then out past O'Hare International to the Euclid Avenue Exit. During rush hour this could take hours, but at 8:00 p.m. it took about thirty minutes—thirty minutes to listen to recordings of local players and to psych myself up, repeating all the encouraging jam session stories I'd heard in recent weeks. I had thirty minutes to toy with the possibility of taking on a new identity and to plan an exit strategy if things went badly.

Jazz has always been associated with the exotic. Early critics indulged fantasies of blackness and the expression of primitive libido mingled with dreams of Gatsby's wealth and "jazz age" decadence. In the 1950s and 1960s fantasies of libidinal release became

quests for social and political liberation.⁴³ More recently, the urge to revolution has become the quest for cultural gravitas as players like Wynton Marsalis take control of the elite musical institutions from which jazz musicians had once been barred. My trip from the heart of Chicago to the suburban bedroom community of Arlington Heights validated none of these fantasies. As I drove, the dense vitality of the city gave way to sprawling ribbons of concrete freeway, office parks of indistinct design, tract housing, and the vast empty expanse of the fields and runways of O’Hare International. My CD player continued to pump out the beat of bustling, swinging humanity, but as I exited the freeway I found myself waiting alone at a stoplight on a wide empty road on the outskirts of suburbia. Beyond an empty golf course, my destination, the Chicago Sheraton Northwest, rose blandly in the distance. I could have been anywhere—anywhere dull, at least. Pulling into the hotel parking lot was like pulling into the lot of any beltline hotel in any city. This commodified space, stripped of its particularity, struck me as oddly comforting.

I wasn’t alone in deriving comfort from this venue. In the city, parking near clubs is hard to find. And while people outside of Chicago often exaggerate the potential for crime, the city is not without its hazards. Neighborhoods surrounding clubs like the Green Mill are also home to gangs, addicts, and others happy to relieve musicians of their instruments and cash. Loren Binford has been mugged twice outside of the Green Mill.

⁴³ Some examples of this include Max Roach’s “Freedom Now Suite,” and Charles Mingus’s “Fables of Faubus.” Many in the free jazz movement equate the constraints of functional harmony with a variety of social constraints so that atonality becomes a metaphor for the freedom from a variety of repressions—racial, political, and social. Many writers have celebrated improvisation for the ways it seems to resist formal constraints and they have sought to understand freedom in improvisation as a metaphor for other kinds of freedom (Mackey 2004, [1994] 1998; Prevost 2004; Heble 2000; Corbett 1995; Litweiler 1984; Jost 1974; Attali 1985).

With good reason, he and other older players truly appreciate the Sheraton's well-lighted, graffiti-free parking.

Crossing the Threshold

Crossing the parking lot with my guitar and amp, I entered the hotel's wide lobby and walked down marbled floors past the long sleek check-in counter unnoticed by uniformed staff processing customers. As I walked unnoticed through the hotel lobby, I felt something quite different than the feeling of entering the sacred space of the concert hall described by Smalls. The leveled nowhere/anywhere space of the Sheraton Hotel provides the setting for the simulacra of other more desirable destinations, places a traveler might want to be rather than the place he or she must be. I passed a Latin-themed restaurant and made my way toward Delaney and Murphy's, a simulated Irish Pub. Umberto Eco uses the phrase "hyper reality" to designate places designed to look like idealized versions of someplace else. Business travelers half-heartedly drinking in the Sheraton's half-hearted simulacra of pubs and bistros seemed to find the illusion to be unthreatening and thoroughly underwhelming.

I felt a curious and pleasurable mix of belonging and not belonging. Like most of the people around me, I was white, middle-aged, middle-class, and male. But I wasn't a business traveler; I wasn't attending a conference; I wasn't an employee; and I wouldn't have come here for the sheer pleasure of the ambiance. But this "clean well-lighted place" offered a sense of order that, however banal, was at least free of obvious threats.⁴⁴ Other venues more overtly acknowledged the potential violence just beyond their doors.

⁴⁴ It is ironic that the only actual violence I encountered was at Delaney and Murphy's, where I interrupted a fight that was about to happen.

At the Apartment Lounge an off-duty cop frisks me at the door. At the Green Mill, the leather-clad doorman scrutinized me, ready to send me back out to contend with the beggars and junkies roaming the streets of Uptown. After weeks of being an outsider, it was a relief to be part of the crowd, even if this sense of security was only the accident of my race, gender, class, and age, generic identities to which I passively submitted.

But walking down the corridor I felt another kind of pleasure. Carrying my guitar, I set myself apart from the regular customers. Although I was accepted because of the generic accidents of my birth, I had embraced another more active role. It is a small role, yet one that still completely altered my experience of the hotel. These corridors were what Erving Goffman calls the “front region,” a place where social actors perform their roles, here as staff and guests, in a regulated public drama (Goffman 1959, p. 106), and I, like other musicians, converted the front region of the hotel into my backstage area where I prepared for my upcoming performance. I rolled my clattering amp past the regular guests. I was about to rummage through storerooms looking for chairs, extension chords, and other things I needed. I would push aside tables and chairs and leave my equipment piled on counters. In a small way I was, in the words of Michel de Certeau, staging a strategic guerilla attack on the highly regulated corporate space of the hotel and my guitar was my rifle. I and my fellow players were “poaching” on this space, subverting its money-making function by temporarily converting a hyper-real, faux-Irish Pub into our jam session, something no more permanently real, but not nearly so hyper.

In the 1950s, Howard Becker wrote that jazz musicians regarded middle class society with contempt and considered their own abilities as mysterious gifts that set them

apart from other people (Becker 1951, p. 137).⁴⁵ The players at Delaney and Murphy's or The Chambers did not share these sentiments. They were not social revolutionaries or dropouts, but professional musicians, professors, and businessmen. When I use Michel de Certeau's military and hunting metaphors I use them as he does, not to refer to overt violence, but to describe the everyday acts whereby people in the city temporarily refashion spaces belonging to others as their own. This is revolutionary in the sense that such acts work against the official uses of commodified spaces in ways that deeply shape an actor's experience of space (just as rattling my amplifier down the hallway shaped my experience of the hallway), but they do not indicate any overt political commitments on the part of that actor. At the jam session I and the other musicians will be playing music, but it will also be noise that is in a small but significant way a carnivalesque disruption of hotel business as usual. When the managers of Delaney and Murphy's determined that the jam session did not contribute any substantial profit to their business, they discontinued the session.⁴⁶

At the Session

Traveling along shared yet unique pathways through the city and through musical experience, I had arrived at the entrance to Delaney and Murphy's. Music spilled into the

⁴⁵ White jazz musicians, critics, and fans have often been viewed as people who, dissatisfied with their culture of origin, embrace real and imagined aspects of African American culture. The pose of the "white hipster," as represented by Mezz Mezzrow or Norman Mailer has been widely criticized (Mailer 1957). For a history of the white hipster see Ingrid Monson's "The Problem of White Hipness: Race, Gender, and Cultural Conceptions in Jazz Historical Discourse" (Monson 1996). The role of the "white hipster" was not one that I encounter among the musician I write about in this chapter.

⁴⁶ As Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard, and Pierre Mayol have shown, the everyday acts of resistance whereby people make the world their own need not be big, politically progressive, or long-lived (de Certeau 1984; de Certeau, Giard, and Mayol 1998).

wide, brightly lit, hotel hallway through the open doorway of the darkened pub. Guitar in hand, I entered anxiously, publicly declaring that I am a jazz musician ready to be called to the stage and prove it. Some players felt the same way; others did not. As stressful as this was, it was also a moment of great joy. Entering the sessions created and affirmed the identity I had chosen for myself and the generic, leveled space of the Sheraton Hotel yielded temporarily to the particular lived space of Scott's session.

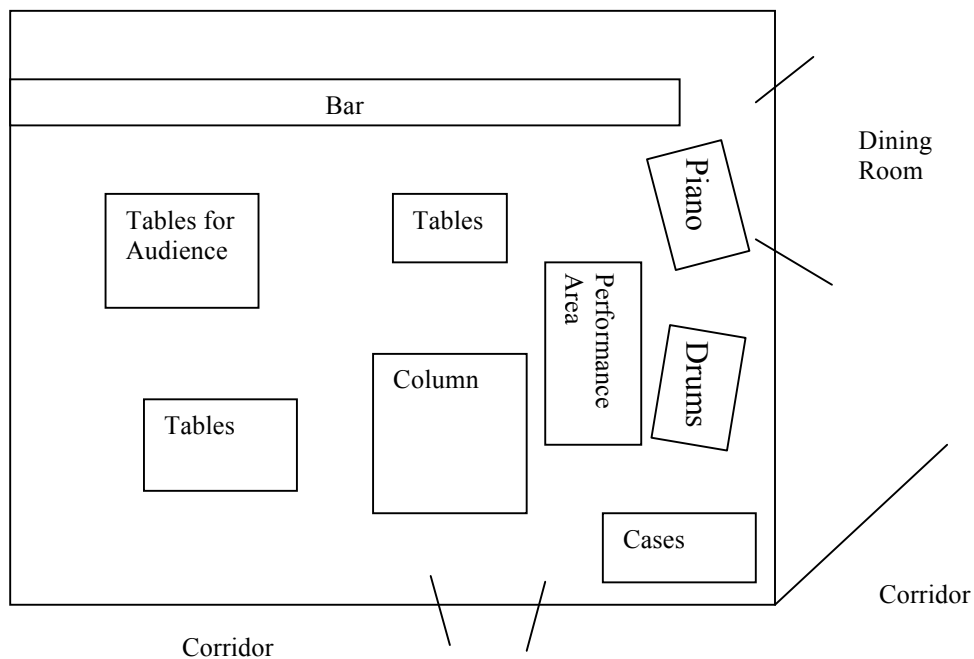


Figure 3.4 Floor plan of Delaney and Murphy's

At Delaney and Murphy's no fanfare greeted my small personal victory. Entering the room, I first encountered a four-foot square support column sporting a drink rail and surrounded by empty stools. This barrier stood between the bright hallway and a few late-arriving business travelers from the dark interior where the musicians and their friends gathered. Perhaps the interior designers imagined businessmen sitting shoulder to

shoulder along the rail in a performance of Irish pub conviviality, but no one ever gathered there. The hall side of the post was a no man's land.

To the right of the column was a small alcove where the musicians left instruments and cases. This was our backstage area where people about to play adjusted reeds and oiled valves, and chatted. I dropped off my guitar, whispered hellos, and checked out the cases to see who was here. I looked over at the people playing and then headed toward the bar to sit and drink a beer.

Greetings

This night was much like any other night. As the band played, other musicians greeted me. These greetings seemed unremarkable at first. I hardly noticed them, because I'd been greeted this way all my life. But greeting rituals, like any such interactions, are stylized, culturally specific performances that bring into being particular modes of personhood, masculinity, affective disposition, and bodily comportment. They are moments of mutual recognition and such moments are fundamental in the constitution of personhood. Greetings are also moments of evaluation and creative moments where greeters can attempt to change the terms of social relationships.

On the television show, "Cheers," the tavern patrons yell, "Norm!" every time Norm enters the tavern. He replies with a joke as Sam sets his regular beer on the bar in front of him. The work-day Norm, a person who is anonymous as a low-level accountant, yet paradoxically locked into an individualized struggle in the dog-eat-dog world of work, dissolves in a wash of camaraderie and lager, and the new Norm is reintegrated

into a supportive community which also reaffirms his standing as a valuable individual. This fantasy was rarely enacted at Delaney and Murphy's or The Chambers.

Greetings at the session were subtler. In the alcove those tending to their equipment said things like, "So, you gonna play tonight?" Others replied, "Yeah, think I might." Men shook hands. The handshake was one of the few moments of physical contact at these sessions. Our handshakes were firm, but not bone crunching. The shake itself was done thumbs up, rather than thumbs back as is the style among many African American men. It was a brief shake with no lingering contact while talking and making eye contact. It seemed to connote familiarity and friendliness. It did not appear to connote the intensified masculinity displayed in the extremely muscular grip used by my grandfather and his friends who were all foundry workers.

Scott always shook my hand. He brought us all together and loosely regulated when people played, though his authority was exercised more with new players than with session regulars. I felt welcomed by Scott's greetings, but I was also put in my place as he told me if and when I would be able to play. Scott often brought in locally famous musicians as guest artists. This increased his status and the popularity of the session. On nights with guests, Scott controlled who would play with the stars and who would wait. As a newcomer my place was clearly at the end of the line.

Jon Bany, in sharp contrast, never sought me out to greet me when I attended his session at The Chambers. On my first visit, I sat quietly with my guitar in my case and I didn't get to play. Jim Pierce later told me I had to get out my guitar so people would know I wanted to sit in. In a way, Bany's session appeared somewhat exclusive as

advertising the session as a NoAm-ProJam implied.⁴⁷ Yet, when I finally took the initiative to insert myself into the music at Jon's sessions, the others happily made room for me. For example, I tentatively approached the drummer, since I needed to reach the electrical outlet behind his set. I thought Charlie might be perturbed at this inconvenience, but he immediately started moving drums and chatting about the session. After this, we always greeted each other with a smile and sometimes a handshake, and I felt we shared a stronger bond because I had asked for his help.

We new participants greeted each other more readily, using a handshake to initiate relationships and strengthen social bonds. New players sought affirmation as members of the session. On this evening, after I performed, I was greeted by a number of players. We shook hands and exchanged compliments and business cards in the hope that the social relations of the moment would lead to new and more affirming interactions and possibly even paying gigs.

Older participants are less eager to greet new people. For many weeks Dave Hibbard, Jarrod Buffe, and Loren seemed to ignore me. In part this was probably true, but they also didn't seem to interact much with anybody. Over the course of my fieldwork I observed that they did interact with others in subtle ways. Dave, for example often sat with Jim Pierce. Jim and I were friendly, so I would sometimes join him and Dave. For the most part, we just sat together. But sitting together is also a kind of social activity. It feels good and it facilitates other subtle interactions. Frequently, men sitting together

⁴⁷ No Amateurs-Professional Jazz. When I asked Jon Bany about this designation he shrugged and indicated it wasn't anything he took too seriously, even though the session was listed that way on various Chicago jazz web sites throughout the eighteen months I conducted my fieldwork.

quietly voiced complaints about the music. They also cracked little jokes, turning song lyrics into bawdy puns.



Figure 3.5 Dave Po and Dave Hibbard sitting together at a session

Complaints and jokes are not simply about their particular contents, they are affirmations of shared perspectives. When someone says, “Hmm, that’s a lot of notes,” he implies that his listener shares the same aesthetic values. When someone makes a bawdy pun, he assumes his listeners share similar gendered identities. Sitting with others quietly or listening to their occasional complaints and jokes changed the way I experienced these jam sessions. I felt like a member of the community. This gave me a feeling of comfort that enabled me to play better and more assertively.

Participants generally sat most often with their friends, but throughout the evening people moved about the small room sitting and talking with most of the other participants, but this general camaraderie was not extended to everyone. No one sat near drunks or loud talkers. On one night a young piano player disrupted the flow of the music by playing loudly over another person's solo. The loud piano player failed to pick up on subtle looks or musical cues that he was playing inappropriately and eventually one soloist commented angrily and loudly enough for everyone to hear. Over the course of the evening people moved away from him. I stayed to observe what would happen, and I became increasingly uncomfortable sitting near him while others shunned him. When he began to complain to me, I felt like he wanted me to side with him, but I couldn't, so I, too, felt compelled to move to a different seat. Though shunned on this particular evening, the young piano player was not permanently excluded from the session. Rusty Jones told me that he liked the young man and attributed his inappropriate behavior to youthful enthusiasm.

Participants valued a certain amount of social and spatial distance. Robert Shy always greeted me warmly. As I sat in the corridor tuning and warming up, he'd walk over to me and said, "How are you, my friend," then, after a brief chat, "I'll let you get your head together." This spatial metaphor for my mental process mirrored the physical space I needed to prepare and Robert respected both. Keeping physical and psychic distance affirms the centrality of musical interaction. Limited personal intimacy and controlled emotional expression emphasize the aesthetics of professionalism at play in this session.

While giving a person space “to get his head together,” was an acceptable form of sociality, some social distancing was disruptive and caused tension at these sessions. One young tenor saxophonist frequently left the room when he wasn’t soloing. He might take a few choruses, then head for the hallway, punching in numbers on his cell phone while other musicians were still playing the tune. This player had strong technical skills and was always allowed to play, but other players were subtly critical. After a less flashy and self-indulgent solo from this musician, for instance, the man next to me offered a left-handed compliment, noting that the young tenor player was finally saying something. Although this tenor player was regarded as a technically skilled, regulars saw him as musically immature, someone who did not interact properly with others on or off the bandstand. He had acquired the musical vocabulary of the session, but not the social vocabulary that subtly emphasized the collective interaction on the bandstand and in the audience.

Quiet, small-scale interactions were the norm, but some participants were more flamboyant and expansive. After I performed on October 6th, Pete Castronova put his hand on my shoulder and said to me for the first of many times, “If you keep picking that thing [my guitar] it will never heal.” He joked and touched more than did other participants, and his interactions sent mixed signals, implying greater intimacy with his touch while verbally relegating me to the generic category of “guitarist.” Pete’s intentions were friendly, but Robert’s leaving me to “get my head together,” seemed a more intimate and personal act.

Rusty Jones was one of the more boisterous participants in this community. Among the top players in the city, his status was well established: people liked playing

with him. Rusty's drumming made other musicians play better and, as Dave Hibbard noted, playing with Rusty increased a person's status around town. Rusty was confident in his abilities and often used his position to facilitate greater levels of interaction and musicianship. He entered the room saying hellos, teasing other players, and encouraging new players to step up. He participated in jazz on a national scale but also made time to participate in local sessions and low paying but socially rewarding gigs like the Jazz Vespers concerts. He was rich in social and cultural capital and spent it freely in the community.

Sitting In

As the night progressed I spoke with Scott and Jim Pierce, the regular guitar player. Jim told me I could use his amplifier and said I should sit in after he played a few tunes. Then, after tuning and warming up in the hallway, I went to the bar, ordered a



Figure 3.6 George Bean plays from his table.

beer, and listened to the band until it was my turn. Many regulars played whenever they wanted. Horn players all sat at the front tables, sometimes playing from their seats. Jim always started the evening, but soon he waved to me and I went up. I was excited: it's difficult to recall exactly what happened that first time, but I do remember that it was much like any other night, though a bit more nerve-wracking.

Between songs there was usually a bit of talk as people decided what to play, what key to play in, and who would play the melody. Strong piano players sometimes got things going by playing an introduction without necessarily consulting the other players. Otherwise people talked about an introduction or just counted the tune in from the beginning of the melody. When I got up, I called the song I had prepared, "It Could Happen to You." I knew Dave liked the tune, but I tentatively asked, "Do you want to play 'It Could Happen'?" Nobody seemed to take charge, so I looked at Loren and counted off the tune. After a bit of fumbling, we were on our way. Jam sessions are exciting, stressful, and fun, but they are rarely opportunities to sound your best. With the different skill levels involved, plus the different personalities—and the general hesitation to tell anyone what to do—the result is often confusion. Still, there can be good musical moments. As the performance that night got under way the players began to swing harder. I comped sparsely at first, increasing my activity as the performance got livelier and I heard where the pianist was leaving space for me. It's common for horn players to solo first. Also, the horn players on stage were regulars and I looked to them to determine when I would play. My solo on the first tune went well. I got plenty of affirming applause, and I was asked to stay up for another tune.

I hesitated to call the next tune. But so did everybody else. In situations like this, people often fall back on the most common standards, and we often resorted to the easy standard, “Autumn Leaves.” The good response after the first tune led me to a more vigorous performance on the next. Strong playing from one person inspires strong playing in others, so the music often gets better and more adventurous as the night goes on, increasing in intensity until a weak player slows the pace or people begin to tire.

“Autumn Leaves,” A Standard Standard

“Autumn Leaves” is a typical jam session tune. The original song, “Les feuilles mortes” by poet Jacques Prevert and composer Joseph Kosma, first appeared in the 1946 French film *Les Portes De La Nuit*. In 1949 Johnny Mercer wrote new lyrics and changed the title to “Autumn Leaves.” Mercer’s version, which echoes the sentiments of the Prevert’s original lyrics, became a hit for many American musicians and it continues to be recorded by performers of various stripes (Wilson 2009). The tune follows a straightforward thirty-two-bar AABC form that begins in major and ends in the relative minor. This major to minor harmonic cycle and the tune’s generally descending melody sonically depicts the poem’s personae as he or she remembers past love and then mourns its loss. Framed by the passing of the seasons, the lyrics recount the flowering of life and love in the spring and summer passing into the death and decay of autumn and winter.

While some players might appreciate “Autumns Leaves” as a musical metaphor for the inevitable waning of love and life, most call the tune because it is easy and fun to play. Harmonically straight forward, it is a “circle of fourths” tune that begins in major and ends in minor offering performers the choice of improvising on a major and minor

scale, or following more complicated scales and substitutions related to the specific harmonic moments⁴⁸. Consequently, it is well within the reach of novice improvisers, while also providing many improvisational opportunities for musicians of greater skill and experience.

Several versions of “Autumn Leaves” circulate among jazz musicians, and the choice of versions can say something about the skill and experience of the players. *The Real Book* presents the tune in the key of E minor (*The real book*).⁴⁹ This is the key often chosen by novice improvisers, and this choice can indicate a reliance on *The Real Book* instead of broad listening experience. *The Real Book* is famous for its many errors, and more experienced players often consider the key of E minor to be the wrong key for “Autumn Leaves.” Bill Evans, who is listed as the source for *The Real Book* version, in fact, performs the tune in G minor, and this is the key most players prefer. *The Real Book* not only transposes “Autumn Leaves” to E minor, but also lists Johnny Mercer as the sole composer even though he is only responsible for the English lyrics.

G minor was the most common key for the North Side Jam sessions, as it was at most Chicago sessions I attended. However, the more sophisticated players like Larry Novak and Jon Bany sometimes call the key of F minor. This version, recorded by Clark Terry on his 1977 recording *The Globetrotter*, also features alternate harmony for the A

⁴⁸ In a circle of fourths tune, chords progress by root movement up a fourth. This is the movement of the most compelling harmonic cadence of V-I. If we consider the A section of “Autumn Leaves” as being only in E minor the progression is iv-VII-III-VI-ii-V-i. Jazz musicians will sometimes tonicize each chord, turning these types of harmonic progressions into a series of quickly passing dominant-tonic relationships, which increases the sense of forward motion while opening the door to increased chromaticism.

⁴⁹ *The Real Book* is a common fake book. For many students, it is their first introduction to many jazz standards.

section of the tune. The first pass over the A section follows the more conventional progression:

Bbm7/Eb7/AbMaj7/DbMaj7/Gm7/C7/Fm/Fm.

During solos this more chromatic progression is substituted for the second A section:

Bm7 E7/Bbm7 Eb7/Am7 D7/Abm7 Db7/ Gm7b5 / C7b9/ Fm/ Fm /.

Calling this version reveals a player's broad listening, great improvisational dexterity, and deep involvement in the world of jazz. Though it might seem an extravagant call, players did not appear to choose this version in order to gratuitously display their prowess or to exclude weaker improvisers. Instead, they appeared to make this choice because it gave them pleasure. The chromatic substitutions usually evoked smiles and approving comments from the audience as well as from the players themselves, as if we had all just ridden an old roller coaster that still provided unexpected thrills.

Interacting Socially as a Player

After playing, things felt different. I was happy with my performance and my fieldwork, so I went back to the bar to relax and celebrate with another pint of beer. I wasn't a regular yet, but I didn't feel like such an outsider either. I felt that people noticed me and regarded me differently though I had no immediate evidence of this. That would come later. It was clear, though, that my subjective experience of myself and of what was going on around me had been transformed by my participation.

As I sat at the bar savoring the moment, Jim Pierce joined me at the bar. We exchange compliments and questions about our instruments, tone, and technique, compared notes on favorite guitarists (Jim Hall), criticized tones and improvisational approaches we didn't like (obliquely referencing other Chicago guitarists who occasionally visited Scott's session), and we talked about the possibility of playing duets. Guitar talk led to talk of work, family, the importance of music, and the problem of weaving all these threads into a whole fabric rather than a frayed knot.

"Have you heard Grant Green with Larry Young?"

"Yeah, What about that one he did with Sam Rivers? That was odd, but it worked."

"Reminded me of that recording with Archie Shepp and Niles Pederson."

"I like the way Scofield gets that vocal quality with his distortion."

"I give that guy a lot of credit for having a sound. I remember some friend of mine told me—he took some lessons from Jimmy Bruno, and Scofield's name came up. I think Bruno broke a little bad on him, like, 'Would you want to sound like that?' It's like, hey man, you try and sound like all those archtops all the time and get that little circle jerk thing going. And it's like this guy's got an original style that you can tell like that."

We traced our musical development and aesthetic values, mapping the soundscape of our identities with lists of recordings and concerts. We amplified our experience, telling the anecdotes of others almost as if they were our own. The pathway Jim outlined traced the aesthetic boundaries of Scott's session, but also mapped other musical routes. For example, Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen, a hard swinging, virtuosic bassist well versed in the Great American Song Book, would always be welcome here. But Scofield's distorted, rock-influenced tone or Sam Rivers' atonality would raise a few eyebrows.

Some people never seemed to get beyond this exchange of song titles and short anecdotes. But what seemed like frustrating superficiality was also a way of both connecting with others and also maintaining distance. The performances at the sessions—the sounds, the tunes, the bodily comportment on the stand, and the conversations off—seemed to be signs of emotional control rather than catharsis. And the stillness on stage, players' eyes closed or cast downward, and their carefully constructed phrases all seemed to be performance of artistic introspection.⁵⁰ Perhaps the superficial listing of tunes, titles, and performers was the icebreaker that paved the way for the time on the stand when performers enacted a more intimate look into each other's musical selves. Perhaps, too, the emotional distance provided by the listing and joking provided escape from the potentially homoerotic implications of men breathing and swaying in the dark.

⁵⁰ The role of the artist was not the only role in play at this session. Musicians were often playful and sometimes took on the role of performer. Also, the musicians at this session were not the only players to think of themselves as professionals and artists, though other sessions, such as the ones discussed in Chapter Four and Five, sometimes emphasizes other roles that jazz musicians play.

Listing and joking relieved other tensions as well. For instance, the participants espoused a wide variety of political opinions. One drummer was a republican and left-handed; the other was a liberal democrat and right-handed. When they take turns at the set, they must reverse the layout of the set. This is an inconvenience for both. But they transformed this potential conflict into a more pleasurable interaction by comically exaggerating the burden of moving drums while teasing each other about the merits of right-handed or left-handed technique and right wing or left-wing politics.

While light banter and apparently superficial interaction can be analyzed in various ways, it is important to note that it is a source of pleasure. Rarely a calculated strategy, these verbal encounters are usually spontaneous utterances that make people laugh in situations that can generate a variety of tensions and anxieties.

Music and Family

In light of the emotional reserve that was often a part of Scott's session, my conversation with Jim on October 6 was a bit unusual. Jim and I quickly moved from talk of guitars and recordings to talk of family, work, and self-expression. I assumed that Jim was a full time musician, but I learned that he works a full time job as a warehouse manager. Nevertheless, he arrived at the Sheraton at 5:30 every Wednesday to play duets with bassist Adam Kraus in the dining room adjoining Delaney and Murphy's. They play until 8:30, when Scott, Adam, and Robert Shy took over. Jim later joined the trio and played until the session ends at 12:30. He also liked to sit in at the Chambers on Thursday evenings and he had a steady weekend gig with his friend Lady T at Pacific Blue in Glen Ellyn. So, in addition to working at least forty hours a week at the warehouse, Jim also,

spent ten to fifteen hours a week playing music in clubs and restaurants. He also tries to practice everyday. Sometimes he would get up at 3:00 a.m. to work on tunes. Work, playing, and related travel could easily come to seventy or more hours each week.

Yet, music and work were only two of his regular responsibilities. Jim was also married with four children, and he cared for two elderly relatives, both suffering with Alzheimer's disease. Talk of families changed the tone of our conversation. Sighs and a feeling of heaviness replaced jokes and light banter. Jim was not the only musician who found family life and music pulling him in opposite directions. Many players had been divorced or had been single for long periods of time. Busy schedules, low pay, and late hours made conventional family life difficult.

Some participants in Scott's session had turned away from national music careers to settle in Chicago and raise families. Robert Shy, for example, toured the United States and Europe with Roland Kirk, Eddie Jefferson, James Moody and others, but in 1973 he stopped touring to be with his family. Looking back on that time he told me, "Now I gotta go out and try and find a day gig. I had two daughters in college. I had another daughter in grammar school...Oh yeah. Had another son. Two sons, one was in high school. He was getting ready to graduate. Another was still in high school." For Robert, family was important and an obligation he couldn't ignore. "You gotta face the music and all. So ok, now I gotta provide for a family. Music is one thing, you always love it. You gonna never lose eyes on the prize, you know, but you still gotta do what you gotta do." Robert continued to play while working construction, pouring cement for the Dan Ryan Expressway, and eventually driving semi-trailer trucks. He retired in 2003. "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God I'm free at last," he joked. "Now I am free to do what I want to

do which is playing.”⁵¹ Robert never quit playing. He was and continues to be one of the first-call drummers in Chicago. Like Jim, Robert didn’t get a lot of sleep while he was working and playing. “I’m moving up [at the day job]. I stayed 21 years. I still play. I got up at 5:00 to be on the job at 6:30. 21 years. But see, what happened... I had to be on the job at 6:30. Gigs get through 1:00 or 2:00. Get to sleep around 3:00.” Fortunately Robert enjoyed his day job and his employer didn’t complain when he arrived late after a big gig.

Robert was also fortunate that his wife understood the importance of music in his life and the nature of that work. Robert toured for a number of years while his wife took care of the children. “She was cool with that,” He told me. “You have to have a woman that understands, you know, knowing the kind of work you do and all that.”

The stories of Robert and Jim illustrate how a musician’s life often depends upon and undermines the common gender roles within the nuclear family. While Robert made his musical life and family life work by first depending on his wife to manage the family and then later adopting a more conventional role as a working father, other musicians found family happiness by becoming involved with women who also had professional or artistic goals and who understood and pursued a lifestyle similar to their own. These couples were often childless and mobile.

Jim talked animatedly about playing music and about caring for his elderly relatives, but talk of his family flowed less freely. He and his wife had not made peace with his musical practices and aspirations. “She didn’t get it,” he said. “If your spouse isn’t in the arts she won’t get it.” He didn’t elaborate, but went on to say that music isn’t

⁵¹ By paraphrasing speeches by Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert illustrates both the impact of the Civil Rights era and one way he has personalized that struggle.

a hobby. What music was for him was difficult to articulate, but on several occasions he tried.

Well, yeah, people go, “You have a nice hobby.” And it ain’t a hobby. Trust me, if I could make better dough, I’d be doing this all the time. That’s the way it is. It’s like, don’t trivialize it. People golf for a hobby. This ain’t golf. It takes too much effort, too much time, takes way too much dedication. There’s a lot of people don’t understand that.

“Why do you like sitting in a room by yourself playing that all the time? It’s like, “Yeah, I do. And?”

“Well you should be out making dough.”

“That’s what YOU want to do. That’s not what I want to do.”

I find a place to play and that’s what I do. I like that—that we communicate on several different levels. You know... the suburbs are a vast wasteland in terms of that.

For Jim, his domestic life with his wife, children, and neighbors was very much at odd with his musical life. Not all of the participants at the session experienced this so acutely. But for most, there was the sense that playing was important, definitive—not simply a choice of how to spend some free time. Some players found ways to follow both the path of family and the path of music, and they experienced their musical lives with satisfaction. Others with families and non-musical careers experienced moments of regret as they wondered what direction their lives might have had they been more committed to following the path of music. And some, like Jim, found themselves engaged in a constant struggle to follow these two paths that led in opposite directions.

Self Creation/Self Expression

JB: You can't hang your personality on every note.

JP: No, but I try to.

Many people consider music to be a form of self-expression. A quick Google search provides hundreds of links to sites attesting to this belief. But the idea of self-expression in music raises several issues. The musicians I spoke with on the North Side held differing views on self-expression, yet all their views supported the conclusion that ideas of self and expression are linked to particular communities and are generated by shared practices and community goals. My experiences further support the understanding that cultural practices provide templates for the experience of self and emotion, and that these templates are flexible, adaptable to new experiences and external forces.

It might be assumed that when I express myself, I communicate to another person what I think or feel, taking something from inside of myself and placing it outside for someone else to see or hear. Jazz improvisation might seem like a perfect example of the spontaneous outpouring of emotion and ideas. Among rock musicians, the emphasis on performing original music and the disdain for cover bands also illustrates that music is regarded as self-expression. But in the course of a performance musicians perform songs about joy and sadness, they play exhilarating up-tempo tunes and dirge-like slow tunes. Musicians play tunes written in their youth and songs that look to particular futures. If we understand musical self-expression as simply taking a musician's internal thoughts and

feeling and displaying them externally for others, then we would have to conclude that most musicians are severely bi-polar.

Understanding self-expression as the act of a person making public internal private thoughts implies an understanding of the self as an independent source of thoughts and feelings. Yet, musical expression often relies on collective musical performance, and even solo performances make use of musical vocabularies produced collectively. An individual's musical voice is drawn from the ranges of voices made available by genres, performance practices, venues, marketing categories, and other external factors. Even jazz, with its strong emphasis on individual improvisation, is often thought of as the expression of a variety of ethnic, national, or regional identities. So the expression of self in music is closely allied with the expression of community even though self and community are sometimes seen as opposites.

Presumably we all have some understanding of the concept of self, since each of us has or is one. Many people, at least people influenced by Western culture, have an individualistic and essentialist notion of the self, and this understanding is expressed in texts thought to define Western culture. In the Bible Yahweh tells Moses, "I am that I am." Such notions of the self are also found in popular entertainment, as when Popeye similarly proclaims, "I yam what I yam." These statements presume that one has a true, coherent, and abiding self, a self that is often understood as a soul, the ghost that animates the corporeal machine. Given these beliefs, people are encouraged to look within and listen to their hearts in order to understand themselves.

Other theories hold that at a person's core there is no true perceiving self, but only perception. Existentialist and phenomenological thinkers argue that the self, rather than

being the ground of our identity is the product of congealed perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. Some Buddhist thinkers espouse a similar doctrine sometimes called the bundle theory of the self, which describes the self not as a seeing thing, but as the act of perceiving and the collection of perceptions gathered together in that act. Psychoanalytic psychology offers yet still others way of conceptualizing the self. The ego or self of which one is consciously aware is only the tip of the psychic iceberg, a fragment of awareness shaped by subterranean forces—the primitive bodily urges of the Id and the repressive internalized cultural demands of the Super Ego.

Other scholars understand the self as a kind of representation. In this sense, the term refers not to ego or experience, but to a kind of sign. Goffman writes that the presentation of self is like a theatrical performance that an individual tailors to a particular audience in order to affect that audience in a particular way (Goffman 1959). According to Goffman, an individual performs a variety of selves corresponding to different situations. While Goffman focuses on how a person present his or her self to others, it seems likely (from my fieldwork) that performances of self are also given for the presenter's own benefit. Beholding oneself succeeding or failing to perform the identity of jazz musician deeply affected the self-images of musicians I encountered in the field. If the presentation of self is the presentation of a sign to oneself and to others, and that presentation is done using a collectively constituted vocabulary, then individual identity is in part determined by grammar-like structure just as in the presentation of linguistic signs.

The self might be a person's objective core identity, or it might be the result of particular experiences. It might be the result of primitive drives and corresponding

repressions, or it might be a role or the sign of a role a person performs to gain leverage in social situations. Who we feel ourselves to be, who we pretend to be, and the social forces that act upon us, rather than representing opposing theories of the self, seem to be different moments in the processes of selfhood. As I participated in the sessions hosted by Scott Holman and Jon Bany, I originally set out to blend in with the regulars at the session. Accordingly, I performed a self that signified a professional musician who valued elegance and craft over emotional display. As I engaged in these collectively held ideas about music and musicians, others affirmed this identity. This affirmation gave me status as a person in the community. Collective affirmation increased my felt sense of self. What began as artifice presented to others became existential reality. As the nature of my perceiving self changed through dialogic interaction with others, I came to perceive differently the sounds and activities around me. A player who at first seemed unique later sounded to be musically weak in terms of prevailing musical ideals. Another player whose solos seemed dull and generic began to sound thoughtful and elegant. I began to seek his affirmation and his companionship brought me into deeper community of the session that in turn strengthened my growing sense of self among these people.

The Felt Self: Taking Performance Personally

Jim's struggle to "hang his personality on every note" shows that his musical performances are more than self-expression. For Jim, musical performance is also a way calling a particular self into existence. When he and other players fail musically, they don't just fail at presenting themselves, they fail at being themselves. They may say

something like “It’s just not happening,” or “I’m not happening.” Being musically out of sync feels like being psychically out of sync, and that produces feelings of anxiety, depression, and self-doubt. I write from both my own experience and from observing and speaking with other musicians at the session. This dynamic is certainly not unique to jazz performance. For several years I played with a dance band that wasn’t very good. At one point the drummer quit and was replaced by a more skilled drummer. After our first gig with the new drummer, the bass player, who was usually cranky, turned to me with a smile and said, “I always thought it was me.”

But not all musical situations evoke this personalization of performance. I never experienced this while singing hymns in church, singing the National Anthem, or playing in the pit for musical theater productions. I suspect improvisation—a practice that depends on individual creation and rhythmic grooves that produce intense bodily responses—invites this kind of involvement. Not to mention that performers with artistic or professional aspirations are more likely to experience musical failure as a kind of personal disintegration. In the context of Scott’s session Jim was frustrated because when the music “wasn’t happening,” then neither was he.

The Dialogically Produced Self

One’s sense of self is not simply a personal matter; it is a dialogic construction drawn from possibilities made available by the community. It is dialogic first because in the sessions, a person was always grooving or swinging with other people. Furthermore, the musical possibilities, and hence the subjective positions available to performers, were produced by the personal and musical histories of those present, by the history and lore of

jazz as conceived by those present, and by the economic and social conditions that made participation possible. One performs oneself as one performs any other improvisation, breathing new life into existing forms, working in harmony or dissonance with the others on the bandstand.

The Presented Self

Jim was deeply concerned with experiencing a particular kind of self in performance, but when a performer creates and experiences a sense of self, he is also presenting himself as an object for others. At the session Jim always presented himself in a professional way, never overplaying, knowing all the tunes, providing supportive accompaniment to soloist, and generally getting along with the other players, patrons, and hotel staff. He had a long-standing relationship with Scott, Robert, Adam, Loren, and other participants that included jamming, socializing, professional performances, and studio work. His identity as a professional jazz musician and community member is secure; yet he rarely used any of his cultural and social capital to expand the repertoire of possible musical choices at the sessions. Some players, like George Bean, a trumpeter who has been on the scene since the 1940s, were willing to make more noise; that is, they played and behaved in ways that might have been unacceptable in a less established player. Jim's musical and social choices reflected both his status and, perhaps, his unwillingness to jeopardize that status, even though his playing history and his musical influences reflect broader interests.

The performance of self and the feelings of self at play in these sessions are shaped by economic concerns as well as by musical and social considerations. Jim plays many

gigs, as do Dave Hibbard, Scott, Loren, Jon Bany, Don Stille, and other session participants. Some of their gigs are at jazz clubs, but they more often perform at cocktail parties, restaurants, and weddings. Don Stille, a player with strong jazz skills earns much of his income working with a group that specializes in performing at Jewish weddings and bar mitzvahs. At these kinds of gigs, musician must provide music that is elegant without drawing too much attention. The music at weddings, restaurants, private parties, and commercial recording sessions is more about the client's presentation of self than the musician's. Dress at the sessions reflected this experience. If someone had come from a gig he might be wearing a tuxedo, but most players dressed in chinos and dress shirts. The look might be termed "business casual." Few sported the tattoos or piercings common among rock musicians or the flamboyant ethnic clothing sometimes on display at South Side jam sessions. On some nights, the aesthetic of professional elegance seemed to drift toward the effacement of personality affected by those whose work is to serve others.

While Jim explicitly understood musical performance as a practice of self-expression, others did not. Three and a half months after my initial conversation with Jim I met Dave Hibbard at a coffee shop in a northern suburb, midway between my Ravenswood apartment and his home in Gurnee. Dave and Jim sit with each other at sessions. They recorded a CD together with bassist Nick Tountas, and they had very similar approaches to improvisation. Even so, their ideas on self-expression appeared to differ, at least at first glance. "I don't think of performing as self expression," Dave told me, "any more than I think of this communication we're doing here as self expression. I think of it as communication." Playing and talking weren't, for Dave, the revelation of immediate and

personal feelings. An articulate and thoughtful musician, Dave clearly explained to me what he believed he was doing when he played music:

Why do we play? Once we start looking at the human condition, there's a lot of indicators about why we do things. The old caricature... the caricature of the guy in the movies who gets frightened and starts whistling. Why? Because it makes him look bigger. Playing trumpet made me bigger. Gave me more authority. It made me more important. It's all that, tied also to the need to communicate. Because I play those things that I write, either spontaneously or those things I labor over and then use as jumping off points for improvisation.

So there's lots and lots of reasons we do the things we do and it's really easy to trivialize it by saying, "I'm playing what I think, what I feel." I don't do that. Never have. Because I know that too many times I got our there, [and] I had a sore throat, I had a running nose, we got there within ten minutes of the time to start.... We didn't feel good; the place stunk; we had an argument... You're not in a good frame of mind, and your job is to get up there and play good music.

As Dave pointed out, professional musicians are often required to play music that, in fact, expresses the opposite of what they think or feel. As a professional musician Dave was obligated to provide his client with the product they had purchased no matter how he felt. But music can run counter to self-expression in other, more personal ways. People often play music expressing not who they are but whom they wish they were and the jam session provides a temporary alternative to their regular lives. Other people play music expressing who they hope to become, performing music in order play into existence a new and better self.

Dave didn't experience feelings of personal disintegration following bad performances:

It's the acceptance of the human condition. And the fact that the thing I want is the top notch and you don't get the top notch all the time. Sometimes I only get it for one or two bars at a time... If you go in there and become angry or upset or feel cheated because you don't get it, then what you're doing, you're closing yourself off to everything. There's never a chance of getting it. One of the difficulties I think of being a musician, a creative person of any sort, is that you

open yourself and become extraordinarily vulnerable to the people who are not creative.

Dave stressed throughout our talk that improvisation requires that a person be ready to go with whatever presents itself. Accepting the disappointments is necessary in order to remain open to the improvisational possibilities.

Nevertheless, Dave acknowledged that other people could hinder his ability to reach the top notch. He said that he had to “disconnect” from the visual and verbal to focus on the aural. That didn’t happen easily:

I’m still hassling with fear that somebody’s going to kick my horns over or the drummer’s so stoned we’re not going to get through this thing. But if I can get into a situation where I’m comfortable and disconnect I’m totally a voice at that moment.

When Dave spoke of the “disconnect” from the non-musical world, he spoke in terms of physical intimacy, physical transformation, and divine creation of life:

Trumpet is very intimate. You put it on your mouth and it’s in a position that’s not unlike kissing. You breathe life into it. You don’t strike it or stroke it or turn it on to get life into it. You breathe life into it, so it’s a very intimate process. And it becomes part of—it’s like my head all of a sudden got bigger. I have a bigger mouth.

Though Jim regards his music as a kind of self-expression and Dave does not, their views are really quite similar. Improvising jazz is a way of performing one’s musical self into being. Rather than expressing immediate feeling, it performs for oneself and others a particular identity, in this case, the identity of a sophisticated and professional musician. Playing music also transforms one’s subjective experiencing of oneself. Players hear differently, experience their body differently, and they experience themselves as having a particular standing in the world. This improvising self is not an abiding object or even coherent; all sorts of distractions can thwart or divide this self. The experience of this

thwarting is unpleasant and, at the very least, requires the development of a philosophical distancing from failure. Jim, Dave, and other players conjure their improvising self only for hours, minutes, or measures at a time, but it leaves an echo that goes with the players as they perform other identities in other situations, imbuing those identities with a feeling of harmony or dissonance.

Art begins as artifice. So too does the self. The musical practices of these North Side sessions provide a template for producing self and sound. It is a template that draws on general jazz practices and models of professionalism dialogically reproduced and refigured in each performance. I tried to fit the model of a professional player and this, in turn, changed my playing. As I performed this objective self for others, I gained standing in the community. Trying on this self, crafted for this particular situation, I experienced the music and myself differently. Playing jazz standards at these North Side sessions, I began to hear others in terms of local musical and professional standards and in terms of local social relations. Gaining voice also allowed me to speak differently and I was increasingly able to interject sounds and practices acquired elsewhere, contributing not only to the repetition of the model, but also to its subtle and continuous transformation.

Conclusion

This chapter began by tracing the path I followed to a North Side jam session on October 6, 2004. But tracing this single path quickly proved to be insufficient for understanding this session and other sessions these musicians frequented. Moments from my early fieldwork immediately called for references to other nights, other performances, other conversations, and other locations, and the progress of the evening was frequently

interrupted by analysis and conjecture. By relating a single evening, I hoped to give a sense of wholeness to my experiences, but the community I studied didn't afford that sense of completeness and the fiction of completeness was undermined by the growing pile of fragments.

Unlike other ethnographies that portray a single defining ceremonial moment, my night was nothing special, one of many, best made sense of by reference to the many strands that make up this network. This community is not renewed in a climactic moment in a ceremonial cycle, but through everyday reenactments. And if the fragmentary or temporary nature of this community isn't clear, I must emphasize that the stories I've told were gathered over the course of eighteen months. During that time Scott's session was cancelled at Delaney and Murphy's, briefly resumed at Basta Pasta, and then abandoned all together. During this time, I also did field work in other musical communities. My time in the field was a patchwork experience.

As I have portrayed it, the musical community that gathered at Delaney and Murphy's and The Chambers is a model of quiet musical virtuosity where great technical skill, craft, and professionalism are highly regarded, but this community is not the only community of jazz virtuosos in Chicago. Highly skilled jazz musicians—black and white, male and female, young and old, North Side and South Side—can be heard across the geographic and social landscape of Chicago.

Also, the model of virtuosity operating at Delaney and Murphy's and The Chambers is not the only model of virtuosity and jazz professionalism found among Chicago's jazz musicians. Indeed, as Micaela di Leonardo argues what counts as work is related to a person's social position. Often the activities of men—activities that are more

obviously economically productive—count as work, and excellence at those activities counts as virtuosity, but the “kin work” and social virtuosity of women often goes unnoticed (Di Leonardo 1987). Ideas of virtuosity and professionalism at Delaney and Murphy’s and The Chambers are the product of the social positions and goals of the participants. Other communities, like the one at The Negro League Café that I describe in the next chapter, include people of other social positions who have other social goals. Consequently, those communities emphasize other kinds of virtuosity and work. Though different communities foreground different kinds of virtuosity, technical and social virtuosity do not exist separately. For example, Scot Holman was not an exceptionally virtuosic pianist, and he maintained the session at Delaney and Murphy’s through his social virtuosity. Conversely, Theodis Rodgers, a virtuosic pianist with a national reputation, played an important role at The Negro League Café session (Chapter Four) even though that community often emphasized social relations over technical virtuosity.

I suspect that the narrative strategy of ethnographies, the concern with telling a good story, foregrounds coherence and homogeneity in a community. I hope that my story telling has depicted the specificity of the jam sessions at Delaney and Murphy’s and The Chambers, but I also hope that the narrative coherence does not overemphasize their communal coherence. People at those sessions really did have a kind of community, but their affiliations were multiple, they were working on many different social and musical projects, and sometimes they were in conflict. As Dave Hibbard told me, “We have different types of communities. I have my family community, my business community. Some overlap; some are exactly the same; some are not. But I have a social group that has nothing to do with these guys.” Nevertheless, the North Side jam sessions I describe

here constitute a real community, one that while temporary and partial, provides participants with a sense of self and allows them to make a portion of the city their own—at least for the moment— through shared musical practices.

Chapter 4

Rebuilding My Father's House: The Negro League Café Jam Session

“We want the jam session to be perfect; we want our lives to grow perfect; we want to finish this house.”

—Theodis Rodgers



Figure 4.1 Cecile, Aki, and Theodis on stage at the Negro League

In Bronzeville, the Negro League Café was home to a jam session quite different from the sessions at Delaney and Murphy's and The Chambers (Chapter 3). On Tuesdays, people from the neighborhood came to play music, listen to the jam and hang out with family and friends talking and eating barbeque chicken, smothered pork chops,

and greens. Neighborliness and the desire to build local community guided their choice of repertoire, performance practices, and the social interaction of participants. The goal of bringing neighbors together in song opened the door to a wide variety of musical practices that differed greatly from those of the professional and aspiring professional jazz musicians discussed in Chapter Three. Bringing together neighbors also allowed differences among participants to emerge. Scott Holman's session at Delaney and Murphy's drew a fairly homogenous group of people, but the session at the Negro League Café drew people united by proximity, ethnicity, and shared history, yet set apart by gender, class, educational background, and musical preferences. Similarities, differences, and a many-stranded web of musical and non-musical relationships intensified feelings of community and conflict, and the Negro League Café session ultimately proved to be fairly unstable. The session, which began a few months before I began participating in May of 2005, ended a few months after I left Chicago in March of 2006. At the heart of the session were Theodis Rodgers and Aki Antonia Smith, two keyboard players who hosted the session and inspired its focus on the local community.

The Negro League Café session highlights the way that music—particularly jazz—is put to local uses and takes on local meanings. The session also illustrates the tenuousness of local urban communities. While I focus most closely on the actions of local participants, the session also demonstrates the links between neighborhood musical practices, the city of Chicago, and the global economy.

Going to the South Side

I thought that maybe it was just me, but in the winter of 2005, after several months in the field, I realized that few white Chicagoans ever ventured south of the Loop. Even jazz musicians deeply committed to the musical styles born on the South Side feared this part of town was too inhospitable and dangerous. Von Freeman's session at the New Apartment Lounge and the session at the Velvet Lounge, the AACM hangout run by veteran saxophonist Fred Anderson, drew some young white die-hards, but that was about it. And even those die-hards told stories of frightening encounters. My own preconceptions were also fed by news reports, rumors, and literary portraits of Chicago. In Saul Bellow's short story "Looking for Mr. Green," George Grebe, a Chicago city employee, is responsible for delivering a relief check to Tulliver Green, an elderly black man living on the South Side. Bellow depicts the South Side as a place so hostile and foreign that Grebe can learn nothing of Mr. Green. Mr. Raynor, Grebe's supervisor, warns him of the problems he'll face. Raynor says, "They don't want to tell you anything." Grebe replies, "Because I'm a stranger." "Because," Raynor corrects him, "you're white" (Bellow 1968). So Grebe sets out to find Mr. Green, alternately imagining himself hunting after some wild game, or pondering the metaphysically ineffable 'Other.'

I knew Bellow's story was a fictional exaggeration, but it left me thinking that race relations in Chicago were incredibly hostile and that on the South Side I might be seen as an enemy combatant. (Other people thought so, too. One Chicago policeman I met at The Green Mill, a popular North Side jazz club, offered to be my guide and protector on my journeys south of the Loop.) At the very best, I hoped for the muted

hostility and indifference some white ethnographers report when encountering people of color.⁵²

So imagine my relief and pleasure on my first trip to the Apartment Lounge, when I was given free birthday cake; and at Bernice's Twilight Zone, when Bernice herself found me an open chair and made me a bowl of popcorn. When Miss Marie scolded me for not bringing my guitar on my first trip to the Tropical Den, I thought I'd struck ethnomusicological gold. This is not to say that the South Side isn't a dangerous place. At The Apartment Lounge the bouncer (an off-duty cop) inspects you with a metal detector, and the door at the Tropical Den stays locked until Otis the bartender has a good look at you and buzzes you in. African Americans I met often offered to walk me to my car. They worried that I was an easy target.

In the movie *Animal House* some white college boys visit a black music club where black men steal their dates and offer them the blade of a knife. I, instead, got cake, friendship, and music. In spite of my good experiences it would be a great mistake to underestimate the difference between white and black Chicagoans. Though I am enthusiastic about the people and the field I study, this is not an ethnography about a secret pluralistic utopia. Chicago is a deeply segregated city where racism leaves many blacks poor and unemployed in places with high crime rates and poor housing. Yet, I was generally welcomed into a lively, neighborly, working class world; gatherings in clubs reminded me of family parties from my childhood. The many differences between these

⁵² One of the most famous and entertaining accounts of people misleading and using an ethnomusicologist is told by Bruno Nettl in "Come Back and See Me Next Tuesday" (Nettl 2005).

worlds are obvious. The folks at the Twilight Zone were listening to blues and jazz rather than dancing the polka, but it still felt like *Gemütlichkeit* to me.

So I was caught off guard when the African American woman drinking next to me at the Twilight Zone turned on her stool, sucked a little gin through her straw, and glared at me through her copper-tinted dreads. “We sure wanna thank you for coming down,” she said, putting a fresh layer of frost on my beer. “We know you riskin’ your life and all.” Any secret fantasies I had about erasing differences were dramatically put to rest that night. As a kid, I loved soul music. I thought black people had special musical gifts and I dreamed of having those powers myself. I like to think that I am beyond that now. My early fascination, born in me almost before I knew what race was, has led to a life of musical practice and research. I still love black music, but I like to think that I know who I am and that I have my own musical voice. Still, ethnomusicology may just be the same adolescent urge to become the other, repressed and made socially acceptable. If I thought I was passing, Aki’s comments certainly cleared that up.

Aki’s initial hostility didn’t bode well. I sat tight and listened anyway, hoping this moment would somehow be good fieldwork. Much to my relief, the mood quickly turned from confrontation to conversation. Robert Shy, the drummer on the gig that night and a friend from other sessions, came over and shook my hand. He introduced me to Theodis Rodgers, the piano player and Aki’s boyfriend. We all talked and by the time the band’s break ended and Robert and Theo headed back to the stage, Theo and Aki had invited me to the new jam session they were hosting at the Negro League Café.

Talking with Aki and Theodis that night set the tone for many months of fieldwork and musical participation. Race continued to play a central role. The session

was clearly about local black music and identity. During my participation in the session Aki and others continually teased me about overcoming my whiteness through participation in symbolic black practices. Our initial meeting also suggested gender conflicts that I saw time and again at the session as women participants struggled to gain respect and authority. Questions of gender and authority arose on stage and contributed to the session's eventual demise. In addition, my initial meeting with Aki, Theodis, and Robert illustrates how people participate in a variety of urban communities, and also how various black musical communities differ. Theo and Robert performed together and knew each other, but Robert never came to the session at the Negro League and Theo never came to the session at Delaney and Murphy's where Robert was the session drummer. Their paths intersected, but they were also working toward different musical and social ends. This difference seems mundane except when we remember that the category of "black music" is sometimes invoked as a force that unifies African American expression across time and space (Baraka 1963, 1968). Finally, my conversation with Aki, Theodis, and Robert illustrates how musical practice shapes identity. My skin color was a barrier, but as we talked of music and as Robert acknowledged me as a player, Aki's attitude changed and she came to consider me as a provisional insider.

I also changed as I played with Theo and Aki. I developed new musical skills and tastes, and I felt like a member of a new community. As a member of that community, I developed a different sense of myself that included feelings of responsibility to the people with whom I played every Tuesday. Ethnography offers the opportunity for insight into the lives of others, but it also offers the opportunity for personal transformation. The gaze of others contributes to one's individual identity. Philosophers

have argued the self is constituted intersubjectively, and this is a growing concern among some anthropologists.⁵³ As Dorinne Kondo has shown, ethnographers are not immune from the constituting network of intersubjective relations at play in the field (Kondo 1990). The gaze of those I came to study transformed me. Others may have been transformed as well, as they participated in the session and in my research. I would also hope that readers, as they gain knowledge of the people they are reading about, also undergo some recalibration of self as they participate vicariously in this musical community.

Bronzeville: Community Life in a Global City

The Negro League Café is located in Bronzeville, “The Black Metropolis.” Just a short ride from the Loop and just north of Hyde Park and the University of Chicago, Bronzeville is bounded on Pershing Road (Thirty-ninth Street) on the North and by Fifty-first Street on the South, and by Cottage Grove Avenue on the East and the Dan Ryan Expressway on the West. Like New York’s Harlem, Bronzeville was a primary destination of the Great Migration in the early Twentieth Century when blacks left the rural South seeking jobs and relative freedom in the cities of the North. Drawn by hope

⁵³ For a brief account of intersubjectivity in philosophy and the social sciences see Michael Jackson’s *Minima Ethnographic*, especially pages 1–15. Among other topics Jackson introduces the existential-phenomenological implications that the theories of Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, M. M. Bakhtin and other philosophers and critics have for anthropology, the anthropological deconstructions of subjectivity in the works of social theorists from Levi-Strauss to Foucault, and the resurgence of interest in subjectivity and intersubjectivity in the writings of a diverse collection of anthropologists and theorists that includes Irving Goffman, Carl Grauman, Vincent Crapanzano, just to name a few, as well as in his own work (Heidegger 1962; Merleau-Ponty 1962; Sartre 1956; Bakhtin 1981; Foucault 1970; Levi-Strauss 1963; Goffman 1967; Graumann 1995; Crapanzano 1988; Jackson 1998).

but contained by zoning laws, African Americans created in Bronzeville a Mecca for African American arts and business second only to Harlem. Bronzeville was home to Negro League Baseball, Chicago-style jazz, and the *Chicago Defender* (a national African American weekly newspaper). Throughout the century Forty-seventh Street—the heart of Bronzeville—was a thriving thoroughfare lined with black-owned businesses, stores, restaurants, and nightclubs. But racist zoning practices and the loss of industry have led to a dramatic decline in the later half of the twentieth century. Today, once stately greystones stand next to vacant lots and boarded buildings. In the first wave of urban renewal that began in the late 1940s, the city demolished many homes in Bronzeville, and replaced them with high-rise public housing projects, turning the neighborhood into a densely packed warehouse for thousands of the city’s poorest African American residents. According to Derek Hyra, Bronzeville, in 1999, had the highest concentration of public housing in Chicago (Hyra 2008, p. 89). Today, many of those decaying projects have been torn down. Littered empty lots stretching for blocks along the Dan Ryan Expressway are all that remain of the twenty-eight high-rises that made up the Robert Taylor Homes.

The destruction of the projects is part of what Derek Hyra calls the “second renaissance” in Bronzeville (Hyra 2008, p. 5). The area is undergoing gentrification, but unlike gentrification in other parts of the city and the urban renewal of the past, Bronzeville’s second renaissance is seeing an influx of black professionals. In addition, black real estate companies and contractors are profiting from the process. The resurgence of Bronzeville is part of a general migration of professionals to housing near Chicago’s central business district, and as many have argued, the concentration of

financial, legal, and other professionals around the Loop is a sign of Chicago's importance as a global city that serves as a command and control center for the international movement of capital (Abu-Lughod 1999; Madigan 2004; Koval et al. 2006; Hyra 2008). This suggests links between the musical practices of Bronzeville residents and changes in international finance. This is not to say that other local musical practices are unaffected by global developments. Certainly, the very existence of the Arlington Heights Sheraton Hotel, the home of Scot Earl Holman's jam session, is dependent on nearby O'Hare International Airport. However, the transformation of low income housing in Bronzeville to high priced condominiums dramatically reflects the increasing globalization of markets and Chicago's place in that process.

Gentrification brought on by local and international developments is not spread out evenly across Bronzeville. From the Harold Washington Cultural Center at the intersection of Forty-seventh Street and Martin Luther King Boulevard, residents can walk to restaurants, boutiques, bookstores, and coffee shops, but at the intersection of Forty-Third Street and Prairie Avenue, the Negro League Café is the only lit up business on an otherwise dark street. There are plenty of empty lots and rundown buildings near the Café, and several buildings have been restored to their earlier grandeur. If you live there and you want to go out for a decent meal, the League is the place to go. The only alternative is J. J's Fish, and that involves walking past corners where gang members and drug addicts conduct business. Ron Curry, owner of the Café, has attempted to draw the growing business class by hosting events like the "Business Builders Circle Breakfast:" flyers on display at the café describe the breakfast as "an opportunity for business professionals to Eat, Meet, and Build Business relationships." Organizations like The

Thapelo Institute, Inc., a not-for-profit organization promoting health and fitness for African and African American men, also held events at the Negro League Café. The photo below shows a Thapelo Institute sponsored meeting on prostate cancer awareness. The meeting addressed local barbers whose barbershops are local gathering places and a source of information on the South Side.



Figure 4.2 Barbers' gathering (photographer unknown)

If widespread gentrification really does take hold in this area, it is easy to imagine the Negro League Café being supplanted by more upscale establishment, but for now it is the only decent restaurant for many blocks,⁵⁴ and Don Curry is clearly courting the

⁵⁴ Being the only restaurant for several square blocks might not seem like much for some locations, but on the North Side, it is difficult to find a single block on a busy street without at least one good restaurant and several fast food joints.

growing number of local business people with delicious ribs and chicken, live music, and local history and culture.

Music and the Second Renaissance

Music plays an important role in the Second Renaissance of Bronzeville and is part of the city's plan for drawing workers with the skills needed in a global city. Sharon Zukin writes, "Cultural institutions establish a competitive advantage over other cities for attracting new businesses and corporate elites" (Zukin 12). Richard Longworth observes that Chicago, "the City that Works," once drew immigrants with the prospect of jobs, but now draws a new breed of workers with the prospect of culture and comfort. "Today's employers come here," he says, "because the city offers sweeter but less tangible attractions. An entrepreneur wanting to start a high-tech or global service firm looks for a place with smart, educated workers and the kinds of amenities—housing, restaurants, culture—that will attract and keep them" (Longworth 2004, p. 75).⁵⁵ Major corporations based in Chicago actively support the arts, providing funding for a variety of performances that increase the city's prestige. Boeing Corporation, Bank One, and Kraft Foods joined together for the Chicago Jazz Partnership, which, between 2005 and 2007 contributed \$1.5 million to jazz events such as the Made In Chicago concerts in Millennium Park. As *Chicago Tribune* jazz critic Howard Reich reports, "Backers of this plan stress that their campaign is designed not simply to nurture jazz but to add firepower to a distinct brand of the music: Chicago jazz" (Reich 2005, p. 10). A consortium of city

⁵⁵ For more on the role of creative workers in modern cities also see Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, and Everyday Life* (Florida 2002).

and business groups including The Jazz Institute of Chicago, the Mayor's Office of Special Events, the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, and the Chicago Office of Tourism all work together to present large events like the Chicago Jazz Festival and the Chicago Blues Festival. They also fund and organize cultural programs like Chicago Soul Trails, which offers concerts and tours of local clubs with a safe glimpse of Chicago's gritty urban heritage. The JazzFest Heritage Music Weekend, held on the grounds of the old South Shore Country Club, provides a similar, specifically South Side, African-American music festival. This festival is put on by Jazz Unites, Inc., the organization run by Geraldine de Haas, a longtime South Side musician, community advocate, and impresario. When I spoke with her and her associate Delmarie Cobb, they stressed how the festival catered to local families, but that local families were linked to African Americans across the nation. They envision the festival as a place for family reunions that link neighborhood to nation. On the day I spent at the Jazz Unites festival, I met local residents, returning former residents, and Europeans of African descent. De Haas emphasizes that her festival operates without city funding, but other music events in Bronzeville do benefit from the city's support. Forty-seventh Street has been designated a "Redevelopment Area" and a "Tax Increment Financing District" in order to promote development and tourism (Hyra 2008, p. 123–125). Music is certainly part of this plan, but, as Hyra points out, planners have ignored community input, and they closed a Chicago jazz landmark, the Palm Tavern, so it remains to be seen how the interests of developers will fit with the interest of local citizens and musicians. The Negro League Café on Forty-third Street seems worlds away from this development now. Nevertheless, changes in global finance have led to new labor needs in Chicago. These changes have

led to new housing needs near the city's central business district. The city, in order to attract and maintain the highly skilled workers required in a global economy has, among other things, funded upscale housing development and the development of cultural services that will draw those workers to the city. The musicians at the Negro League Café do not receive any of this support directly, but they bob along precariously its the wake, latching on the bits and pieces that now float their way.

The Negro League Café Jam Session

Though the Negro League Café exists in networks that link neighborhood, city, nation, and world, the musicians that play there are more concerned with problems closer to home. People talk about their relations with other people in the club, gigs that grow out of the session, and what's going on in the streets around the Café. Even concerns about African and African American identity are, for the most part, performed in terms of local relationships. Cultural exemplars are drawn from relatives and people in neighborhood.⁵⁶ The session's emphasis on community determines many aspects of the music including repertoire choices, performance practices, and aesthetic values—and this emphasis opens the door to a particular range of participants with uniquely diverse yet culturally specific kinds of preparation. It also helps shape the relationship between those playing and those listening, and the range of activities that take place at the jam. The emphasis on building a local community brings with it an inherent potential for conflict. In contrast, the North

⁵⁶ For example, when honoring African American leaders, session participants looked to local heroes like Oscar Brown, Jr. The musical tribute to Brown featured performances by his daughter and other musicians who worked with him and still live in the area. Bronzeville is important to the national history of African Americans, so it is easy to find national figures who have had face-to-face relationships with local residents.

Side session discussed in Chapter Three emphasized very specific professional and aesthetic characteristics that attracted a relatively homogenous group of participants from across a wide area. Negro League Café participants were united more by proximity and race. One might assume that proximity and race would entail many shared traits, but that was not the case. The session at the Café drew men and women, homeowners and recently paroled criminals living in single-room apartments, educated professionals and high-school dropouts, and straight-ahead jazz players and musicians with a commitment to a wide range of African American musical practices. While these people shared much, certain conflicts sometimes simmered beneath the surface of sociality. Often, the session was held together by the galvanizing musical presence of key participants. When they were absent, the session did not always go smoothly, and participants with competing agenda pulled the activities in different directions.

Nobody embodies the session's focus on the local community more than Aki, herself. Born on the South Side, she moved away, traveled in Africa, lived on the North Side, and returned home. She taught music to grade school and high school students, and, in addition to jazz, she has performed funk, soul, and other genres associated with African Americans. As a young woman she went to Ghana where she took the name Aki to recognize her African ancestry. Recently, she has also begun using her family name. Now calling herself Aki Antonia Smith, she pays homage to her African roots but also her immediate family and father. She has begun rehabbing her father's home just a few blocks away. She told me that her father had a vision for Bronzeville that made her proud of her family and her heritage. When I first started attending her sessions she had just acquired a recording of her uncles' jazz band that had been recorded in the 1920s. Aki's

uncles played jazz, ran a South Side music store, and were a part of the history of Chicago jazz. Aki felt that taking back her family name, restoring her father's house, and hosting the jam session were ways she could continue to keep her father's vision alive. She was not alone in her quest to restore community through music. Wherever I went on the South Side, musicians, MCs, bartenders, and audience members told me, "We're bringing jazz back to the South Side." And they said it as if they were watching their home be born again.

The Pathway to the Negro League Café Session

From my North Side apartment in Ravenswood, I drove south on the Kennedy, past the Loop, and continued weaving past the construction on the Dan Ryan to Forty-third Street.⁵⁷ As I exited the freeway and crossed over eastbound on Forty-third Street, what I first encountered were vacant lots where, until recently, the Robert Taylor Homes housed thousands of poor African Americans. Bleak in the twilight, these now littered fields made me think of anything but global enterprise or vibrant local communities. I passed J & J Fish and Chicken on Forty-third Street and Prairie Avenue and the rundown storefront where tough-looking young men always seemed to be skulking. At night they had Forty-third Street to themselves. Everyplace else was dark. No neon or flashing lights marked the Negro League Café, and I drove by several times before I recognized the club's name, spelled out in baseball bats and lit with a few simple bulbs, telling me I'd

⁵⁷ In Chicago, sections of highway are named for politicians. I-90 and I-94 run together through the heart of the city, parallel to Lake Michigan. The Kennedy Expressway refers to the section of I-90/I-94 north of the Loop and the section of I-90 continues west toward O'Hare International Airport. The Dan Ryan Expressway is the section of I-90/I-94 that runs south of the Loop.

reached my destination. As I would learn, this small island of light was an important victory in the neighborhood battle against the “bangers.”

Most session participants didn't come nearly as far. Many drove from nearby homes, some took the Red Line train that stopped just up the street, and some walked. A few participants grew up nearby. Some went to high school together. Others knew each other from church. Many of the participants and listeners came every Tuesday, but there were always new people who came only to eat and then stayed for the music. Sometimes these people borrowed an instrument and sat in. Sometimes other white or black musicians came from the North Side, and on several occasions, people visiting from out of town stopped by. Sometimes out-of-town visitors were just tourists, but they were often in Chicago to visit family.

The club itself is on the northeast corner of Forty-third Street and Prairie Avenue. Kitty corner is a small building that houses a business providing social services. The other two corner lots are vacant. Forty-third Street is busy enough during the day to warrant an El station, but on Tuesday evenings, the streets are nearly empty and a little threatening, so people park close so they can walk in the glow of the club's spotlights and avoid the shadows and alleys. Passing through the corner doorway, patrons enter a spacious, comfortably lit, but somewhat spare barroom that, for me, seemed a welcome contrast to the street's desolation. Men and women sat at the bar or at small tables: some alone, some in groups. Sporting events flickered perpetually on the big screen behind the bar, while, from the walls, portraits and murals depicting the greats of Negro League baseball reminded drinkers of past glory for the neighborhood and the race. Chicago was home to the Chicago American Giants who dominated Negro League Baseball from 1910

until 1939.⁵⁸ Don Curry markets the Café not only as a place to eat and drink, but a place to learn about local history. Like many businesses on the South Side, it is wrapped in tropes of racial uplift. Even the Café's website exhorts viewers to seize the day as "*Carpe Diem*" floats across the screen (www.thenegroleaguecafe.info Nov. 7 2005).⁵⁹



Figure 4.3 Aki at the door

To get to the session you pass through a doorway into the dining room. Immediately to your right is a slightly raised platform that is a stage by night and extra seating space by day. But before you get on stage you have to talk to Aki who is sitting at a table immediately to your left. She takes your money—\$3 for players, \$5 for listeners—

⁵⁸ The Chicago American Giants were originally known as the Chicago Leland Giants. In 1911, they made South Side Park on 39th and Wentworth their home when the White Sox moved to Comiskey Park, which had just been completed nearby. The Giants stayed at South Side Park until a fire destroyed it on Christmas day, 1940. Rube Foster, a star player who became the manager of the Giants, helped found the Negro National League, one of the main professional leagues of Negro League baseball.

⁵⁹ The slogan, "Eat the Food. Digest the History," also appears on promotional materials for the Negro League Café.

and she signs you in so you can be called up later. She also shows you pictures she's taken of other nights and let's you know if there will be any special guests or features that night. The dining room holds about twenty booths and five or six small round tables along the edge of the stage. On the other side of the stage is an open window to the kitchen where the staff passes plates of "soul food with a Caribbean twist," the café's specialty. People from around the neighborhood come for business meetings, birthday parties, or just for a bite to eat after work. Whenever I came to the café to play or eat, people I knew always said hello. Aki made sure that newcomers were always introduced to regulars as they stopped at her table.

The Negro League Café Dining Room & Bar Room

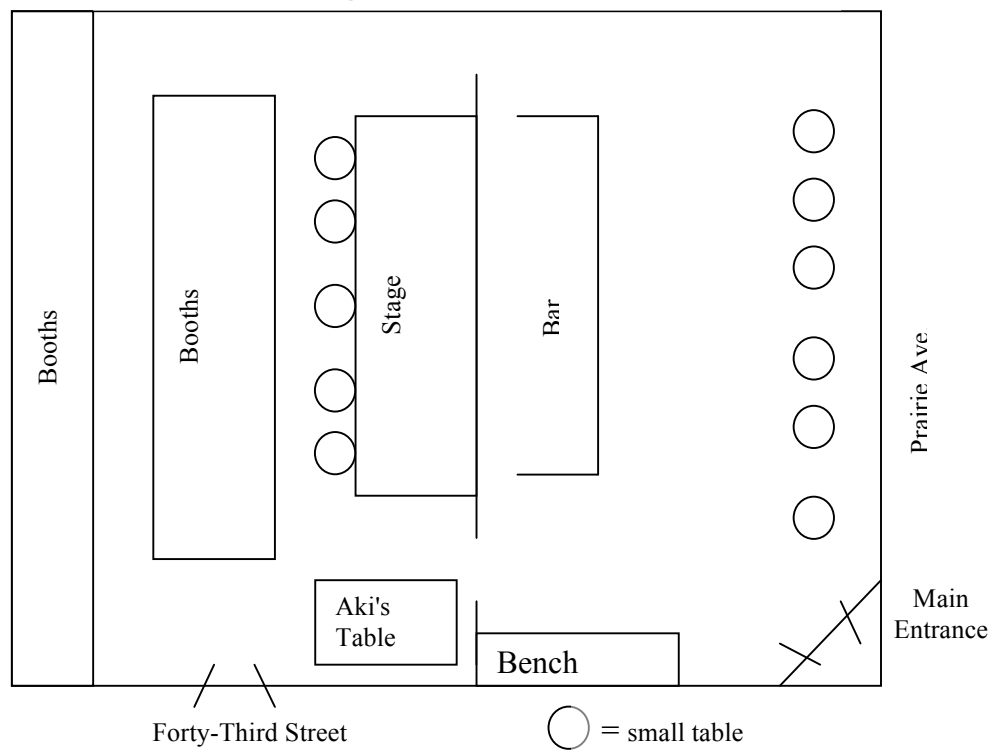


Figure 4.4 The layout of the Negro League Café

Participation by locals indicated a commitment to building local community, but it also tells a story of neighborhood economic conditions. Unlike many of the players at The Chambers and Delaney and Murphy's (Chapter Three), participants at the Negro League Café sometimes lived on the edge of poverty. Some could barely afford reliable transportation across town, much less expensive homes in distant suburbs. On more than one occasion people asked me for train fare or a ride home. Other participants carpooled and a number of relationships in and out of the session seemed to develop out of the need to share transportation. Financial need and a lack of alternatives, as well as shared history and culture, helped to foster the commitment to local community.

Poverty nearly brought the session to an end. Theodis Rodgers, a driving musical presence at the session, wasn't earning enough money in Chicago, so he left to play the casinos in Las Vegas. Aki stayed in Chicago to run the session and continue restoring her family home. With Theo gone, however, it was difficult for her to make car payments, and one day her car was repossessed along with the session PA system that she kept in her trunk. She managed to cobble together a small system for the next session, but the sound quality was poor. We limped along with this PA for several weeks. At the end of the night we piled Aki, her sister, her son, her keyboards, and the PA into my car for the short, crowded ride back to her apartment. After a month of this, we made a desperate dash first to the Chicago suburbs to retrieve the PA and other contents of her car, and then to Wisconsin, to the high security impoundment lot to retrieve her car minutes before it hit the auction block.⁶⁰ During my time at the session Aki constantly struggled

⁶⁰ When a car is repossessed, the repo men make the car and its contents very difficult to retrieve in order to prevent enraged car owners from attacking the impound lot and

with the bank to hang on to her car and her father's house. For her, the struggle to build community was not a luxury, but part of a daily struggle to keep hearth and home together.

Not all participants faced the same dire economic challenges. Linard Stroud, a drummer at the session, did some studio work and performed regularly with several popular bands at such prominent clubs as Philander's in Oak Park. Deameris Vaughn, the session's main drummer worked days as a tennis pro at a South Side health club and had a regular church gig. Aki's cousin Al Smith worked a day job and played in several pop bands. Some nights, he'd rehearse until 9:00 with his pop group, sit in at the Negro League Café, and then grab a couple of hours of sleep before starting his day job at 6:00 a.m.

Participants took a variety of pathways in preparation for this session. Some players represented third generation Chicago musicians. Aki's relatives had been active in music since the early twentieth century. The father of Verne Allison, Jr. (a frequent drummer at the session) sang second tenor with the Chicago R&B vocal groups, The Dells, Morris Jennings, cousin of Linard Stroud (another regular drummer at the session) played drums for Chicago's Chess Records in the 1970s. Linard's other cousin, pianist and singer, Margie Stroud, also played at the sessions when not performing in clubs around the world.

Some players came with strong performing backgrounds and formal musical training. Aki had a Master's degree in education, as did bassist and singer, Cecile Savage. Linard studied music at Livingstone College in Salisbury, North Carolina. Even players

retrieving their car and possessions by force. Only Aki was allowed past the guard, the double gate, and the razor wire topped fence when we went to collect her car.

without college training came to the session with a wealth of professional experience. Theodis, for example, had toured with several stars including Curtis Mayfield and Angela Bofill. For many years Theodis also worked as the musical director for the Ebony Fashion Fair Tour, and he played on numerous recordings and movie soundtracks.⁶¹ This background made Theo something of a celebrity among his fellow undergraduate students at the University of Illinois. Percussionist Tony Carpenter, who occasionally sat in on drum set or congas, also worked extensively with such high profile musicians as Tyron Davis, Jerry Butler, and Ramsey Lewis. These players and other participants in the session also gigged frequently around the Chicago area.

Another source of preparation for session participants was the church. Linard Stroud, for example, played every Sunday at Metropolitan Apostolic Church on Forty-first Street and Martin Luther King Drive. Margie Stroud and Deameris Vaughn also had regular paying church gigs. Others simply sang or played as volunteers on Sunday mornings. Amateurs did not bring the same technical ability or musical flexibility to the session, but they did not come untrained.

Gospel music played an important role on Chicago's South Side. Pilgrim Baptist Church, where Thomas Dorsey developed the musical style we know as gospel, was just a mile from the Negro League Café. When the church burned in 2006, the community suffered a great blow. While Gospel music has been a force in the life of many African America musicians, some regard the trope of gospel roots to be part of the mythologizing

⁶¹ Theodis has worked extensively as a sideman. He can be heard on a number of film soundtracks including the soundtracks to *A Family Thing* (Pierce 1996) and *Indecent Proposal* (Lyne 1993) which included a cameo appearance of Theodis playing with Sheena Easton. He has played on recordings too numerous to mention, backing such luminaries as the ChiLites, Jerry Butler, and Curtis Mayfield.

of black expression, a myth that distorts their own artistic efforts and intentions. When I asked Theodis about his earliest musical experiences, he looked at me and said, in his best Amos and Andy dialect, “I fust got ma training in de choich” (Smith and Rodgers 2005), nearly failing to get it out before he and Aki doubled over in laughter. When they recovered, Theo and Aki told me how they and another session participant met in the early 1970s, and how they spent their high school study-hall time together working out tunes by the British prog rock group Emerson, Lake, and Palmer.

Several participants came to the session with extensive academic training, professional experience playing jazz, and a family history of musical participation, but others came along other pathways. The extent of their preparation was playing with their high school bands, singing with small church choirs, or playing alone in their rooms. Some, like Rudy, were good musicians with little experience playing jazz. Rudy always dressed sharp in a coat, tie, and matching pocket hanky. Every week he waited quietly alone or with Aki until his turn came. When he opened his mouth to sing, he seemed to undergo a metamorphosis, transforming each week from mild Rudy into Ray Charles. His weekly performance of “Georgia” always brought the house down. But it wasn’t as much a jazz performance, as it was an excellent theatrical reenactment of Ray Charles, and musical theater, I was told, was Rudy’s real background.

Others came who were virtually untrained. It was not unusual to hear musicians who had trouble playing the tune or following the form of even the most basic jazz standards. Some performers didn’t know any standards and would call simple pop tunes like Stevie Wonder’s “Superstition.” And then there were players who seemed familiar with jazz repertoire but didn’t abide by any of its standard practices. Their solos seemed

to begin and end mid-chorus; sometimes, they continued soloing off-stage while others took their turn.

Stronger musicians dealt with these problems in various ways. Theodis tried to guide people toward more musical and organized participation. He often sang background riffs to the horn players, helping them to accompany other soloists as an ensemble. More experienced horn players would have done this on their own. Periodically, Theodis also stopped the session to teach participants new approaches to soloing. For a while, participants got in the habit of calling "Oleo," a rhythm changes tune by Sonny Rollins.⁶² Week after week people called this tune and each time many players struggled to solo, either playing awkwardly or reverting to blues-based melodic material. One time, prior to playing the tune, Theo had the horn players come to the stage to practice playing the B-flat major bebop scale, a common scale used for soloing on rhythm changes and other jazz standards.⁶³ The horn players stood on stage and stared at their shoes. Seeing no one could play the scale, Theo taught them how to play it, and how to apply it to "Oleo." Strong musicians at the session often drew younger players eager to pick up tips. For example, during breaks young percussionists often gathered around Tony Walton as he demonstrated various rhythms on the set or the congas.

No one was every scolded or shunned because of musical mistakes or unusual choices. If people like me gained membership because of interest and playing ability, many others gained membership because they were from the neighborhood. Even people

⁶² "Rhythm Changes" is a standard thirty-bar form in jazz based on George Gershwin's song "I Got Rhythm." The AABA form consists of four eight-measure sections. The A section's elaborate tonic harmony chord, and the B section consists of a sequence of secondary dominant chords: III7-VI7-II7-V7.

⁶³ The major bebop scale is a major scale with an added raised fifth degree: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, #5, 6, 7, 8.

who played poorly and behaved erratically were handled gently. We knew their names, their families, and their stories.

Repertoire and Community

The Negro League Café session demonstrates how repertoire is chosen not only to meet aesthetic criteria, but also to promote sociality among participants. This suggests that genre is a category that is social as well as musical. What is jazz to one is the death of jazz to another. The range of musical choices available at the Negro League Café jam session included options unacceptable at sessions that had a different social agenda. The goal of including local participants, whatever their skill level or musical background, contributed to the participants' conception of jazz, affecting their choice of tunes and their performance practices.

If Theodis and Tony Walton were on the stage, anything could happen, but more often than not only the most common jazz standards such as “Oleo,” “Blue Bossa,” and “Autumn Leaves” were called. And these tunes were played in the most accessible ways. “Autumn Leaves” was usually played in E minor, the *Real Book* key, even though many jazz musicians consider E minor the wrong key (*The real book*, p. 36). Nevertheless, the key of E minor accommodates players who learn mainly from the *Real Book*. Novices lacked the professional experience and familiarity with more obscure recordings that led advanced players to the “hip” versions of standards. Other tunes like “Georgia” were made accessible by simplifying the harmony and treating them more like a blues tune.

“Georgia On My Mind”

Two Harmonic Realizations of the A Section

4/4 swing feel

| FM7 | Em7b5 A7#9 | Dm7 Dbm7 Cm7 F7 | Bbmaj7 Bbm7 Eb9 | Am7 D9 | Gm7 C9 |
A7#5 D7#9 | Gm7 C9#5 |

12/8 R&B Harmony in the style of Ray Charles

| FM7 | A7 | Dm7 Cm7 | BbM7 Bdim7 | Fmaj7 D7 | G7 C7 | FM7 D7 | Gm7 C7#5 |

With simpler harmony and a bluesy 12/8 groove, a soloist can improvise convincingly using only the F blues scale: F-G-A-flat-A-C-D. “Making the changes”—improvising in a way that clearly outlines the harmony—wasn’t necessary, although players with the skills could still improvise complex solos drawing on a variety of scales. Complex harmonies call out for equally complex melodic material. For instance, a soloist improvising over the Em7-flat 5 and A7 sharp-9 in the second measure of the first example could draw from both G jazz melodic minor and B-flat jazz melodic minor.⁶⁴ Such applications of jazz melodic minor scales to ii7 flat-5 and V7 sharp-9 harmonies are fairly common among more advanced improvisers. Though jazz musicians might enjoy more complex melodic material, the audience sometimes does not. The Negro League Café crowd generally preferred the simpler approach and my own solos received greater applause when I used more blues licks and fewer complex scales.

⁶⁴ Jazz melodic minor refers to the ascending portion of a melodic minor scale.

The inclusion of tunes from the genre sometimes called “soul jazz”⁶⁵ and “smooth jazz” also made the Negro League Café session more welcoming and accessible to a wider range of neighborhood participants. Jazz musicians interested in bebop or post-bop styles rarely call these tunes. Many jazz musicians, in fact, look down on these genres, particularly smooth jazz, equating them with watered-down commercial pop music designed to appeal to mass audiences. Soul jazz generally relies on blues vocabulary, funky rhythms, and simple harmonic progressions. This music has deep roots on the South Side. According to many South Siders, organ trios playing soul jazz were very popular in South Side clubs during the 1950s and 1960s. Soul jazz is party music that, in order to keeping the good times rolling, usually keeps its artistic aspirations well hidden. Eddie Harris’s soul jazz hit, “Cold Duck Time” was a jam session favorite as were similar funk and soul-derived jazz tunes like Herbie Hancock’s “Chameleon” and Joe Zawinul’s “Mercy, Mercy, Mercy.” These tunes feature long static harmonic vamps. At the session, soloists often played over the vamp and ignored other sections of the tunes that might have disrupted the groove or called for a more harmonically sophisticated improvisational vocabulary. For example, on “Mercy, Mercy, Mercy,” participants sometimes improvised over the two-measure vamp B-flat 7 to E-flat 7, performing the rest of the form only when they played the melody.

Smooth jazz tunes like Grover Washington, Jr.’s “Mr. Magic,” feature similar vamps though recorded versions include more involved production, synthesizers, and strings which makes them seem more polished than the gritty, down-home feel of an

⁶⁵ I use the term “soul jazz,” since it is the common term in popular music magazines and even in some album titles. However, some musicians I spoke with, including contemporary organ trio musicians Greg Rockingham and Bobby Broom, objected to the term since it evoked what they consider to be demeaning racial stereotypes.

organ trio. Some jazz musicians see these tunes as recordings that rely more on engineering than the creative input of improvisers. Highly regarded players have publicly denounced smooth jazz musicians. Pat Metheny famously echoed the sentiments of many when he called Kenny G's smooth jazz soloing "lame-ass, jive, pseudo bluesy, out-of-tune, noodling, wimped out, fucked up playing."⁶⁶ Smooth tunes at a session might be understood as concessions to less trained and sophisticated players, but that was not the case. These tunes weren't simply tolerated; even experienced jazz players at the Negro League loved them. Probably, no one thought these were the hippest tunes, but they were songs people remembered from good times.

Smooth jazz and soul jazz speak to the African American neighbors of the Negro League Café in particular ways, referencing black pop music and dance in their musical structure as well as real and imagined local vernacular culture in their references to African America working class cuisine ("Cold Duck Time") and speech ("Mercy, Mercy, Mercy"). Much of my training as a jazz guitarist had been about learning to play and improvise over complex harmonic progressions. Such training prepared me to sit in at

⁶⁶ Kenny G, a Grammy Award winning smooth jazz player, had recently released a recording on which he improvised over a recording that Louis Armstrong had made many decades earlier. Metheny went on to call Kenny G's recording musical necrophilia. Metheny further claimed that Kenny G's solo wasn't just bad playing, but an affront to all jazz: "He, in one move, through his unbelievably pretentious and calloused musical decision to embark on this most cynical of musical paths, shit all over the graves of all the musicians past and present who have risked their lives by going out there on the road for years and years developing their own music inspired by the standards of grace that Louis Armstrong brought to every single note he played over an amazing lifetime as a musician." Such is the regard many jazz players have for smooth jazz. <http://www.jazzoasis.com/methenyonkennyg.htm>, September 30, 2009. Not all smooth jazz musicians as reviled as Kenny G. For example, Grover Washington, Jr. is generally regarded more favorably by more mainstream musicians, though the relative merits of Grover Washington, Jr. probably seem more important to people who are not fans of smooth jazz.

The Chambers and to hold that session in high regard. Preparing for the session at The Negro Café altered my experience of smooth jazz. As I learned and performed smooth jazz tunes, I began to enjoy them as pleasurable musical social interaction that did not threaten my standing as someone who could “make the changes,”⁶⁷ and I heard them as treasured party songs of people who were becoming my friends.

Just as participants at the Negro League Café session embraced jazz as a sign of African American identity. Because of their wider interest in African American identity, they also embraced and performed other similarly meaningful music as part of the jazz jam. Reginald Robinson, winner of a 2004 MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, came by one Tuesday to play his ragtime compositions. Songs by Stevie Wonder were frequently performed. On my first night I found myself on stage for nearly half an hour playing a marathon version of George Clinton’s anthem “Tear the Roof Off the Sucker.” “We want the funk,” chanted the swaying audience, “give up the funk,” while exhausted bass players passed the bass around without dropping the beat or the bass. Theo usually signaled the end of the session by calling out, “It’s time for fifteen minutes of funk,” which often went longer, much to the dismay of the staff who usually turned up the lights and mopped around our feet to drive us out so they could go home.

Some performers intensified the importance of blackness at the session by performing original compositions that were explicitly about black pride. One young woman sang a funky original tune that reminded me of Erykah Badu: “Some like it black,” she chanted. “No sugar, no cream. It’s the real thing.” In her performance this woman also quoted from “Fine and Mellow” and “Ain’t Nobody’s Business,” two songs

⁶⁷ To “make the changes” is to improvise of complex harmonic progressions.

made popular by Billie Holiday, who is not just an iconic jazz singer, but an iconic black woman and jazz musician whose struggles and deeply expressed emotions resonate powerfully with many black women.⁶⁸

On some nights, if things were slow, Theo would take a tune down the path of African American musical history, treating it first in a stride piano style, then playing a bop solo, perhaps getting funky for a few choruses, and ending with an expansive free form development of the material. Theo's virtuosic recapitulations of African American music history were like snapshots of the pathways to and through this session. Players traveled to the session through the streets of Bronzeville and along the paths of black musical expression that could have been heard on those streets over the course of the twentieth century.

Of course that pathway through African American music and culture is also a pathway through American music and culture not often associated with African Americans. Assumptions about what counts as black music were sometimes confounded. Just as Theo and Aki dismissed the influence of gospel music on their playing and instead

⁶⁸ In *In Search of Billie Holiday: If You Can't Be Free, Be a Mystery*, Farah Jasmine Griffin writes at length about the mythology spun around Holiday and the dangers those myths pose for black women. She counters those myths with her own romanticized account, uncritically finding in Holiday a genius, a spirit guide, and an alter-ego that flatters and warns. "Holiday is a foremother," she asserts, "a beloved and respected ancestor. When she is called out of her name, so are we. When she is judged by everything but the genius of her body of work, we recognize and fear that it might happen to us as well" (Griffin 2001, p. 123). There is no shortage of literature on Billie Holiday. For two brief accounts of Holiday's life, music, and cultural significance see "Listening to Lady Day: An Exploration of the Creative (Re)Negotiation of the Music Lyrics of Billie Holiday" by Kim L. Purnell and "Our Lady of Sorrows" by Francis Davis (Purnell 2002; Davis 2000). The construction of Holiday as a cultural icon has involved crafting stories about her life for children. Two recent books on Holiday intended for young audiences are *Becoming Billie Holiday* by Carole Weatherford and *Billie Holiday: A biography* by Meg Greene (Weatherford 2008; Greene 2006).

looked fondly back to their fascination with Emerson, Lake, and Palmer, other players also found inspiration outside the most obvious African American musical canon. For example, people called Elton John's song, "Your Song" and "Brown Eyed Girl" by Van Morrison almost as frequently as "Superstition" by Stevie Wonder.

While these tunes may challenge stereotypical understandings of black musical life, the performance of African American identity was still central to the session. Aki and Theo often talked about how they thought their session compared to other sessions in the city; like many players in town, they had visited Von Freeman's session at the New Apartment Lounge, and, they told me, they had enjoyed Von's session, but now, so many young white college players were sitting in that they felt uncomfortable there. It wasn't just a neighborhood session or a black session anymore. They never expressed any concern about my participation or any other white participation, but had the session reached a racial tipping point, I think that might have changed.

I and other white players were always welcome, but participants weren't always sure how to classify me. I fit in because I could play all of the music called at the session, but I didn't fit because I wasn't from the neighborhood and I'm not black. Occasionally other participants attempted to designate me as a classificatory African American. One way was through the use of African American soul food imagery and metaphor. If I played a particularly bluesy solo, people speaking in exaggerated dialect said things like, "That was greezy" or "You been eatin' yo greens." Other times they simply said, "We're gonna make a black man out of you yet." I and other participants were not always comfortable with this. Musicians with professional experience perhaps preferred to regard me simply as another professional player. Regarding me as a professional

musician highlighted what we shared—musical vocabularies, work experience, and many years devoted to study and practice. Professionals at sessions often want to make connections that facilitate work and art. Highlighting their differences does not further this agenda. On the other hand, players who strongly valued the session as an expression of racial identity and pride might resent my presence and ignore me altogether. Imagining me as black would hold little appeal for them. I had my own reason for discomfort at comments about my potential blackness. As an ethnographer I had worked hard to avoid the appearance of racial mimicry, and as a musician, I wanted people to recognize my skills and hear my musical voice. I might have considered these remarks as condescending, especially when they came from less accomplished musicians, but I recognized that people said these things, because they liked me and the way I played. Nevertheless, racial identity was an important part of this session, and it was almost inevitable that some people would, from time to time, try to mitigate my racial differences by bestowing on me a kind of provisional blackness.

Cecile Savage, the main session bassist, complained of just the opposite problem. As a young white woman in France, she became interested in the blues and managed to land a job touring with blues harmonica player, Sugar Blue.⁶⁹ Cecile had lived on the South Side since the 1970s, and had played with many South Side jazz and blues musicians. She rarely worked on the North Side, and she felt that this was because white musicians regarded her as black. I don't know if white musicians actually discriminated against her because of real or imaginary classificatory blackness, but she clearly feels

⁶⁹ Sugar Blue is perhaps most famous for his work with the Rolling Stones. He can be heard on *Some Girls* (Rolling Stones 1978) and *Emotional Rescue* (Rolling Stones 1980), where he played the memorable harmonica riff on "Miss You."

more black than white. Her friends are black, her colleagues are black, her lover is black, and her daughter is black. No one at the Negro League Café ever teased her about eating greens and playing “greezy.”

Performing Community: “This is a Jam Session”

Some sessions, like those at The Chambers and Delaney and Murphy’s, exist as an opportunity for players to demonstrate their abilities to other players, to make professional connections, and to perform and enjoy professional identities and relationships; players at these sessions strive to play well and they have high expectations for themselves and other players. At the Negro League Café session, people came to play with friends and neighbors and they placed less emphasis on polished or expert performance. People sat in not only to demonstrate their musical skills, but also to perform and learn about their own musical heritage. And players brought with them a variety of performance practices not found in other jazz jam sessions. The session was also a time for other performances of community that had much less to do with music and more to do with bringing neighbors together.

Participation was the goal. When Aki said, “This is a jam session,” you were suppose to get up and do something, anything. This aesthetic of participation was shared and promoted by Aki, Theo, and many other session participants. Aki was the main instigator, prowling the room, exhorting people to get up and do something: “It a jam session.” At first I would quietly wait my turn. At some sessions it is considered rude to just jump on stage. But Aki began to scold me. “What are you waiting for? It’s a jam session.” I soon learned that I was expected to just plug in and play. I was treated a little

differently than some. Aki knew I was writing about her and she wanted my experience of the session to be good. I was also one of the better players and she trusted my musical judgment. Others solid players received the same treatment, and participated in performances without explicit invitations from Aki or Theo.

Even weak players were encouraged. Failure to play well might be a source of frustration for participants at some sessions, but failure to participate was the source of frustration at the Negro League Café. Aki would often sit with me and review the quality of energy and participation at the preceding week's session. This jam session was a place to learn and groove with your neighbors and not a place to strut your stuff in front of potential employers. When I hesitated to take the stage, saying, "I don't know this song," I was told, "It's a jam session." Once, I was already on stage and the keyboard player began playing a long introduction, going through different rhythms and modulations. She played as if she were wandering through notes and chords waiting for her song to emerge. The other players and I interjected musical fragments here and there, and slowly she settled on a key and a rhythm. We seemed to be entering the first actual chorus of the tune, and I still didn't know what we were playing. I looked over at Deameris, the session drummer. (I usually stood just to his left.) He knew most of the players and the tunes they regularly called, and I looked to him for cues when I was confused. As I watched him for some cue, he turned to me and said, "What *is* this?" We never did figure it out, but by the second chorus enough people on the stand figured out enough parts so that we finished with a successful performance of the mystery song.

One older man often asked to sit in at the keyboards, but when he was invited to the stage, he hesitated to call a tune, and he made excuses for failures his in performance.

He was a weak player, and Theo, rolling his eyes at all the excuses, clearly thought he was a bit of a whiner. The struggling pianist's insistence on playing and his hesitation on stage confounded Aki's assertion, "This is a jam session." This man could not call tunes or go follow the lead of others—he didn't jam well. On one occasion he got up with a bass player who wanted to jam over a funky groove. The whiny piano player continued to fumble with the keyboard settings and make excuses. He wanted Theo to come over and help, and maybe even relieve him at the keyboard. But Theo just got a fresh drink. "This is a jam session!" he shouted. "Work it out!"

They forged ahead, but neither the keyboard player nor the bass player had a strong sense of what to do. I overheard one player say, "What the hell is he doing up there?" His friend replied, "I don't know, but he sure is doing a lot of it."

When Aki shouted, "Come on, this is a jam session!" she spoke to the audience as well as the musicians. They were friends, relatives, and neighbors—members of the community—and they were also expected to contribute. Aki got them to listen, to clap for solos, to clap along with the groove, and sometimes even to sing. Sometimes they sang along with the band. Sometimes they were coaxed onto the stage to perform themselves. On other nights, the audience ignored Aki and the musicians, but the inclusion of everybody was the goal, the rocking inclusive jam session, standing as a performance of and metaphor for a thriving, self-aware neighborhood.

The audience at the Negro League Café could make or break the session. If they talked and ignored the band, the music seemed to lose energy. But if they were invested in even a musically weak performance, people felt good and enjoyed the music. Extra-musical relationships always seemed to shape the experience of the music. If you sat

close, the music felt more intimate; if you knew the song it seemed like a good song; if you knew the performers, they sounded more interesting.

The Negro League Café session, with its emphasis on community, clearly displayed how social and spatial relationships affected musical perception and aesthetic judgments. When I came to hear my friends play songs I liked, I got up close and I wanted to be moved. Knowing people and being near them seems to create certain expectations that complete the music and compensate for its objective deficiencies. Emotionally and physically distant listeners hear the music differently. On one particularly lively evening I needed to take a break from the excitement, so I wandered into the barroom to sit at the bar and have a cold beer. The audience back in the dining room was clapping and yelling for the band. As I sat there, I overheard one man ask, “What’s going on over there?” The person next to me replied, “Some kind of amateur hour bullshit.” They didn’t know the players; they weren’t in the room feeling the groove. Over the months of my involvement, as I came to know the session participants, as I became a regular participant, and as I felt comfortable being emotionally and physically close to the other players, I found the music more and more satisfying. But it was all just noise to the two men sitting at the bar.

But in the dining room people reached out to each other in order to enhance the musical experience and the bond between performer and audience. Experienced jazz professionals like Theo often played as if in private reverie, much like the pros at Delaney and Murphy’s. But many players directly addressed the audience in their performances. Singer Rudy Bolar’s performance was as much theatrical spectacle as sound. Dressed to the nines with his hand held high revealing himself while seeming to

reach for something more, Rudy physically depicted the longing and passion of the song's personae, calling out to the audience for a witness that they eagerly gave in applause, whistles, and shouts.



Figure 4.5 Woody Bolar

Such performances were discouraged at The Chambers (Chapter Three) where instrumentalists sometimes quietly criticized singers, referring to them as entertainers rather than musicians. Yet even instrumentalists at the Negro League Café directly addressed the audience as they responded to its encouragement. Off stage, Cleo, a regular at the session, was a friendly middle-aged fellow who didn't draw too much attention to himself, usually sitting quietly, joking with two of his friends who also came each week. But on stage he was something else. A large man already, with his furry hat on his head and his trumpet as his lips, he became a glowering giant ready to blow down the walls of Jericho. In keeping with the style of the session, his performance invoked theatricality that involved music, posture, and eye contact. This performance did not retreat into

artistic contemplation and reverie, but reached out making explicit, almost confrontational contact with the audience members, much to their vocal approval.



Figure 4.6 Cleo is in the house.

At The Chambers, players might have experienced noise from the audience as an impediment to their creativity, but not at the Negro League Café. Cleo's glare was not a censure but a challenge to meet the performance head on, and a statement that Cleo had indeed stepped up to the stand.

Participants varied in their performance styles. People with extensive professional jazz experience rarely took on the role of entertainer. Those with experience in the church often spoke to the audience to explain their choice or to acknowledge their belief that God had given them a special musical gift that they felt obligated to share. Those more familiar with hip hop tended to pace back and forth, hunching and crossing their arms

like rappers in a music video. But always, comments from the audience acted like a catalyst to more energetic performances and greater pleasure. A quiet audience was a cause for concern, and following a quiet night Aki often talked with me at length, pondering what had gone wrong and how things might go better the following week.

Non-Musical Social Practices and Community Building at the Session

Participants at the Negro League Café session perform all sorts of non-musical social rituals that help to build feelings of community among themselves, ranging from simple greeting rituals to social and political presentations. Each of these performances strengthens face-to-face relations and emphasizes the connections between music, the neighborhood, and African American identity.

Greetings between men at the Negro League differed from those at the North Side sessions. Men clasped hands with thumbs pointing back rather than up, and they often brought their hands together with enough force to make a small clapping sound. Often they leaned forward as they clasped hands, pulling their shoulders together, and slapping one another's backs. North Siders shook hands with their bodies at arm's length, but men at the Negro League Café pulled their bodies together. People can engage in any ritual in a mechanical way, and I can't say what individual greeters felt at the Negro League Café, but from my perspective these performances seemed to enhance intimacy, which was quite different from the performances on the North Side. One seemed to signify intimacy and blackness while the other signified a detached friendliness. In both cases these performance could indicate what the actors felt, what they hoped to feel, or what they

thought they should appear to feel. In any case, the stories those performances told were specific to the local social dramas being enacted.

Handshaking at the Negro League Café made me uncomfortable, since it put my otherness and my attempts to deal with that on display. The person shaking my hand was also forced to deal with this. It might have been easiest to just copy the people around me, but I was concerned about entering into relationships based on false understandings of my identity. I was a white outsider, and someone documenting this community, so I represented a long history of power relationships. I didn't want my greetings to become acts of symbolic denegation, a fictitious bracketing of power relations in which "by temporarily but ostentatiously abdicating his dominant position in order to 'reach down' to his interlocutor, the dominant profits from this relation of domination, which continues to exist, by denying it" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 143). I couldn't pretend to be just one of the guys as I trolled for interesting dissertation fodder. I wouldn't have fooled anybody. As it was, our failed attempts to shake hands led to another kind of bond. I'd start to shake white, my partner would start to shake black. Then we'd both switch and fail again. The confusion and false starts we shared as we reached across this ethnic divide usually led to laughter, a bridge that helped us come together the next time we met.

As months passed at the session I eventually began to shake hands in the local fashion. I didn't really try to do this. I had been committed to shaking white, but prolonged face-to-face interactions changed me. I experienced the community and myself differently, and the community experienced me differently as well. People began to tease me less about eating greens, and I started to shake hands like a regular, because I was

one. I continued to maintain a variety of identities—guitarist, white observer, friend of Theo and Aki—but they tended to recede into the background behind my growing identity as one of the regulars.

The Negro League Café jam session often included the recognition of birthdays. On my first visit to the session, Aki announced the birthday of an older man dressed in a blue print cap, billowing blue, African-style pants and a matching jacket. With his grey beard and flowing clothing, he had the look of a storybook village elder. (Indeed the image of the elder was common on the South Side. At the session, participants spoke of older jazz musicians as elders; Aki talked of her relatives as venerated elders and ancestors.) I had seen this man at several events on the South Side, and he had, in fact, sung something he referred to as “Birthday Blues” to Robert Shy at Bernice’s Twilight Zone several weeks earlier. On this evening he sang the “Birthday Blues” to himself. The song seemed to be at least in part extemporized, partly sung, partly rapped, responding to the event and the audience. The audience loved his performance, clapping and shouting its approval, and the “Birthday Blues” turned into an extended jam that included many of the session participants.

The session was also a place for children's birthday parties. Though held in a bar, late in the evening, the session was a family event. Parents hung balloons around their booth and ordered cake and ice cream. If I had been one of those kids, I would have been greatly impressed by the murals of Negro League baseball players, the music, and all the adults having a good time. Similar experiences from my own childhood still fuel my fantasies of what my world could be.



Figure 4.7 Birthday Balloons

The session was a forum for a variety of political and community announcements and presentations. Candidates for sheriff and other community leaders spoke between sets. In August of 2005, Robert Irving III and Kelan Phil Cohran came to the session to promote an upcoming event called “Jazz in the House.” Irving and Cohran were South Side musicians and members of the AACM. In “creative music” circles, they were highly

regarded both across the United States and in Europe. The “Jazz in the House” event was a fundraiser for their organization, Eternal Sound Family, where kids could get free

Figure 4.8 Eternal Sound Family Post Card - front

Figure 4.9 Eternal Sound Family Post Card - back

music lessons. Cohran spoke to the Negro League Café audience of their mission and of his life in music. He spoke of gigging seven nights a week in the 1950s, his daily six-hour

rehearsals with Sun Ra, and the current musical decline and need for revival on the South Side. He spoke of the spiritual and cultural value of music and of the intellectual benefits that helped musical children excel in math, science, and abstract thinking. He asked the audience to “pledge your allegiance to the children.” As the postcard clearly indicates, this musical event was for families and community, linking the “Eternal Sound Family” with neighborhood families in order to invigorate African American achievements through participation in African American music.

Documenting Culture as Cultural Practice

Many participants sought to document the session, and I was not the only person videotaping, photographing, and taking notes. Every week people used their cell phone cameras to photograph and record their friends. Others came to take photos of the session itself, documenting more than their friends’ participation. One man, realizing that there was money to be made from the desire to document the session, came each week and took pictures to sell to participants. On several occasions people gave me photos of myself on stage so that I too would have a reminder of my performances. Even WTTW 11, a Chicago public television station, sent a crew to film the session for their Artbeat show. But no one took more pictures than Aki. Each week her table by the entrance would be covered in photos from the prior session and, as people paid the cover, she would show them their pictures from the last session. She also took notes and wrote about the session. Each week we talked about the need to document the African American culture in Bronzeville, and she often told me of her plans to turn her photographs and writings into a book that would explore and commemorate the session, her family, and

life in the neighborhood. Constant documentation of this session by Aki and others suggests levels of performance extending beyond the session itself. Not only were people performing for themselves and others present in the Café, but through pictures, writings, and news reports, they were also performing for absent friends and family, the larger community, and their future selves and families. In years to come, this session, like the legendary Bronzeville performances of Louis Armstrong and King Oliver in the 1920s, may become an icon of a better, more vibrant community, a memory, wrapped in myth, inspiring hope for the future.

Community and Conflict at the Negro League Café Session

At The Chambers and Delaney and Murphy, the community of musicians was rather narrowly defined and easy to maintain. Either you played a particular kind of music in a particular way or you didn't. If you didn't, then you went somewhere else. Players sometimes argued with each other or the club owners, but if things broke up, participants eventually regrouped elsewhere. However, the Negro League Café session didn't just cater to a musical community: it catered to a neighborhood and an ethnic community. Embracing a wider variety of participants unavoidably opened the door to a wider variety of conflicting interests that sometimes threatened the dream of a community united in music.

Most participants happily played many kinds of music. Nevertheless, conflicts over genre arose. For example, many people at the session enjoyed playing gospel music in church and sometimes brought gospel songs to the session. But too many gospel songs led to negative comments among the regulars who preferred to play mainstream jazz.

And taking time away from mainstream jazz wasn't the only complaint. Everybody enjoyed playing gospel with strong musicians like Margie Stroud, but few gospel musicians at the session played like Margie, and some augmented their weak playing with personal accounts of religious faith. More experienced musicians were bored and frustrated by these awkward testimonies, particularly when claims of divine gifts and inspiration prefaced lackluster performances. On more than one occasion, as Aki called amateur church musicians to the stage, I heard people around me mutter, "Please Lord, no more gospel."

Musicians performing other genres could also dissipate and divide the energy of the session. The young woman who sang like Erykah Badu sang well, weaving original rapped and sung lyrics with references to jazz tunes made famous by Billie Holiday. But while she made references to jazz, she took the stage as a pop star, embracing the star aesthetic, taking the limelight, and thereby demoting the instrumentalists to mere sidemen. Her performance invigorated her friends, but it left little space for solos or the kind of interaction that many of the session participants desired. They were willing to perform music from various genres, but they were unwilling to forego the interactive and improvisational creativity of jazz performance practice. Commitment to those performance practices helped make this session a jazz jam session in spite of the variety of genres performed.

Others who came to play other genres were simply inept. They forgot words, screwed up the song form, and made other mistakes that brought the music to a halt. Theo could often salvage these moments either by teasing the weak performer and enlisting the

audience to help him out, or by taking over the failed performance and treating it as a jam that brought the other musicians back into action.

Good or bad, too many non-jazz performers led to discontent among the regulars who came to play and listen to jazz standards. On several occasions, famous jazz musicians were in the audience and many regulars were eager to hear them and play with them. When those celebrities weren't brought up, regulars felt that important musicians had been insulted. Musicians complained about the offending performance and they began to blame Aki for the direction the session had taken.⁷⁰ As word of dissention got back to Aki, she felt that her efforts were unappreciated, and she became defensive of her authority. Everybody was happy to play many different kinds of music, and the dream of building African American community through participation in the broad range of African American music worked well when the music went well. However, most participants identified themselves as jazz musicians or aspiring jazz musicians, and when they didn't get to play some standard jazz, or when they thought jazz music was being disparaged, they became disenchanted with the session and its social project. While this intense drama about music, community, and social practices unfolded, many casual participants remained unaware, and people in the bar continued to think of the music as noise that made it hard to hear the ball game on the television.

⁷⁰ This incident occurred after Theodis had moved to Las Vegas. It illustrates not only the conflict arising from genre choice, but also the gender issues at play in the session and the vacuum created when Theodis, the virtuoso male authority figure, moved to Las Vegas and left Aki, the main social theorist of the session, but also a woman and a less virtuosic performer, holding the reins.

Gender and Authority at the Session

The Negro League Café jam included more women than most sessions and this was another source of conflict on Tuesday evenings. Aki was the main instigator and Cecile Savage was the session bassist. Margie Stroud regularly performed as a pianist and singer, and each week women sang and sat in on bass, piano, and other instruments. Most sessions elicit little gender conflict, since they include so few women, but the presence of women in prominent roles at the Negro League Café session brought normally submerged gender issues to the surface. Cecile complained about a lack of respect for her knowledge and abilities. On one occasion a man asked me the name of the last tune we played, I told him, and several moments later Cecile approached me, irate and fuming: “I just told him the same thing. He didn’t believe me, but he believed you!”

Aki, too, felt she received little respect and that people thought of her as Theo’s girlfriend rather than a co-host of the session. Theo did, in fact, spend the most time at the keyboard while Aki collected the cover charge and moved about the room encouraging people to participate and interact. When Theo left Chicago to perform in Las Vegas, Aki became the primary keyboard player and she was unable to direct the music with the same authority as Theo. Often, the session seemed to meander, or other men began to exert their musical authority on stage. Aki became defensive and unhappy as divisions grew among male players vying for control. In early 2006, the pleasures and hopes evident in the first days of the session soured into disappointment and frustration. After Theo’s departure Aki often confided, “There are just too many chiefs,” as the community of the session seemed to crumble into a room full of misunderstood individuals.

The End of the Session

Like any community, the session at the Negro League Café included personal animosities and struggles built up over many years. This session included relatives, former band mates, ex-lovers, and neighbors. Rivalries and conflicts from years past often simmered beneath the surface, held in place by compelling musical performances.

Theo had been the driving musical force of the session throughout most of my fieldwork. During his career he had worked all over the county. Eventually he was offered a lucrative long-term gig in a Las Vegas casino, and, frustrated by his lack of well paying work in Chicago, he took that gig. After he left Chicago, conflicts that had seemed unimportant compared to playing with Theo, began to surface. Aki, Cecile, and many of the other regulars are very good musicians, but Theo is a virtuoso who has command over many styles of music. Everybody wanted to play with Theo. People came specifically to hear him. Theo had the musical skills and he had a long history on the South Side. Old high school friends as well as visiting pros came to sit in with him. When he left, no one person could take his place and in mid-2006 the session ended.

While I think that the session ended because Theo left, others see things differently. Cecile and Deameris, the original rhythm section, didn't enjoy Aki's leadership. Cecile in particular grew frustrated with Aki's unwillingness to play more standards or read from a fake book when someone called a tune she didn't know. Aki, on the other hand, felt the session came apart because people didn't respect her. She also felt that old rivalries contributed to the session's demise.

At the end of the session, she did, in fact, appear to be ousted by a rival faction. One week she was running the session. The next week she showed up at the Café only to

find she was no longer part of the show. Don Curry, the owner of the club, had installed a new person as leader. This person was a former band mate with whom Theo and Aki had personal and professional disagreements. The new leader may have sought to undermine his old enemies, as Aki believed, or Don Curry might have sought him out as Aki's session began to bring in less business. Either way, Aki, Cecile, and Deameris stopped participating in the session and they stopped socializing with each other.

Conclusion

Aki, Theodis, and others at the Negro League Café imagined a better community for themselves and their neighbors. Following their dream—shaped in no small part by the realities, myths, and potentials of jazz practice—they worked to revitalize their neighborhood, forming a micro-community of people drawn together through shared ethnicity, shared location, and shared cultural practices. This particular face-to-face interaction shaped how they and their fellow musicians understood jazz—how they played jazz, what tunes counted as jazz standards, what other music was appropriate at a jam session, and what counted as a good performance. Many pathways intersect at the Negro League Café; pathways of South Side residence, African American heritage, love of music, neighborliness, and community activism all ran together.

One would think that so many people traveling similar pathways and sharing so many face-to-face and imaginary relationships would make for an enduring and stable community, but life in the city is fluid, people have multiple selves, and lasting community is often difficult to achieve. The session at the Negro League Café is an example of how people actively create community, taking broad categories like jazz,

black music, and African American heritage and making them their own through face-to-face performances. The session is also a testament to the fleeting nature of such ownership, and it also illustrates how even categories that seem homogenous from a distance, up close are fractured and incongruous. Paul Berliner claims that improvisation is an infinite art, but at the Negro League Café, improvisation is a practice closely bounded by local geography, history, and human aspiration, but also a practice that can embrace new players and principles overnight. And it is precisely those flesh and blood boundaries and realities that empower the musical and social practice in play at the Negro League Café.

Chapter 5

Communities, Clubs, and Festivals: The Many Layers of Chicago Jazz

When I lived in Fayetteville, Arkansas⁷¹ in the late 1990s, there was one jazz community and one jam session. Young or old, black or white, New Orleans style traditionalist or free improviser, everybody played in the same handful of combos and attended the same session. It's a small town; there aren't that many pathways to the local jazz hangout. Chicago musicians will tell you the city's jazz scene isn't what it used to be. Still, it's vibrant enough to support many different communities, sessions, clubs, and festivals. Communities form according to musical preferences, ethnicity, age, location, skill level, professional status, and commitment to aesthetic, social, and political ideology.⁷² Some have existed for decades and have grown into formal organizations. Others appear for a short while and disappear.

⁷¹ Fayetteville is just up the road from Bentonville, Arkansas and Wal-Mart's corporate offices. Alice Walton, the daughter of Wal-Mart founder Sam Walton, and a number of Wal-Mart executives live in Fayetteville. Consequently, Fayetteville is richer than most towns of its size and home to the Walton Center for the Arts and several fine restaurants and clubs. Nevertheless, it is still a small town in rural Arkansas, 190 miles from Little Rock, the nearest major city.

⁷² In the communities where I conducted ethnography, people held a variety of political views, and the sessions did not overtly embrace and particular political position. But several Chicago musicians, such as Ernest Dawkins and Ted Sirota lead groups that make explicitly political music. Although I did not conduct fieldwork with these musicians, conversations with Ted Sirota and other members of his group indicated that they were drawn together because of their political commitments as well as by their musical interests. Other musical communities have also demonstrated explicit political

No single, community, repertoire, or set of performance practices can account for the musical or social possibilities of jazz, even in a place and time as specific as Chicago in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The two communities that are the focus of this study—the North Side jam sessions (see Chapter Three) and the session at the Negro League Café (see Chapter Four)—are embedded in an overlapping network of other face-to-face and imagined communities, commercial enterprises, civic projects, foundations, and institutes. None is more or less real than the other, in spite of the constant arguments about authenticity found in the discourse of jazz. Individuals often participate in several of these social configurations while being unaware of or excluded from others.

Jazz is plural. In this chapter I look at some of the other communities of jazz musicians living in Chicago. The variety of ways other face-to-face communities embrace general musical practices and social identities further illustrates how such activities and identities serve local needs and desires. In this chapter I also illustrate some of the differences between face-to-face communities and imagined communities by comparing jam sessions rich in social connections to clubs and festivals where people who are members of the larger imagined community of jazz fans gather but share few face-to-face social connections. The communities at Delaney and Murphy's and The Negro League Café are not absolutely separate from larger imagined communities. Rather, they participate in a variety of face-to-face and imagined communities. To understand any community of Chicago jazz musicians, we must consider how that community relates to other communities and other levels of social organization.

commitments. For example, in the 1970s, the Detroit jazz collective called Tribe published their own magazine, *Tribe*, in which they discussed not only local jazz, but also political ideology and local politics. The musicians that wrote for the magazine often interviewed local politicians and political candidates.

My understandings of the communities at Delaney and Murphy's and at the Negro League Café are shaped by my contact with other jazz communities and performances in Chicago. I participated in two other face-to-face musical communities. The first was a group of predominantly young white men who hosted sessions and played regular club gigs in and around Chicago's near North Side. The second was a group of older African American men and women who often gathered at Bernice's Twilight Zone and the Tropical Den near the intersection of Seventy-ninth Street and Exchange Avenue in South Shore. Considering only the sessions at Delaney and Murphy's, The Chambers, and the Negro League Café, one might conclude that differences in jazz divide primarily along racial lines, however, fieldwork with young North Siders and with older South Siders shows that age, education, and other factors also influence jazz practice and significance.

Extensive fieldwork in Chicago's leading jazz clubs revealed other layers of jazz practice and significance. I attended nearly one hundred performances at The Green Mill, Pete Miller's, Pop's For Champagne, Andy's, The Jazz Gallery, and other popular North Side jazz venues⁷³. While some session participants like Rusty Jones and Larry Novak performed regularly in these venues, most session players did not. Popular venues included other performers and patrons. Certain communities of players and listeners seemed to form around particular venues. Weekly features of particular performers or styles—singers on Wednesday at the Green Mill, the Yoko Noge Jazz Me Blues Band on Mondays at Andy's—attracted particular collections of musicians and listeners. From night to night patrons and musicians enacted a variety of social dramas, each framed

⁷³ During my time in Chicago, there were no similarly popular mainstream jazz clubs on the South Side.

differently by jazz repertoire and practice. But relations between club owners, musicians, and patrons were often more commercial than communal. For example, nationally popular performers like Kurt Elling attracted many one-time visitors to The Green Mill, and Pete Miller's and Pops For Champagne drew patrons who were celebrating anniversaries, birthdays, and other events that had little to do with membership in a musical community.

Chicago is home to several nationally and internationally recognized jazz festivals and these account for yet another level of musical practice and social organization. Every summer the three-day Chicago Jazz Festival and the JazzFest Heritage Music Weekend employ many local jazz musicians, but most locals do not perform at these events. Also, these events draw hundreds of thousand of listeners (Mayor's Office of Special Events 2006; Jazz Unites 2005). If all these people regularly attended live performances, Chicago would need many more clubs. Unlike the sessions where leaders are paid a pittance or are dependent on the meager proceeds from the door, these festivals receive millions of dollars in corporate and city support (Reich 2005).

The festivals, clubs, and communities I describe in this chapter, as important and diverse as they are, still only make up a portion of the ever-changing collection of musical practices that make up Chicago jazz. This dissertation, in fact, leaves out many, like Patricia Barber and Jeff Parker, who are currently among the city's most popular jazz musicians, both at home and abroad. But my discussion of younger white players at Phyllis's Inn, older African Americans at Bernice's Twilight Zone, and the practices found in popular jazz clubs and the city's largest festivals add greater context for the communities at the Negro League Café and at Delaney and Murphy and The Chambers.

These discussions also further illustrate the variety of meanings created in jazz practices and they illustrate how we cannot fully account for jazz by looking at just one community of musicians or one level of social organization. Though the meanings of jazz depend on concrete social conditions of the people making the music, jazz is infinite in that the actual practices and meanings of jazz exceed the grasp of any particular community of jazz musicians.

In the Shadows of Neo-Bohemia: Younger Jazz Musicians on the North Side

Rusty Jones, who frequented the session at The Chambers (see Chapter Three), came from a family of professional musicians; he grew up listening to and playing jazz. Aki Antonia Smith, who hosted the Negro League Café session, did the same. For her, jazz held extra significance as an important African American cultural creation that brought together family and neighborhood. Rusty and Aki followed different paths to jazz, but they grew up with the music and the paths they traveled were already well worn by their families. Many of the young white musicians playing on the near North Side, however, lacked those connections to jazz. Jazz isn't the music of their generation or their people, but their commitment is no less intense. They draw only small crowds, and they must scuffle for gigs, playing mostly on slow nights at venues that normally feature more popular kinds of music. During my fieldwork in Chicago I attended weekly sessions at The Elbo Room, Phyllis's Musical Inn, and other near North Side clubs where a loosely connected community of young players gathered to play, socialize, and work on their music.

Comprised mainly of white men in their twenties and thirties, this community also included African American and Asian musicians and occasionally a few women who participated mainly as singers. All of these players had Bachelor's Degrees from college jazz programs. A few were working on their Master's Degrees. Some had grown up in the city and graduated from jazz programs at De Paul University or Roosevelt College. Some came from smaller cities and had attended jazz programs at Northern Illinois University in De Kalb or other midwestern schools. Chicago attracts young players because of family ties, but also because the city still offers young musicians the prospect of a professional career as a performer. Most cities offer fewer opportunities. Some young players think about going to New York, but they like Chicago; it's cheaper, musicians can get around by car and transport equipment easily, and Chicago musicians are thought to be friendlier and more laid back than New Yorkers who compete aggressively for the handful of available jobs performing with major jazz artists. Most young players in Chicago would prefer to play cutting-edge jazz and many admire contemporary innovators like Dave Binney, Chris Potter, or Brad Mehldau. But they are also committed to earning a living in music; they happily work with wedding bands, rock bands, musical theater orchestras, or even country bands—whatever work they can find. They have grown up with rock, hip-hop and other contemporary styles. They play those styles well, with an insider's familiarity, rather than as older jazz musicians who sometimes sound like they are slumming when playing current hits. Most manage to earn at least a meager living in music and few have day jobs apart from teaching music lessons.

Younger musicians played commercial gigs wherever they could, but they worked often in and around Wicker Park. Richard Lloyd has dubbed this neighborhood “Neo-Bohemia,” because, since the mid-1980s, this former Polish, then Hispanic neighborhood, has become home to many young artists, musicians, and the web design firms, advertising agencies, and other media developers that employ them (Lloyd 2006). Once a tough neighborhood plagued by drugs, prostitution, and violence, Wicker Park is increasingly a neighborhood of coffee shops, bookstores, cabarets, trendy restaurants, and indie-rock bars. Like Paris in the nineteenth century or New York’s Greenwich Village in the early twentieth century, Wicker Park has become a haven for a creative class who resist the norms of middle class American life (Stansell 2000). As Lloyd argues, “Wicker Park is understood, both by media observers and by local insiders, in the context of the mythic tradition of bohemia, shorthand for both a distinctive sort of urban district and an associated style of life” (Lloyd 2006, p. 11). While associated with resistance to middle class conformity, neighborhoods like Wicker Park supply creative workers who produce the sounds, images, and words crucial to this corporate media district. Furthermore, the neighborhood draws other young professionals working in the global economy who enjoy new music, cool videos, and hip bars. For awhile Wicker Park had a national reputation for hipness that was touted in both *USA Today* and *The New York Times* (Shriver 2002; Lloyd 2006). Though other locations have become the hip spot *de jour*, Wicker Park thrives, inspiring gentrification and drastically rising rents that have forced many artists and musician to move on to the nearby and still ungentrified Ukrainian Village neighborhood.

As one of Richard Lloyd's interviewees proclaims, "Wicker Park is not a place—it's a state of mind!" (Lloyd 2006, p. 47). Indie Rock is a big part of that state of mind and indie rock musicians like Liz Phair and the band Veruca Salt have been at the heart of the neighborhood's sonic imagination. Jazz musicians, not part of the dominant alternative music scene, are relegated to its geographic and psychic margins. They rarely play in the clubs near the neighborhood's main entertainment area at the intersection of Damen Avenue and North Avenue. Their gigs and sessions usually take place early in the week, drawing a few folks on nights when club would otherwise be nearly empty. I was one of the folks (sometimes the only one) drawn in on those off nights, when I came to listen, sit in, and drink a few beers so that the evening wouldn't be a total loss for the bartender.

I first became involved with these musicians when I saw an online list of jam sessions that included a session at the Elbo Room on Lincoln Avenue. Just north of Diversey Parkway. The club is about a mile northeast of the heart of Wicker Park, and like many neighborhood clubs, it features a variety local and touring rock groups with names like "Prettyyoungraves," "The Blasters," and "We Make Thunder." But on Tuesday evenings at 10:00 p.m. the club hosted a weekly jazz jam session. Early in my fieldwork, just after I had successfully sat in at Scott Earl Holman's session in the suburbs, I felt confident enough to try out a session in the city. I spent the day practicing. That evening I put on nice pants and a clean shirt, grabbed my gear and the mapquest directions, and headed to the club. From the street, the Elbo Room looked like any corner bar in the city. When I walked through the front door I was greeted by blaring heavy metal music. I saw no bandstand and no players wandering around with saxophones or

trumpets. The burly leather clad bartender pointed me to the stairway and told me the session wouldn't be starting for about an hour.

Downstairs, the music was live and even louder. The room had been made or left to look like abandoned industrial space. Dim bulbs illuminated cement walls, floors, and the slab ceiling as pale, black-leather-clad head bangers grooved to the throbbing and squealing of the shredders on the low stage. I learned that on Tuesdays from 8:00 until 10:00 the Elbo Room featured local, amateur metal bands. I got a drink, found a stool (you had to be careful, since this basement wasn't entirely dry) and listened. Soon, serious, clean cut, young men with horn cases began to filter in and drift among the longhaired, leather clad crowd cheering on the efforts of their friends and neighbors on stage. The jazz players may not have known what to make of the metal crowd, but, surprisingly, the metal crowd often hung around for the jam session, clapping appreciatively and sometimes attempting to dance or otherwise transpose their musical practice onto the new music now being played. Michel de Certeau's discussion of how the powerless "poach" on the turf of the more powerful seems doubly apt here. Amateur metal bands manage to claim some of the club's time and space. Jazz musicians, even lower on the food chain, then move in and take advantage of the audiences brought in by the metal bands. The jazz session itself drew few people other than the participating musicians, so the metal fans helped make the session appear to be financially viable to the club owner. After several months, the club owner saw through the ruse and discontinued the unprofitable session at the Elbo Room and replaced with music that drew more drinkers.

The session ended soon after I started participating, but not before I made some connections with the young men who frequented the jam. I became friends with Ed



Figure 5.1 Phyllis's Musical Inn

Breazeale, the drummer who led the Elbo Room session, and I continued to attend his shows, even subbing for his regular guitarist on a few occasions. On the last night at the Elbo Room, Todd Boyce, who regularly sat in and played tenor sax, told me he was starting something new at Phyllis's Inn and that I should come. That's how things happen among these players. Clubs like the Elbo Room don't vigorously promote off-night jazz. Usually the people playing will pass the word or maybe send out an email announcement. If the club advertises the session at all, it is only listed in small print at the bottom of an ad for something else.

Phyllis's Musical Inn has been a fixture in Wicker Park for several generations. The bar became Phyllis's in 1952 when Clem Jaskot purchased it. Clem renamed the bar after his wife Phyllis, who occasionally played her accordion there. The Jaskots catered

to the Polish community that lived in the neighborhood at the time. Today you won't hear polkas at Phyllis's. Clem Jr. now caters to young urban hipsters who enjoy both the Inn's



Figure 5.2 A slow Monday night at Phyllis's Musical Inn

gritty urban feel and the indie rock bands that take the stage on most evenings. The bar is an important part of the bohemian scene in Chicago and in *Neo-Bohemia*. Recalling one exciting performance by Veruca Salt the local band now gone national, Richard Lloyd writes, “When I walked through the door, I was confronted with a surprisingly thick crowd of young people... a striking bunch, attired in funky secondhand ensembles and sporting a variety of tattoos and piercings” (Lloyd 2006, p. 4).

On Mondays you'd never know that anything much ever happens at Phyllis's. A few friends of Clem valiantly struggle to hold up their end of the bar, and I buy a few beers so that Lulu doesn't get lonely standing by the till. The house lights are up. The stage is a distant shabby island separated from the bar by the becalmed sea of the dusty dance floor. Todd Boyce and the rest of the band arrive one by one, set up, and hang out

by the bar waiting to begin. The archipelago of tables is uninhabited, so no one hurries. I always feel a little sad at Phyllis's because the band is very good, but they aren't Veruca Salt. Friends of the band are playing similar gigs at other bars on Division, and, during breaks, the musicians visit each other to listen, talk shop, and hang out. Sometimes people sit in, but the gig isn't really a session. When strangers ask to sit in things get awkward. For their music, Clem pays the boys generously in drinks, a coin gladly spent, but one whose luster soon fades in the light of the ever burning need to pay rent, buy groceries, and continually repair the second hand cars that ferry these musicians from gig to gig across the expanse of Chicago and its surrounding suburbs.

The scene at Phyllis's might sound depressing, but these musicians are young and eager to play. While I was in Chicago, friends of the band at Phyllis's started another session farther north at a new and struggling club called Kitty Moon. Others started little gigs at coffee shops. At these gigs, the musicians play the contemporary and challenging jazz they like—highly improvisational music that is rhythmically, harmonically, and melodically complex, yet rooted in mainstream jazz and more highly structured than the free improvisation of “creative” musicians. Because these gigs appeal only to a small and specialized audience, they come and go. Consequently, these young musicians play a variety of commercial gigs, work in music stores, and teach lessons as they work their way up the professional ladder. Dan, the bass player at Phyllis's was sometimes late, because of his early evening restaurant gig in the suburbs, and Joe, the drummer, occasionally subbed out the gig when his country band was playing. Though they got to play their own compositions and arrangements at Phyllis's they enjoy the other gigs even though the music was sometimes corny, and they certainly enjoyed putting some real

money in their pockets. Players often tired of this life and turned to other professions, either taking blue-collar day jobs or going to graduate school. During my time in Chicago, several musicians from this community shifted their attention to careers in web design and engineering.

These players have many influences, and they do not represent a single approach to jazz. In fact, the band at Phyllis's was engaged in an ongoing debate; some players wanted to include more free improvisation, others wanted to work on standards. Nevertheless, the sound of these players shared many important characteristics. Unlike older jazz musicians, these players have not only been to college, but most have graduated from college jazz programs where they developed strong technical skills and studied contemporary harmonic and improvisational practices using books like Mark Levine's *The Jazz Theory Book* and many of the other jazz texts that have been published during the past twenty-five years (Levine 1995). While the neighborhood players at the Negro League Café had trouble playing a basic bebop scale, these players solos are informed by a wide variety of melodic materials like the modes of the melodic minor scale and the octatonic scale which they applied to highly altered harmonies such as dominant chords with altered fifths and ninths. Rhythm section players, too, draw on contemporary approaches employing harmonic extensions, substitutions, polychords, and quartal harmony. Altering old harmonies and creating new harmonic structures complicates the functional harmony of jazz standards and makes it less obviously functional, without necessarily embracing the atonality of many creative improvisers. They certainly didn't do this on every chorus, but these adventurous harmonic practices were an important part of their vocabulary. Bass players and drummers, likewise, make

use of the most contemporary approaches attending less to the stable 4/4, swing rhythm of earlier jazz. Bass players might play quarter note walking bass lines, but they might also opt to play counter melodies that are rhythmically less obvious. Drummers, too, are happy to punctuate songs erratically, often abandoning the steady spang-a-lang rhythm on the ride cymbal. Nevertheless, the sonic connections to bebop are quite clear. These players, having benefited from the massive re-release of classic jazz recording on compact disc are well acquainted with the history of recorded jazz and consider themselves part of that musical tradition. Their overall sound is still that of small acoustic jazz bands in which soloist play over a supporting rhythm section following a repeating harmonic form of either twelve or thirty-two bars.

Young North Side jazz musicians find their greatest influence in contemporary recording artists who play harmonically based, acoustic post-bop music, and they incorporate the innovations of these players into their own performances. Like David Binney and Brad Mehldau, they compose original music or rework standards in complex meters like 7/8 or 5/4.⁷⁴ They avoid the fairly obvious subdivision of compound meters used by older composers like Dave Brubeck. Instead, they realize compound rhythm in subtle ways as Brad Mehldau does in his deceptive 7/8 version of the Rodgers and Hart standard “I Didn’t Know What Time it Was” (Mehldau 1996). Their timbre, especially that of the guitarists, is also influenced by contemporary developments. Some favor the amplified archtop guitar sound of Joe Pass or Wes Montgomery, but others use digital

⁷⁴ A performance is in part defined by the preparation it requires (see Chapter Three). As I became a provisional member of various musical communities, my own preparation changed. After playing with these young North Side jazz musicians, I began to practice standards in compound meters. I wanted to better understand what they were doing and I wanted to be accepted as a player. 7/8 proved to be a daunting shibboleth.

delay and chorus to get the more processed and sustained sound of contemporary players like Pat Metheny and John Scofield. Often guitarists work in rock bands and many play jazz on Fender Stratocasters and use Mesa Boogie amps that work well both at rock band volumes or in quiet jazz clubs. Guitarists are prevalent throughout Chicago's jazz communities. I conducted fieldwork for several weeks before I first heard a band without one. Perhaps the presence of so many guitarists is itself an effect of the influence of other guitar-driven, popular styles.

Players participated in these gigs and sessions for a variety of reasons. While these performances themselves paid little if anything, they were viewed as a pathway to more lucrative work. Unknown players did not get called for gigs, so some players religiously attended every session they could find including more distant ones like Von Freeman's at the New Apartment Lounge, and the sessions at the Velvet Lounge and at Andy's in the Loop. Ambitious and eager players attended several sessions in one night, often waiting until 2:00 in the morning to get a chance to play with Von Freeman. One player who had missed several sessions because he was sick told me anxiously how important it was to always "be on the scene" if you wanted to maintain your artistic and professional connections. Part of being on the scene involved proving your musical mettle. Consequently, young players often called difficult and up-tempo standards. Some players obviously came in to show off their skills, playing aggressive solos, then leaving to impress someone at another session elsewhere.

But players were also concerned with creativity and their identity as artists. Their weekend gigs paid better, but weeknights provided opportunities to make art, and the hunt for work and prestige sometimes took a back seat to the trials and pleasures of

creativity. For example, the house band at the Elbo Room always began the session playing a set of original tunes or dramatically reworked standards. The musicians at Phyllis's also played many of their own compositions and arrangements, and they often took long solos honing their technique and trying out new ideas.

Old School on the South Side

In the neighborhood of South Shore, about 14 miles south of Phyllis's Musical Inn, older African Americans come together to play and listen to jazz in ways that they have developed over decades. Their musical practices help to affirm and sustain relationships and identities first forged when some were students of Capt. Walter Dyett at Du Sable High School in the 1940s. Several members of this community, like George Freeman, are successful professional musicians who have performed and recorded with Gene Ammons, Johnny Griffin, and even Charlie Parker. Others are part-time musicians, like pianist Billy Fowlkes, who runs a beauty parlor in addition to gigging. Others just listen or sing a tune or two every once in a while. The musical practices of these people have little to do with the latest improvisational innovations or professional advancement. While their musical practices are rooted in the past, it would be a mistake to think of their music simply as exercises in nostalgia. People do hear echoes of their younger selves and they often talked with me about past performances, ambitions, and relationships, but their music is also a way of performing who they are now. Performances are lively affairs with much give and take between the musicians and the audience; those who can play usually bring their instruments. Older, simpler, blues-

based approaches to jazz allow for a wide range of participation, and leaders actively encourage the less skilled players.

This emphasis on inclusion entails a wide variety of musical and non-musical interaction, but it doesn't eliminate conflict. Though many of these people are in their 70s and 80s, they still work to craft fresh selves and secure their positions in the community, dreaming of new romances or planning gigs and fresh business schemes. They share a broad range of musical and social values. Sometimes they revisit old enmities and experience new conflicts that surface as whispered gossip and occasionally as confrontation. But, for the most part, people come together to play, listen, and enjoy themselves.

These jazz musicians and their friends gather at several clubs. A few people make the rounds every week, others spend a night or two at just their favorite place, and some only come out for big events that happen every couple of months. I came to know a particular group of people through my participation in events at two clubs: Bernice's Twilight Zone and The Tropical Den.

Old School Part I: Bernice's Twilight Zone

Bernice's Twilight Zone has been a fixture on the South Side for as long as many of her customers could remember, though it hasn't always been where it is today on 79th Street, just south of the Exchange Avenue intersection. The people who frequent the Twilight Zone remember Bernice's first Twilight Zone on Cottage Grove and also her other bar, The Grass Hut. They remember the steak house that used to be on the corner. They remember when white people used to live here, and they remember when black

middle-class families moved in before the corner of 79th and Exchange became so rundown and dangerous.⁷⁵ Today, the Star Submarine across the street serves deep fried shrimp through a slot in their bulletproof glass divider, and commuters look out on a crumbling city as the Metra Electric Line rumbles down the center of Exchange. But alongside the poverty, violence, and alienation, I encountered small town neighborliness that many local families brought with them when they migrated to Chicago from the rural South. It's the kind of neighborliness romanticized by Ice Cube in his 2002 film *Barbershop* that was filmed just down the block from Bernice's.

Bernice's Twilight Zone, a scrawl of blue neon, brought little cheer to a dark and deserted 79th Street on that cold December night the first time I visited the club, but inside people were definitely making merry. Men in suits slapped each other on the back and traded joking insults, while women in gowns leaned together to laugh as tenor player Houston Person swung on the bandstand. Nearly every head had a hat; husbands' pork pies, fedoras, and kufi caps with kente cloth hatbands bravely held their own next to the elaborate wide-brimmed crowns of their wives, but none caught my eye like the Santa hats and Christmas lights that blinked on the heads of the waitresses as they wove through the crowd delivering beers wrapped in paper napkins and tiny, single-serving bottles of wine, crown royal, bourbon, and vodka. Though I was the only white person, and probably the only person without a wallet full of grandchildren's pictures, the man collecting tickets at the door welcomed me as if I'd been here before, the prevailing social role of old friend eclipsing my obvious outsider status.

⁷⁵ Even South Shore has participated in Chicago's recent economic development. Since I did my fieldwork in 2005 and 2006 the vacant buildings next to the Twilight Zone have been replaced by new brick buildings.

Patrons were dressed for The Ritz, but the club itself was quite humble. Paneled walls and a drop-tile ceiling gave the room the feel of a basement recroom that wasn't challenged by the simple tables and folding chairs in front of the bandstand. A silvery curtain of fringe festooned the canopy over the rectangular bar that filled the front third of the room, like a do-it-yourself thatch-roof retro tiki hut. The informal design of the club only added to the sense that the Twilight Zone wasn't just a commercial space, but Bernice's place where many of the customers were also friends.

The Twilight Zone provides a stage for the performance of gender roles that both empowers women and maintains traditional family relations between men and women. Men normally dominate jazz bars. They come alone and with other men to listen, or they come with dates for a romantic evening. At the Twilight Zone, I often witnessed groups of men and women together, husbands sitting with husbands and wives with wives. The Zone is emphatically Bernice's. On my first visit, she greeted me; a commanding person in a flowing black gown, she personally led me to a chair. She was captain of the ship directing staff and patrons and bestowing favors. Waitresses would approach tables with unordered drinks saying, "Bernice would like you to have this." But she was also part mother, making sure the kids in the recroom were having a good time. Once, I ordered some popcorn. The waitress told me they didn't have any, but later, Bernice brought over popcorn that she had popped upstairs.

A kind of humorous gender stereotyping prevails. On one occasion I began to sit in an empty chair when a man nearby said, "You can sit there if you want, but when my wife gets back you're going to be in all kinds of trouble." All the men laughed. Women, too, engaged in this joking gender rivalry. When Barbara Morrison, a jazz and blues

singer from California, was performing, she delighted the women by constantly teasing the men in the band. Near the end of one set she told the audience she was going to sing another song. Jimmy Ellis, a senior Chicago musician, standing next to Barbara and looking very serious in his sharp suit and dark glasses, seemed a little impatient. Barbara turned and said, "It's alright baby. I know you been waiting to pee. You go ahead and we'll start without you." Later she told the audience that she'd been married three times. Her first two husbands died from eating poison mushrooms. The third died when he was struck in the head. "I never could get him to eat his damn mushroom," she said as the women in the club shrieked with laughter.

During my fieldwork I developed an informal system for classifying jazz clubs. There were clubs where people talked but didn't listen. These clubs were the most common, and in them jazz functioned as a particular kind of sign. Like the rare steaks and crystal champagne flutes it signified particular kinds of status, mood, and festivity. People were there to perform relationships and identities that had very little to do with the actual music. They never clapped and their conversation continued unabated no matter what was happening on stage. In other clubs people listened but never talked. The music and the musicians on stage were something special. They look up to the stage in silent attention.

The third type of club was the most rare. There people talked and listened, and the music and the talk were part of a single fabric. The Twilight Zone was this kind of club. The people talked throughout the performance, but they were often in conversation with the music on the stage. Barbara Morrison called out to the audience and they responded. When a soloist took a good ride people yelled for more. The chatter in the room, even

when it didn't directly address the stage, contributed to the mood that fed the music just as the music fed the fire and stoked the party. I was reminded of ethnomusicologist Anthony Seeger, who, when he recorded Suyu songs and edited out the background chatter and laughter, learned that the chatter and laughter were an essential part of the music and the feelings the music was meant to create and express (Seeger 1987, p. 77). Twilight Zone patrons certainly wouldn't criticize studio recordings as incomplete, but when I took members of this community to The Green Mill where people listen quietly, they were mildly insulted when the musicians didn't joke with them. Though the music was first rate even by their own standards, simply listening bored them and they insisted that we leave and go someplace fun. For these listeners, the talk among audience members and between the audience and performers seemed no less an essential part of the event, just as the whoops and stomping from the dance floor was an essential part of the polka parties my parents took me to when I was young.

The Twilight Zone hosted concerts every couple of months and a DJ Night every week. On Thursday evenings amateur DJs would come for a soul food dinner and then compete, playing four or five of their favorite jazz recordings to see whose selections would get the most applause. DJ night, they told me, was an offshoot of an event called Jazz in the Alley. Many years earlier “Pops” Simpson started having friends over to play records in his garage near the intersection of 50th St and St. Lawrence Ave. The event



Figure 5.3 Al Carter-Bey making announcements at the Twilight Zone

grew. When Pops Simpson’s garage could no longer hold the crowd, people spilled into the alley to listen to the DJs and to the jam session. DJ nights at the Twilight Zone are quieter affairs attended by a handful of committed regulars.

Al Carter-Bey organizes the big shows at Bernice’s Twilight Zone. Like Aki Antonia Smith’s work at the Negro League Café, Carter-Bey’s musical activities are a part of his greater project of building a stronger community on the South Side. He

promotes jazz and local culture on his radio show,⁷⁶ and he sends out an email newsletter that tells people about upcoming musical events and passes along news and stories of interest to African Americans.⁷⁷ He is also interested in other community projects. Because of his concerns about displaced families, he publicly opposed the demolition of Cabrini Green and other housing projects. He also started the Al Carter Youth Foundation, and he caused some controversy when he included young gang members in



Figure 5.4 “Someone You Should Know”

community organizing projects. At concerts he reminds the audience that they are building community and preserving heritage. As he make announcements at Bernice’s people can see themselves in the mirror behind the stage. Above the mirror the words

⁷⁶ Al currently hosts a show on WHPK 88.5 FM and he had another show on WBEE 1570 AM. Other participants also had weekly radio shows in Chicago. I suspect that these radio shows spring from the same impulse of DJ night and Jazz in the Alley.

⁷⁷ Some of the items in his newsletter might be considered urban legends. One email claimed that social security numbers were racially coded. I applied the code to my own social security number. Either the code is false or I, too, am black.

“Someone You Should Know” perhaps encourages them to regard the performers as cultural heroes. Their reflections place them side-by-side among Al and the musicians. Possibly the image and the slogan encourages them to regard themselves not only as passive listeners, but also as participants in a noble culture—African Americans, South Siders, and members of the Twilight Zone community.

The concerts mobilized a series of face-to-face relationships. You wouldn’t hear about shows at the Twilight Zone, if you got your jazz news from *Down Beat*, WBEZ, or *Chicago Tribune* jazz critic Howard Reich.⁷⁸ I first saw a brief listing for the Twilight Zone on a web site listing dozens of weekly jazz shows in the city. Most people learn of Carter-Bey’s concerts from people who help Al by selling tickets to neighbors and friends. Many also volunteer at the shows and sometimes it is hard to tell who is working



Figure 5.5 Audrey and her family

for Bernice, who is working for Al, and who is just there to listen. I became friends with Audrey when she took my order. When she brought my drink, she also brought one for herself and we sat together talking until she decided to go back to work. We always



Figure 5.6 Al, Coop, and Grady

talked at shows and, over the course of my fieldwork she told me about the club and introduced me to her friends and family who also came to the shows. Just as listeners participate in promoting and running the show, people from the community also participated in the performances. The headliners were usually players from out of town, but South Siders such as George Freeman, Larry Frazier, and other locals could often be found in the audience unless they were on stage working as sidemen or the opening act.

As community events, the concerts were opportunities to acknowledge people for their contributions to the community. The concert on February 3, 2006, for example, featured trumpeter Michael Thomas and his band, but the event also honored Ezell

⁷⁸ *DownBeat* is based in the Chicago metro area and sometimes reports on major shows in the city. Howard Reich is a well-known jazz critic, and WBEZ is Chicago's biggest public radio station and programs many jazz shows.

“Coop” Cooper, owner of Coop’s Records on the South Side. The first set ended with a special composition, “Coop’s Chicago Blues.” When the band went on break the speeches began. Al Carter-Bey recounted the history of Coop’s Records, how Coop started out forty years earlier on Eighty-seventh Street, how he moved to Forty-seventh Street in Bronzeville, and how today his son carries on the family business in his own shop, Coop’s Underground. (Coop’s Underground, unlike Coop’s Records, specializes in rap and hip-hop and later several audience members grumbled privately about that.) Al also introduced a host of local celebrities who came to honor Coop. Others spoke as well. A man named Grady emotionally remembered visiting the store when he was young. “He gave me the opportunity to experience a lot of things,” Brady told the crowd. “I’d stop at the record store. Coop had his cigar. ‘What up homey?’ Coop would say. Family!” “Every day I came down to the shop,” Grady continued. “He’d play a record every morning. ‘Body and Soul’ or something, and we’d reflect on the day that was about to happen.” Coop’s words about life and music shaped lives, so it wasn’t empty encouragement when someone shouted, “Preach!” Coop stepped to the microphone and thanked everyone for honoring him this evening and bringing so much to his life. Honoring local celebrities, selling the tickets,⁷⁹ and socializing helped make shows at the Twilight Zone more obviously participatory community events that jazz shows at more famous venues.

The headliners came from across the country. Some were friends of Al Carter-Bey, some had family in the area, and others seemed to simply enjoy playing for an audience that had long and abiding love of their music. The music they played was a part

⁷⁹ Tickets at Bernice’s were reasonably priced. Usually they cost between \$10 and \$15. Tickets for similar shows at The Jazz Showcase in The Loop usually cost around \$25.

of these people's lives and it facilitated the kind of sociality these people enjoyed. I heard a variety of styles, but much of what I heard has been called soul jazz, though several players I spoke with disliked this term because they thought it contributed to negative racial stereotyping. The blues strongly influenced most of the music I heard at Bernice's Twilight Zone, shaping its form, harmonies, and melodic content. Rhythmically, the music swings hard, propelling dancers and conversations. It is meant to make people feel good rather than challenge them with new and unsettling ideas and sounds. It's the kind of music that could perk someone up after working all day at the Chicago Stock Yards or the steel mills of nearby Gary, Indiana. Tenor sax, Hammond B3 organ, electric guitar, drums, and sassy vocalists, formed the heart of this music that beat in bars across the South Side in the 1960s and 1970s. Houston Pearson, Barbara Morrison, and Duke Payne, who played with the 1960s Chicago organ group, Odell Brown & the Organizers, each fit this mold when they played at the Zone. The music was exciting and familiar. The people in the audience knew the performers; they called out to them and greeted favorite songs like old friends. Clapping and nodding, conversations and shouts of encouragement rose and fell with the intensity of the performance.

Most of the music I heard at the Twilight Zone was excellent, but musical virtuosity wasn't required. When Jimmy McGriff played, he was already very old and past his prime, but an enthusiastic crowd turned out all the same. And when he called "Misty" twice in the second set, they still clapped appreciatively and rushed to the stage to have their pictures taken with him when the band went on break. George Freeman seemed to struggle at times to hold the rhythm section together behind McGriff, and a few folks complained that McGriff should retire, but for most, the memory of McGriff's

past grooves filled the gaps in his performance that evening. The social work of the evening was still a success.

Old School Part 2: The Tropical Den

“It’s good to be here with my friends.”
– George Freeman



Figure 5.7 George Freeman at the Tropical Den

“This the place. You’re in the right place! Come on in!” Nothing is happening on Exchange Ave. at 9:00 on a Thursday evening. Even so, the Tropical Den manages to hide and Otis the bartender, laughing at my confusion, buzzed me in before I even found the door. Exchange Ave. is not a safe place at night. Yellow police tape hung from the small grocery store across the street. According to the gossip in the Tropical Den

someone had been robbing old women as they left the market. When the police couldn't catch him, someone from the neighborhood shot him. The older South Siders I met complained often about "gang bangers." So the door stays locked. But Otis is quick to let in regulars, people stopping by to sit in, and the folks selling DVDs, perfume, and other products popular in the local underground economy.



Figure 5.8 Miss Marie, proprietor of the Tropical Den, with her friends at her regular table

Al Carter-Bey told me that if I really wanted to see what was going on, I needed to go to the Tropical Den. George Freeman, he told me, has a long-standing Thursday night gig at the Den, and that's where a handful of fans and players from the Twilight Zone concerts like to go on Thursday evenings. Musical practices at the Den, like those at the Twilight Zone, were rooted in long-standing relationships that remained vital and looked to the future. Those practices promoted musical and non-musical participation. And, unlike life at the Twilight Zone, the same people engaged in these practices every

week and had been doing so for years. In fact, these people often gathered on other nights at Lee’s Unleaded Blues, City Life Cocktail Lounge, and other South Side bars to talk, listen, and play blues and jazz. For them music truly was an everyday practice, and they



Figure 5.9 Edwina Smith and George Freeman at the Tropical Den

measured the time and space of the South Side by the weekly cycle of gigs they visited.⁸⁰

Most people at the Tropical Den are deeply involved in music. Edwina, who saves a stool for me every week, has been listening to George for decades. Though she works as a home health aide, she sings at the session and plays occasional gigs around town. Eugene Rainy sings as well; the 45 he recorded with John Wright, “Come Rain or Come Shine,” is in the jukebox and people play it all the time. Others are very active players in the city. John Wright, for instance, always comes late because he has his own Thursday night gig at Philander’s in Oak Park. Those who don’t play participate in other ways. PJ

⁸⁰ Ruth Finnegan discusses at length the ways that urban musical practices organize space and time in the city (Finnegan [1989] 2007, pp. 318–326).

sometimes gets up and tells jokes. Rodolfo Sanchez has a jazz show on WHPK-FM. Jon Allen has a video production company called BIP—Black Image Productions. He records shows at the Tropical Den and other clubs; he broadcasts them on public access television and passes out copies to friends.



Figure 5.10 Eugene Rainey singing with George Freeman

The people at the Tropical Den have strong ties to the past. As we sat at the bar, they enjoyed telling me how they first heard George and others twenty years ago at the Enterprise Lounge or El Matador; they tell me I should have heard John Young before he got too old to play.⁸¹ When I ask George about his sound, he told me about hearing T-Bone Walker when he was young and thinking, “That’s the sound for me.” Old songs and

⁸¹ Young, who passed away in 2008 at the age of 86, was a leading jazz pianist in Chicago. Like many people at the Tropical Den, he graduated from Du Sable High School, where he studied with the legendary band director, Capt. Walter Dyett. He played with many different people in Chicago, including the musicians who gather at The Chambers and Delaney and Murphy’s. His life illustrates how people move among many different communities in the city.

memories of the past provide pleasure and a sense of continuity. These people have traveled the same path; their time with the music defines a large part of who they are together now. Eugene Rainy proudly passes around a photo album. In the black and white photos Eugene, his wife, George, and his date are all young. Dressed in their best clothes, they walk through the city together. George strikes a comic pose. Then, as now, he is clearly the joker of the group. When Eugene shows me the photo, the look on his face reveals the emotional importance of the photo and the relationships he, George, and the others continue to perform at the Tropical Den. The session is a testament to the lives they have lived.

While George regrets that his chops aren't what they used to be, the people at the Tropical Den are not content to reminisce and quietly ride out their remaining days. George is still very active, playing at clubs and the Chicago Jazz Festival. He recorded an album of new material just a few years earlier.⁸² John Allen is looking into opening a new club, and Edwina is looking for more opportunities to perform. And Thursday nights are lively. People are quick to talk about the past when I ask, but they come to party and flirt.

While friendship is a constant theme, there is no shortage of conflict at the Tropical Den. Some people feel shunned if George doesn't ask them to sit in enough and they sooth their bruised egos by complaining about their neglect. Because of jealousies and old grudges some people refuse to sit together. Once, a woman knocked a man down when she felt he'd been rude one too many times. Participation in the club scene often had a price. One evening I happened to strike up a conversation with the grown daughter of a Tropical Den regular. Her story of anger over her father's neglect revealed another

⁸² *George Burns*, Southport Records 1999.

side to the man whose company I enjoyed at the club. Participants might disappear for a while and people would whisper to me that he or she was mad at someone and had been hanging out at one of the other clubs in the circuit. After a while they usually returned to



Figure 5.11 John Allen having a snack at the bar

the Tropical Den as relationships among participants changed and past insults lost their sting.

The people who came to the Den rarely came just to listen and their participation was facilitated in musical and non-musical ways. The repertoire was always well known and tunes were often played in a bluesy style, which emphasized groove and called for simple harmonic realization. George also welcomed many singers. Participants didn't need an instrument or instrumental training. They just needed a voice and the lyrics to the songs that everybody knew. While many jazz standards were played, George regularly called "Blues in G." Harmonic players joined in and singers could riff on any of the

hundreds of standard blues refrains. George sometimes took solos using only the note G, repeated rhythmically in different octaves. These melodically simple but rhythmically compelling improvisations built great excitement, drawing shouts of approval from the audience.



Figure 5.12 The view from my barstool

Many people interacted verbally as well. Singers talked to the audience and they talked back. Every night George would yell, “Everybody say yeah!” And people said “Yeah!” He’d shout again, “Everybody say hell yeah!” And they’d shout back, “Hell yeah!” Then George would yell, “Somebody buy me a drink!” And the crowd would shout, “Hell no!”

The space of the club also contributed to interaction between the audience and the musicians and among audience members. The Tropical Den is a tiny bar and the band sets up practically in front of the door, so people sometimes walk between George and the rest of the band as they enter the room (See Figure 5.7). Sometimes George leans over

and says hello or they greet him with a pat on the back as they head to their seats. People in the audience are thrown into relationships. Nearly sitting on top of one another, you need to become friends or the pushing bodies might become unbearable.⁸³

As I have written, the dominant social role of old friend prevailed at Bernice's Twilight Zone and the Tropical Den. I was immediately welcomed, and I quickly made friends. People expected my participation, and they called to see that I was okay whenever I didn't show. Nevertheless, racial difference was always a factor in my relationships. George usually introduced me as "the white boy." On one occasion I commented on George's amplifier, it was a rickety old Peavey with missing knobs. I wondered why some company hadn't given him a hot new amp in exchange for his endorsement. Other players around town had similar deals. I mentioned that a player of his reputation ought to have a better amp. I didn't really give my comment much thought. It was just part of the shoptalk and joking that usually went on. The next time I saw George he had a new amp. I asked Edwina about it and she said, "It's because you're white. They think you know something." I don't know whether or not George really thought this, but Edwina certainly did. My exceptional status as a white musician writing about the Tropical Den certainly prompted people to say things they might not normally say. I was welcomed perhaps more quickly than some people, but from what I could see the attention I received was in keeping with the treatment others received at the session.

One night, it seemed that nearly everybody was sitting in at the same time. Arm-in-arm, singers gathered around the microphone, people holding drinks bumped shoulder with players holding horns, and the entire front half of the bar became one giant grooving

⁸³ See Feld 1982 for another example of how communities are formed and maintained through a combination of music and crowded bodies.

bandstand. George shouted out, “It’s good to be here with friends!” “These are my friends!” became the improvised chorus of a song that felt like it would go all night. Such was the dream that the Tropical Den’s musical practices sought to conjure into reality. George wasn’t able to work this magic on every evening, but it was something we always hoped for. Not all musical communities hoped for this, the professionalism of Delaney and Murphy and The Chambers, or the neighborliness of The Negro League Café were very different kinds of social relations. And communities of “creative musicians,” valued particular visions of what it meant to be an artist as much or more than they valued professionalism or neighborliness. But enduring friendship was a prevailing theme at The Tropical Den.

Creative Improvisers on the South Side and the North Side

Musicians who identify themselves as “creative musicians” have been particularly effective at banding together and at constructing an alternate network of jazz organizations, venues, and sessions. “Creative” musicians, sometimes identified as free jazz players or the jazz avant garde, are committed to playing highly improvised music that is not structured by functional harmony, tonality, or song forms from the Great American Songbook. They are often influenced by both jazz improvisation and the improvisational practices of John Cage and European avant-garde musicians like Karlheinz Stockhausen. Partly because they see themselves as more or less distinct from contemporary mainstream jazz, partly because they are committed to developing new musical vocabularies not widely shared, and partly because they have been excluded from mainstream jazz venues, these players have become adept at forming their own

communities, venues, concert series, and sessions. In Chicago I observed two communities of “creative” musicians. The first is the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, a South Side collective dating from the 1960s that is devoted to exploring and developing what they call “Great Black Music.” The second is a community of younger white musicians, influenced by jazz, the AACM, and European free improvisers like Peter Brötzmann. The most prominent figure among these players is 1999 MacArthur Fellow Ken Vandermark.⁸⁴

The Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians

The AACM has been active in Chicago since the 1960s and continues to be a vital part of Chicago’s music. It is one of the first and most important musical collectives to come out of the post-bop era. The organization is most famous for its commitment to black music and culture and its emphasis on “creative music” or free improvisation. As they state on their website, the members of the AACM have a grand vision of what music is and can be:

Since its inception, one mission of the AACM has been to provide an atmosphere conducive to the development of its member artists and to continue the AACM legacy of providing leadership and vision for the development of creative music. The AACM first coined the phrase Great Black Music to describe its unique direction in music. The AACM pays homage to the diverse styles of expression within the body of Black Music in the USA, Africa and throughout the world. This experience extends from the ancient musics of Africa to the music of the future. (www.aacmchicago.org, October 15, 2009)

The commitment to “Great Black Music” includes concerts, rehearsal bands, jam sessions, and training for young musicians. The AACM has produced many nationally

⁸⁴ For another account of creative music communities in Chicago as well as an account of Jeff Parker, a guitarist and composer at home in several of Chicago’s jazz communities, see *Genre in Popular Music* by Fabian Holt (Holt 2007).

and internationally acclaimed musicians and they have played an important role in Chicago. This very successful organization has been well documented in jazz literature (Lewis 2009; Anderson 2007; Radano 1993, 1992; Litweiler 1984; Wilmer 1977; Jost 1974). The story of the AACM is perhaps the best-known account of jazz musicians who have been successful while making music that falls outside of mainstream jazz practices. The organization is an important force in Chicago jazz, particularly on the South Side, although many South Side musicians are not members.

The organization continues to be an important force in Chicago. During my own fieldwork I witnessed many AACM performances. Fred Anderson, a senior member of the organization, owns and runs The Velvet Lounge where members of the AACM and other creative musicians from around the world perform. The Lounge hosts a weekly jam session open to anyone. On the night that I sat in, the house band played some free improvisation, but we also played jazz standards. The Velvet Lounge, originally a small neighborhood bar, was located on a block of South Indiana Avenue scheduled for demolition to make way for new condominiums serving the business people drawn to developments in the area. The Velvet Lounge isn't just a bar. It is the main venue for the AACM in Chicago, it is where many young players learn the ways of the AACM, and it is where many leading creative improvisers play when they are in Chicago. One such player is soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy, he wrote out a sign declaring that The Velvet Lounge was "a temple," and everyone saw that declaration stuck on the wall whenever they came for a show. During the time I was in Chicago, many fundraisers were held, and, at great expense. Fred Anderson, owner of the club, pooled money from local fundraisers together with donations from around the world and his own money to raise

approximately \$100,000. In the autumn of 2006 he reopened the Velvet Lounge at 67 E. Cermak Road (Reich 2005, p. 23).

During my fieldwork I attended many concerts put on by the AACM and its members. The AACM Large Ensemble led by Mwata Bowden and featuring dozens of costumed musicians and singers, performed its ritualistic improvisations at the Chicago Jazz Festival. I also saw Bowden lead a much different ensemble performing the music of Count Basie at one of Chicago's Jazz City 2005 concerts held at the Ravenswood community center, a few blocks from my apartment.

The AACM and its members continue to garner international acclaim and receive grants and awards. The organization includes several MacArthur Fellowship recipients among its members. Young members like trumpeter Corey Wilkes, singer Dee Anderson, and flutist Nicole Mitchell, and guitarist Jeff Parker are regarded as important up and coming performers both in Chicago and abroad.

The sound of the AACM is hard to pin down. They draw on a broad range of musical styles that include jazz, blues, and rhythm and blues, different African musical traditions, and the music of classical avant garde musicians. For example, Ronald Radano has observed that early compositions of Anthony Braxton, a member of the AACM in the 1960s, resemble the compositions of John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen in their use of "symbolic notation" and performance instructions that gave performers control over how the structure of the composition would unfold in performance (Radano 1993, p. 122). AACM sometimes make use of untraditional instruments and techniques such as the Art Ensemble of Chicago's famous use of little instruments like bells, whistles, and other noisemakers. Performances can be magnificent spectacles in which costumed

performers seem to enact ritual incantations, or they might just feature tenor saxophonist Fred Anderson playing subdued and haunting modal improvisations with bassist Tatsu Aoki. The AACM doesn't account for every African American musician in Chicago, but most Chicago jazz musicians, black or white, whether they play free jazz or not, respect the efforts of the AACM.⁸⁵

Creative Music on the North Side

White creative musicians also have a strong presence in Chicago. Though they haven't formed an organization like the AACM, they are a clearly recognizable group, though these young men come from a variety of musical backgrounds. Some, like saxophonist Keefe Jackson, have strong mainstream jazz skills, while others, like cellist Fred Longberg-Holms, a former Juilliard student, have been trained in European concert music. Several come to creative improvisation from a background in punk music, and they bring punk music's confrontational rejection of studied tone and technique to their performance. The most prominent member of this community of musicians is saxophonist Ken Vandermark, an energetic performer, composer, bandleader, and organizer. Vandermark has been recognized around the world for his accomplishments and was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship in 1999. This Chicago community also has strong ties to the European improvised music scene and European performers like German saxophonist Peter Brötzmann frequently collaborate with Chicago musicians in Chicago and abroad.

⁸⁵ While most musicians, particularly African American musicians living on the South Side respect the AACM, they don't always share their aesthetic values. One player who was friends with many AACM members commented that performances at the Velvet Lounge sounded like one really long song.

While these players have an identifiable sound, it can be quite varied. Occasionally they can be heard playing a jazz standard, but that is quite rare.⁸⁶ Some performances are quiet and lyrical, reminiscent of early Ornette Coleman. Other performances offer moving explorations of sound. At one performance, percussionist Michael Zerang created a breathtaking miniature soundscape, quietly rubbing bits of wood and metal on the head of a snare drum. Nearly inaudible, the arrhythmic scratching and clicking drew listeners into a delicate world of sound that threatened to crumble at the gentle hiss of their own breath. Often, though, the performances of these musicians resembled a kind of sonic assault. Sound exploded out of silence—players blowing as if they hoped to part with a lung—then stopped abruptly when the set was over. These performances tested the extremes of dynamics, sonic density, and extended technique—exploring the limits of what music might be.

Inclined to see music as something other than the standard commercial fare of jazz bars and restaurants, and largely excluded from Chicago's mainstream jazz venues, these musicians became adept at organizing alternative performances that gave them the freedom to follow their muse and nurture their vision of themselves as artists. I regularly attended three performance series organized by these musicians. The most famous was the Wednesday Night Jazz Series at The Empty Bottle that was organized by Ken Vandermark and John Corbett, a Chicago-based writer and critic who championed the work of Vandermark and his colleagues. Though called a jazz series, I never heard any straight ahead jazz there. A performance by Sam Rivers flirted with the sounds of

⁸⁶ Several Sonny Rollins tunes can be heard on the 2002 Vandermark 5 recording *Airports for Light* [Atavistic Worldwide: alp 140 compact disc]. However, these tunes are not included in the liner notes or credits and are included as a kind of bonus recording. The melodies are recognizable, but the improvisations are far from conventional.

mainstream jazz, but those moments were only brief allusions to tonality in an evening of largely atonal free improvisation. The Empty Bottle is not part of the regular jazz circuit in Chicago. Located in the largely working class neighborhood called Ukrainian Village, the bar caters to artsy punk rock musicians who are moving westward from the recently gentrified neighborhood of Wicker Park. The often cacophonous music of North Side creative improvisers seemed more at home in edgy alternative music clubs, whose patrons may have had little familiarity with the forms, harmonies, and traditions of mainstream jazz, but were well acquainted with sonic extremes, noise, and the allure of cutting edge hipness and anything “alt.” And creative improvisers would at least buy some drink on Mondays or Tuesday when most of the regular crowd was not around. Sylvie’s Lounge, a rock bar on Irving Park just west of Ashland Avenue, was home to a regular Monday night improvised music series run by bass clarinetist and Ken Vandermark colleague Jason Stein. Creative improvisers like Keefe Jackson and “The Model Citizens” also performed frequently on Mondays at The Hideout, a bar better known as a venue for alt country music. Often, North Side creative improvisers sought out performance spaces other than bars. For instance, they could be heard occasionally at the Myopic Bookstore in Wicker Park. Also, while I was in Chicago saxophonist Dave Rempis curated a wonderful concert series at The 3030, an old church on Cortland Avenue converted into a performance space by the Elastic Arts Foundation. Performances of North Side creative improvisers were always staged as concerts and often as part of a series of art music presentations. I never heard these musicians play the kind of casual gig that is part of the musical practice of other jazz musicians.

These concerts often had a unique appearance. Special events featuring Vandermark or famous visiting musicians drew a diverse crowd, but regular weeknight performances were usually sparsely attended. At shows I attended, the audience was made up mostly of single white men, many of whom I recognized as performers from other events. Audience members and musicians alike dressed in thrift store chic, and often sported closely cropped hair and the occasional soul patch⁸⁷ or tattoo. Participants appeared to be performing a kind of bohemian identity that was part working class and part intellectual. One listener whom I saw frequently, a gaunt young man sporting a red goatee and soiled brown work pants, seemed to envision himself as a cross between Trotsky and a UPS driver. At many mainstream performances performers and listeners often responded physically to the rhythm of the music, tapping their feet, nodding their heads, or swaying in time with the music. North Side improvisers rarely set up a rhythmic groove. Some players remained quite still while others seemed to move spasmodically, twisting and grimacing, as if in the throes of some inner turmoil or demonic possession. Meanwhile, the audience sat motionless, seeming to experience the music as an entirely cerebral activity. At times, these performances seemed a parody of bohemian aesthetes and intellectuals, but often the music was striking in its intensity and beauty, and the performers possessed an admirable commitment to challenging and oppositional music that had little hope of providing them with financial rewards or appreciation beyond a small circle of like-minded people.

In some circles these musicians have been received with great acclaim. In addition to Ken Vandermark's 1999 MacArthur Fellowship, several players have had

⁸⁷ A soul patch is a tuft of facial hair grown beneath a man's lower lip. Both Dizzy Gillespie and Frank Zappa sported soul patches.

great success at European music festivals. One player said that they made so much money in Poland, that they were able to pay for heart surgery for their Polish agent.⁸⁸ While some regard the North Side creative musicians as one of the more important developments in Chicago jazz, a number of mainstream players have little regard for their music. While I was in Chicago, I was shown a letter that had been circulating among some mainstream jazz players. I was told that letter, written by a prominent pianist, was sent to the MacArthur Foundation when Ken Vandermark was awarded his MacArthur fellowship. The writer stated that Vandermark was a fraud and that the MacArthur Foundation, in awarding him a fellowship, had belittled those whose lives were devoted to honing the skills and craft required of true jazz musicians. Not all mainstream players held creative musicians in such contempt, but mainstream players and creative players on the North Side seldom mixed. Unlike many AACM members who could play free jazz as well as the mainstream jazz repertoire, white North Side improvisers rarely played with straight ahead musicians and often sounded awkward when flirting with jazz standards. One saxophonist with whom I spoke told me that he chose to clerk at the Jazz Record Mart rather than play regular gigs. Playing gigs wasn't fun for him, and he thought that playing those gigs would impede his ability to play the music about which he cared the most.

Sitting with Strangers: Some Practices In Chicago's Most Popular Jazz Clubs

Recent ethnographies of life and music in American nightclubs (May 2001; Fox 2004; Lindquist 2002) mainly look at groups of people who return to the same club and

⁸⁸ They also complained that, economics being what they are, their Polish earnings would be worth next to nothing in the United States.

comprise communities that endure, sometimes for weeks, sometimes for years. But when most people go out, they go out with friends or their partners. For the most part, they interact with the people with whom they came. Some scholars, like David Grazian have written about people who come to a particular club once or twice forming very limited connections to the strangers they meet.⁸⁹ More often critics must speculate about audiences based on the media those audiences consume rather than on data gathered about people in the act of being an audience. It is no surprise that very little ethnography has been done among strangers who come together infrequently and interact little if at all. They rarely stay still long enough to allow for meaningful participation and observation. Yet most people who visit Chicago's most well known jazz clubs most often participate in this kind of sociality. They rarely seek out the regular, interactive, communal participation that I observed at The Chambers (see Chapter Three) or the Negro League Café (see Chapter 4). During my fieldwork, I attended over one hundred performances at clubs. Sometimes I interacted with others, but mostly I sat alone, surrounded by strangers, observing and listening to the conversations going on around me. These fragments of talk and action point to very different kinds of jazz practice and significance. Clubs like The Green Mill, Pete Miller's, and the Jazz Gallery draw a diverse and constantly changing collection of people, making it is impossible to say what the practices in these places mean for all the participants at any given time. Nevertheless,

⁸⁹ Though I expected my field to overlap considerably with those fields discussed by Grazian, I less frequently encountered the alter ego "nocturnal self" he discusses in *Blue Chicago* (Grazian 2003, p. 22) or the "hard-nosed aggression, stylistic finesse... slight of hand and deceptive trickery" of the urban hustle he describes in *On the Make* (Grazian 2007, p, 13).

practices in Chicago's major jazz clubs reveal another layer to the onion, one that at least highlights the difference between major club practices and the communities I studied.

Every club has its regulars, but most of the people visiting Chicago's main jazz clubs do so infrequently. In my conversations with club patrons I learned that they sometimes come to the club to hear a particular artist. They've heard recordings of these musicians, but they've never been to The Green Mill or any other jazz club before. Others come because the club itself is a kind of landmark, a symbol of Chicago. On many occasions I met graduate students or recent immigrants to the city out to experience the designated highlights of their new temporary home. Tourists also seek out clubs touted in guidebooks and brochures. It is not uncommon to hear accents from around the globe at these clubs as visitors seek uniquely American or Chicagoan experiences. Clubs played to this desire. Andy's Chicago Jazz emphasizes this kind of experience in its name and in the retro Chicago cartoon couple that are part of its logo. A sculptured bust of Al Capone, the legendary Chicago mobster, sits behind the bar at The Green Mill (even though the club is historically more a part of the city's German beer garden culture). More than once I heard people joke, "Chicago, bang bang, Al Capone!" People also came just for drinks; on several occasions I overheard tables of office workers from the Loop who were trying out a new happy hour at the end of their day.

The Green Mill, according to my informal classification of venues, is a club where people listen but don't talk. Musicians are neither background, nor are they closely related to the audience as in clubs where people talk and listen. Instead, they are elevated above the audience both physically and metaphorically. They are up on a stage where they are to be admired as artists. At the Green Mill, the silence of the audience is strictly

enforced. Before each set the MC informs the audience of the no-talking policy. He never jokes about it. I infer from his tone that he holds most of the crowd in thinly veiled contempt. In spite of his regular recitation of the no-talking rule, some people still talk. In these cases musicians themselves discipline the disruptive behavior. Sometimes they politely remind talkers that they are disturbing others, but such pleas fall on deaf ears and rarely overcome alcohol and ignorance. Other musicians made talkers into the butt of their jokes (Chapter 3). Organist, Chris Foreman was a master of the sudden silence. As his solo would build toward its climax, he would surprise the audience by dropping to a whisper letting inane comments or cell phone conversations ring out for the room to hear. Once, drummer Greg Rockingham held the microphone over a table of loud talkers and their conversation was broadcast over the PA. These tactics are often amusing, but not always very effective. Greg held out the microphone until his arm tired, but the talkers remained unaware that they had become the center of attention.

On nights when well known musicians like Kurt Elling perform, people crowd The Green Mill. Sitting knee to knee or standing shoulder to shoulder, they cheer and clap together. Even so, they maintain more or less exclusive relations with their companions. Seated, they cluster around their table; standing, they tend to turn slightly toward one another. They rarely leave their original companions to join another group. They may compete with others for prime seats or treat other listeners with disregard. As I stood alone near the bar, I sometimes felt like an obstacle for people to step on or bump aside as they bulldozed their way to the toilet. At other times, friendly conversations started on breaks, but they were generally brief and not repeated on subsequent evenings.

Chicago's popular jazz clubs draw listeners on Friday and Saturday evenings, but often, on slower weeknights people come not to listen, but to socialize with dates or small groups of friends. The physical layout of the club facilitates the isolation of one group from another. Many small tables rather than a few large ones make sharing or crowding at the bar unnecessary. Lighting—carefully placed candles or track lighting—draws eyes inward to the center of the group, away from the shadows and faces of others across the room. The Tropical Den sometimes has a small buffet that encourages mingling as people scooped up their food, but the big clubs have hostesses, waitresses, and bartenders who act as guides and emissaries, showing customers to their seats and delivering orders. Once at your table you have little need to travel, everything is brought to you. Some places maintain this separation of patrons more than others, but at such clubs I never witnessed the same kind of mobility, mixing, and general familiarity that I witnessed at smaller clubs and sessions. Of course, being in a room full of people, even people with whom you don't directly interact, is a kind of sociality that provides pleasure, but that pleasure has its own particular feeling of community.

Presumably, music is the central attraction of jazz clubs, but sometimes the music is secondary and jazz functions as one of several signs signifying romance or status, which are of primary importance for many people patronizing jazz clubs. One popular club called "Pops for Champagne" particularly encourages this. The club often features singers who sing quiet romantic ballads. Performing from a stage above and behind the bar, musicians can be seen, but they are not the visual focal point of the room, and people must look uncomfortably up or sideways to attend to the musicians. Instead, patrons at Pops often choose seats near the fireplace where they talk and gaze at one another sipping

champagne from delicate flutes. Pops for Champagne is a sign of elegant romance and it attracts bridal showers and parties of sharply dressed men and women celebrating after wedding rehearsals.

At other clubs jazz is a sign of luxury and status, part of a package that includes filet mignon, martinis, and white cotton table clothes. Six nights a week, Pete Miller's in Evanston features top players like Bobby Broom, Ron Perillo, Laurence Hobgood, and Larry Novak for free, even though other clubs charge \$7.00 to \$15.00 to hear these musicians. Nevertheless, the tables in front of the bandstand are rarely full even when the rest of the restaurant is packed. For most of the people at Pete Miller's the music seems to be part of the upscale ambience, something that comes with a steakhouse in the boutique-filled downtown surrounded by the large homes and beautiful old churches of this well-to-do suburb on the shores of Lake Michigan. Jazz at Pete Miller's can be enjoyed as a special musical experience or as just another lovely thread in this comfortable fabric of upper-middle class luxury and privilege.

In my informal classification of jazz clubs, places like Pete Miller's fall into the category of clubs where people talk but don't listen. No one needs to enforce this rule, but musicians must learn to live with the distractions and the disregard of the audience. I suspect that working too long under these conditions has a negative effect on the players and the music they make. In similar situations other musicians and I have grumbled our contempt for noisemakers. Conversely, I have felt the struggle to break free of the self-imposed limitations of a background musician in more appreciative and unfettered playing situations. Nevertheless, many musicians manage to sustain their creativity and

self-respect, playing in the background while holding out for more attentive audiences at clubs like The Green Mill.

In *Blue Chicago* and *On the Make* David Grazian has described Chicago blues bars and Pittsburgh dance clubs as stages where participants act out alter egos in performances that make use of costumes, fake identities, and special language and music (Grazian 2003, 2007). However, this does not appear to be as pronounced among jazz musicians and fans in Chicago. People at sessions or in jazz clubs rarely spoke, dressed, or behaved differently than they did at home. Sometimes they wore their nicer clothes, presenting the best image of themselves, but they never engaged in the more radical and transformative costuming apparent in punk bars and expensive discos. Occasional attempts to perform the role of jazz expert or somehow elevate one's status were, for the most part, quiet performances that seemed to differ only slightly from the selves people performed at home or work.

One exception to the performance of everyday identity in jazz clubs was the occasional attempt of a white person to act as a black person. These performances were based on representations of black culture in television and movies more than any actual experience with black people. Often these performances were fairly mild. Having perhaps watched *The Blues Brothers* (Landis 1980), particularly the scene where John Belushi and Dan Ackroyd as Jake and Elwood Blues visit a black church service where James Brown as Reverend Cleophus James whips the congregation into an ecstatic frenzy, some white audience members occasionally shouted out an awkward "Amen!" or "Play it Brother!" These outbursts were usually isolated incidents that went unnoticed or maybe elicited mildly disapproving looks from the musicians. But on one occasion this racial

mimicry threatened to disrupt the show and led to conflict between the shouter and the audience. One man's participatory shouts or "hallelujah" and comments increased with his consumption of alcohol until finally, at the climactic silence of a ballad he yelled, "I just had a big O!" His loud and disruptive outburst, a combination of black religious and sexual stereotypes, was met with cold stares from the audience and threats of expulsion from the MC. He slunk toward the corner of the room where I struck up a conversation with him. It was clear that he was drunk and also surprised by his treatment. "Isn't that how they do it?" he asked me. He went on to tell me about his work as a Chicago police officer and he offered to be my guide and protector as I did research on the South Side. Eventually his drunken desire to participate in the performance got the better of him. His outbursts infuriated the MC, and he was ejected him from the club in a flurry of insults and profanity.

Later I looked into this man's life. I expected to find proof of a racist Chicago cop with a history of violations and complaints. Trolling the Internet revealed a more complicated story. Rather than complaints, I found commendations recognizing this officer for his work with minority youth. Time and again, as I conducted my fieldwork, racial attitudes proved to be complex in ways that both encouraged and disturbed me, and I saw that when people considered the racial identities of others or themselves, they often appeared to be of more than one mind. Sometimes, sitting in clubs like the Green Mill where blacks and whites routinely perform and sit together, race relations seem almost normal, but the example of this officer, his efforts at outreach, and his drunken racial parody painfully remind us that they aren't.

I suspect that the performance of alter egos is rare or muted in jazz clubs for several reasons. It seems likely that jazz clubs often draw an audience that is older, better educated, and affluent. Unlike the people studied by Grazian, they have reasons to be more satisfied with their everyday identities. Participants in jam sessions too have reasons for not performing alter egos. The jam session participants I met had long standing musical and non-musical relationships with one another. People knew each other as more or less consistent personalities. People also came together to achieve shared professional, neighborhood, and ethnic goals. Familiarity and shared background provides little cover for the performance of fantasy selves.

Observation and participation in jazz clubs is, in a sense, a step back from participation in ongoing jam sessions. There is greater distance between performers and listeners, between listeners and staff, and between different groups of listeners. Neither the long-term face-to-face interaction of session participants nor the fleeting side-by-side co-presence of jazz club audiences constitutes a more real jazz experience. Though these levels of social organization share members, repertoire, and practices, and though each produces meaningful musical experiences, it is a mistake to confuse or conflate one with the other.

Festivals

To take in the immensity of Chicago's jazz festivals requires us to step back even further; this more distant perspective reveals yet other levels of social organization. The Chicago Jazz Festival is the city's largest and most famous, but the city is also home to the Jazz Festival Heritage Music Weekend, the Hyde Park Jazz Festival, and several

smaller festivals. These festivals celebrate jazz, but they are also part of the collection of festivals that includes the Chicago Blues Fest, the Chicago Gospel Music Festival, the Chicago Country Music Fest, Taste of Chicago, Celtic Fest Chicago, and Viva! Chicago Latin Music Festival, just to name of few. These festivals celebrate Chicago's ethnic diversity and enable this sometimes infamously segregated city to take prideful ownership of once marginalized communities.⁹⁰ These festivals cater not only to specific ethnic groups and music fans, but also to people who simply enjoy the festivals as festivals. They also serve as tourist destinations and are advertised throughout Illinois and the nation.

The Chicago Jazz Festival is a large outdoor event encompassing several stages spread out across several acres along the Lake Michigan Shore in Grant Park, a short walk from the Loop. According to the Mayor's Office of Special Events, the three-day event often draws 350,000 visitors (Mayor's Office of Special Events 2006); and many more attend the lead up events like the Made in Chicago concerts at the Pritzker Pavilion and the many late night celebrations following the official festival events. The story of the Chicago Jazz Festival, its history, the organizations involved, its relationship to the city, and its funding deserve a book length study. My account of the Chicago Jazz Festival and other jazz festivals in the city is just a snapshot illustrating another layer of social and musical organization, practice, and meaning. Though the Chicago Jazz Festival provides work for many musicians and draws huge crowds, many of the people I met at sessions have nothing to do with the fest and are unaware of the organizations behind it. The Chicago Jazz Festival and other festivals, unlike the frequent face-to-face gatherings

⁹⁰ For a detailed discussion of how the city makes use of blues music in this way see Grazian's *Blue Chicago* (Grazian 2003, pp. 197–227).

at the jam sessions, seem more like anomalous gatherings of imaginary communities normally bonded by their shared consumption of jazz recordings and literature or by their membership to broad categories like “African Americans,” “Chicagoan jazz fans,” or even “Americans” who have come to enjoy the jazz sometimes touted as “America’s Classical Music,” or simply “America’s Music.”

In “Walking in the City,” Michel de Certeau describes Manhattan as viewed from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center (Certeau, 91 ff). He links the panoramic view of the city with an “erotics of knowledge,” a voluptuous pleasure in “seeing the whole” (Certeau, 92.) The panoramic view is a slice of the totality captured in visionary representations, divine perspectives created by humans long before we had technology enabling anything like such a totalizing gaze. Any totalizing representation, he writes, is a simulacrum, a picture “whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices.” “The ordinary practitioners of the city, “he writes, “live ‘down below,’ below the thresholds at which visibility begins” (Certeau, 93). Below the threshold of visibility, people engage in invisible everyday practices; they walk. Most of this dissertation concerns the everyday practices of musicians who walk in rhythm down in the city. But festivals, unlike sessions, invite the panoramic view from above.

No tall building or promontory offers an aerial view of the festival, yet advertisements feature such an imaginary panorama. The audience, a single organism of one hundred thousand cells blooming on Butler Field, sprawls across the picture toward the distant glow of the Petrillo Band Shell. Alongside photos of the crowd, closely cropped facial portraits of the headliners seem to look us in the eye. Perhaps, beneath the simple desire for pleasure, music, and sunlight, these photos speak to seemingly

contradictory fantasies, fostering, on one hand subterranean desires for empowerment through personal dissolution and integration into the monolithic mass of abstract humanity, while on the other, stirring dreams of intimate personal interactions with musical demigods and their magical creative powers.

Suspended above the park, you might see throngs of faceless people seated neatly in rows before the stage and becoming more dispersed farther out. Like many in the audience you would see little of the actual performers, though you would hear them through the massive columns of speakers, and you might see their images projected on a large screen near the stage. This live event is also a mediated event. Size eclipses the sound and appearance of the performers and only electronic reproduction enables most of the audience to experience the show.

The fest, as a mediated event, caters to the media. The first twenty yards in front of the stage, where the musicians are most easily seen and heard, are reserved for the press and a fence keeps out the crowd. The next twenty yards or so are reserved for VIPs. They, too, are protected by a fence. The rest of the audience views the concert from behind the VIPs and the constant flash of cameras as photographers record images to be enjoyed later in music publications and advertisements for the fest and the city. People on the ground, of course, continue to walk around, engaging with the music and creating meanings, just as in the sessions. However, the sessions are invisible to any similar panoramic view, and it is the difference between panoramic visibility and invisibility that marks festivals and sessions as very different kinds of musical and social configurations. Festivals have been long documented in jazz histories, but sessions quickly slip into myth and folklore that is put to work in favor of one totalizing vision or another.

On the ground, people appear to experience festivals with a mix of awe and boredom. In my own experience, people talk excitedly about attending festivals and the chance to hear the really big stars that will perform. But once there—finding parking, struggling with crowds, standing in the heat, drinking overpriced drinks, and squinting to make out the faces of players on the stage—many seem to have difficulty connecting with the music. Much jazz is chamber music and a football field isn't a chamber. There are, of course, great moments where musicians and listeners connect and the crowd is thrilled by the sounds, but often, when something noteworthy happens on stage, those up front clap and that clapping spreads slowly from the front of the audience to the back as people respond not to the music, but to the clapping of others around them. As I sat at the main stage of the Chicago Jazz Fest, I routinely saw people chatting, reading; I even overheard people call friends on the phone to say they were at the festival, clearly enjoying talking with distant friends about the festival more than the festival itself. Because of my own preference for sessions and clubs, I experience festivals as deficient musical and social experiences, but that isn't the case for many festivalgoers. They are there for just this kind of experience; many wear t-shirts emblazoned with logos of other festivals they have attended.

Throughout the day, people stroll from stage to stage past rows of booths where vendors hawk a variety of goods. At the Chicago Jazz Fest and at the Jazz Unites Jazz Festival and Heritage Music Weekend, local jazz organizations like the Jazz Institute of Chicago advertise their events and solicit membership. Jazz publications like *DownBeat*, *Jazziz*, and *Chicago Jazz* also have booths. I subscribed to *DownBeat* and got a free t-shirt featuring a huge print of Thelonious Monk's face. Vendors sell food with a soul

food or New Orleans twist—catfish poboys or barbeque—appropriate to the setting. Artists, too, sell their goods—“jazzy” looking prints that exploit the stylistic traits of artist like Romare Bearden who represented jazz with distinctive collages, faux primitive scenes of musicians in clubs, or *objet d’arte* that incorporate real or imagined characteristics of African pictures and statues. Commerce, amusement, kitsch, and cliché help everyone wile away the lazy afternoon as they wait to hear the next set.

The Chicago Jazz Festival and other related events serve as a sign of the city’s cultural identity and style of life, shaping thoughts and feelings about the city for people across the Chicago area, the nation, and the world. Festivals draw tourists to the city bringing revenue, and it makes the city an attractive home for the professionals that keep Chicago productive in the global economy. Because of this festivals receive exceptional civic, corporate, and institutional support. The Jazz Festival, for example, is sponsored by the Mayor’s Office of Special Events, programmed by the Jazz Institute of Chicago and funded by US Cellular. Similarly, the “Made in Chicago” jazz concert series is presented by the City of Chicago Department for Cultural Affairs at the Pritzker Pavilion, and it is funded by the Chicago Jazz Partnership, made up of Boeing, Bank One, Kraft Foods, and the Chicago Community Trust. In 2005, when I did my fieldwork, the Partnership pledged \$1.5 million for the support of jazz in the city over the following three years” (Reich 2005). This support for the arts is also a marketing campaign for the city.

“Backers of the plan,” writes *Chicago Tribune* jazz critic Howard Reich, “stress that their campaign is designed not simply to nurture jazz but to add firepower to a distinct brand of the music: Chicago jazz (Reich 2005). Corporate and cultural interests intersect, up to a point. As Michael H. Moskow writes in his essay “Shaping Global Chicago, “Chicago

can't attract global talent—and it won't be able to keep homegrown experts either—if it fails to deliver an appealing quality of life, a well-functioning economy, and a business climate of openness and opportunity for all” (Madigan 2004, p. 192). Of course, questions of the brand “Chicago jazz” and the idea of “opportunity for all” come into question when we realize that festivals and other events tend to favor musicians who have national rather than simply local standing, and when we consider that though millions of corporate dollars are poured into festivals and concert series, those events, at best, provide only a few nights work and maybe a couple of hundred dollars for those who get the gig. Most Chicago jazz musicians, in fact, do not get festival gigs and many have never even heard of the Mayor’s Office of Special Events, the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, the Jazz Institute of Chicago, or the Chicago Jazz Partnership. It might have been better for musicians and the quality of jazz in Chicago, had some of the hundreds of thousands of dollars been available for individual grants, support for local jam sessions, and club gigs, but the Chicago jazz musicians who would have benefited would have had less of an impact on brand “Chicago Jazz.”

Conclusion

Chicago jazz is not a single musical style or social formation. Jazz musicians and fans participate in many different face-to-face communities as well as communities that occasionally meet at clubs and festivals but primarily exist as imagined communities united through shared consumption of recordings and literature. Often, people listen to jazz more casually without establishing any kind of communal relationship at all. Though the music in each of these instances may sound similar, its meanings are not. At each

level of musical or social organization the music is put to very different uses—from affirming local neighborhood and professional identities, to selling food and drinks and communicating the class status of stores and restaurants, to creating a kind of brand identity for an entire city.

Musical communities are not discreet. Musicians move among various local communities. They also buy recordings and read national jazz magazines; some perform at clubs and festivals around the world, while others attend those performances as fans. Most musicians participate in their local communities and in the practices of jazz that extend well-beyond their immediate social relations. It would be a mistake to understand local face-to-face communities as the place of real jazz practice, since face-to-face and imaginary communities intersect in many ways. Nevertheless, local practices have unique local significance that may or may not have much to do with more generalized understandings of jazz practice and significance.

In Chicago, as elsewhere, people often find comfort in the idea that their music is part of an ongoing, stable, and somehow complete tradition. It is important to emphasize that the communities I write about are contemporary responses to present social conditions. They are often short-lived and they do not represent the complete musical lives of their members. And while I have discussed a wide variety of Chicago jazz communities, this dissertation is only a partial account of jazz in Chicago. Many important musicians, such as South Side piano virtuoso Willie Pickens, influential guitarist John McLean, and the very popular pianist and singer Judy Roberts, have been left out. The musical landscape, though wrapped in talk of tradition, is constantly changing and adapting, and musical communities constantly dissolve and regroup.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

Their story begins on ground level, with footsteps. They are myriad, but do not compose a series. They cannot be counted because each unit has a qualitative character: a style of tactile apprehension and kinesthetic appropriation. Their swarming mass is an innumerable collection of singularities. Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces.

—Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

The pathways may be trodden deep, but they only continue because thousands of people up and down the country put thousands of hours and an immeasurable quantity of personal commitment into keeping them open.

—Ruth Finnegan, *Hidden Musicians*

Festivals, clubs, concerts, and sessions; recordings, radio programs, and documentaries; memories, and dreams—people practice jazz at many levels of social organization. Jazz practices do not simply reproduce broad social, racial, or national identities. When jazz musicians play together they are performing face-to-face social relations and identities that are constructed intersubjectively. Performing music with others is not a way for individuals to be interpolated into broad social categories, but rather a way in which those categories are made meaningful in terms of local everyday life. Paul Berliner, Paul Austerlitz and others have observed that jazz is an ecumenical

music capable of incorporating an almost infinite array of styles and influences, and that is certainly true. But jazz practice is a way of making that array of influence specific, unique, and significant for particular face-to-face communities of musicians. As with most musics, scholars have attended to the highest accomplishments in jazz, documenting and analyzing landmark performers, recordings, and performances, treating them as artifacts of the imaginary communities of race and nation. But for most jazz musicians jazz isn't a collection of artifacts; it's something they do. They take music lessons, play and listen with their friends, shop for inspiring recordings and method books, and they tap rhythms on their steering wheels, marking time as they wind through heavy traffic on the way to gigs and sessions. Ways of learning, playing, listening, imagining, and even tapping one's foot—these are socially constructed practices that help to configure the experience of mind and body, self and other. Paying gigs and non-paying jam sessions are rituals of individual and communal instantiation, but they are also the everyday practices of work and pleasure, inextricably bound up in ever-changing, face-to-face social relations that are not just the fruit, but also the ground of grander social and aesthetic categories.

Aki Antonia Smith, at the Negro League Café, Scott Earl Holman at Delaney and Murphy, and Al Carter-Bey at Bernice's Twilight Zone brought together musical communities. People in these communities played music bound up with historical and mythical significance that transcended the time and place of performance. But they played this music in the service of neighborhood relations, professional identity, and friendship. They heard transcendent practices and significance through ears attuned to everyday desires and frustrations, amity and conflict. In the communities I have written

about, musicians walk deeply trodden paths, but they walk in rhythm and they play with styles born of concrete social relations, improvising intertwining musical lines, riffing the melodies of their lives over the soundscape of Chicago.

The stories, descriptions, and analyses of jazz practices and people that I present in this dissertation do not account for all that falls under the heading “jazz.” Though this dissertation is ostensibly about jazz, it is more precisely about the nature of musical practice in service of face-to-face communities. Jazz lays no special claim to face-to-face musical practice; all musicians participate in a variety of imaginary and face-to-face communities that are brought to life and mind by music. Also, jazz scholarship is not unique in turning toward musical artifacts and away from human practices. Much of what we know about any music comes from studying scores and recordings removed from the everyday acts of their creation. As a result, the literature about music often tells a story that foregrounds the links between recognized masterpieces and imaginary communities at the expense of neglecting the everyday face-to-face musical and social practices that complicate essentialized categories.

Examining artifacts to learn about practice is like examining a route on a map to learn about walking. Abstractions and artifacts stand still, like “points that draw a totalizing and reversible line on the map” (de Certeau 1984, p. 97). But people do not stand still, and the order of their movements makes a difference; their actions move along unique irreversible trajectories in space and time. We cannot understand people, music, and society based solely on individual accounts of music making, and those accounts alone create a mythic illusion of individual autonomy. But as any student of musicology can affirm, academic understandings of music and music making are not unduly

burdened by concrete accounts of face-to-face musical practices. We ought to be more concerned about so much speculation about music's power that rests on so little ethnographic data. I would not argue, as some do, that musicians' accounts of their own practices have special authority that always trumps scholarly theorizing, but I would argue that by ignoring ethnographic research, it is all too easy for scholars to pass off their own unacknowledged myths, fantasies, and desires as objective data about the musical experiences of others. Just glancing at the popular and scholarly literature on jazz shows that this has been the case. Music always participates in mythologizing processes, and the scholar's job is to understand those processes; a little ethnography and critical self-consciousness can do much to explain these processes while keeping scholars from muddying the waters with their own unacknowledged fantasies. Flesh and blood musicians aren't that hard to find. As Ruth Finnegan discovered twenty years ago, even a mid-sized English town like Milton-Keynes, hides innumerable communities of people creating meaning through musical practices (Finnegan [1989] 2007).

Just as the world of music exceeds the grasp of any attempt to account for it, the communities I write about exceed the stories I tell about them. I have used stories to evoke their particularity and to avoid containing those communities in apparently objective analysis. But stories are not just accounts; they are also social practices. Telling stories assumes a community of listeners that also tell stories. One tale leads to the next as each person weighs in, reframing a story from his or her perspective or extending its relevance to tales of other people and places. "To reconstitute events in a story," Michael Jackson writes, "is no longer to live those events in passivity, but to actively rework them, both in dialogue with others and within one's own imagination" (Jackson 2002, p.

15). This dissertation is part of a dialogue I had with musicians in Chicago. So far, it has lived mainly in my imagination. Soon it will become a part of scholarly dialogue. But this dissertation also includes the possibility of continued dialogue with people in the field, which is an equal if not greater responsibility of ethnographic storytelling. Musicians I write about are committed storytellers, recounting their exploits over beers at sessions—and also in pictures and writing. They are often deeply concerned with stories of their own practices as well as the practices of others in Chicago. Aki Antonia Smith documented the Negro League Café session in words and photographs. Loren Binford, who played trombone at Delaney and Murphy and The Chambers collects and hopes to publish stories of friends and colleagues with whom he had worked in Chicago's jingle recording industry. Eugene Rainey circulated photos and recounted the childhood exploits of the musicians at The Tropical Den. People I write about will also read what I have written. I imagine they will have something more to say. Aki has already asked to see this document, and she will no doubt respond with her own versions of events, thickening the descriptions, democratizing the ethnographic process, and challenging my authority to fully capture the communities I describe. In the past, writing ethnographies about people in distant places made ongoing dialogue difficult, even if ethnographers had cared to face the critique of those about whom they wrote. Contemporary urban ethnography does not face the same obstacles. The imperative for dialogue and the resistance to totalizing analysis need not be only a theoretical ideal. The field is just an email away.

We ought to consider face-to-face social practices and identities as not only dependent upon national identities and global forces, but as a way of reappropriating

those identities and forces to address local needs and desires. We might even consider local identities as a source of imaginary communities and more abstract social and aesthetic values. Such considerations question assumptions about identities and call for new kinds of research. We can no longer simply say why Suya sing, or proclaim what it means to be African American. Categories like “Suya” or “African American” or “jazz musician” invite further investigation. They are collections of questions about human social practice and identity and not a priori structures. What concrete purposes are served when particular individuals or face-to-face communities consider themselves in terms of broad categories, imaginary communities, and metonymical alliances? The aphorism, “A rose is a rose is a rose,” seems to poetically affirm the identity of things, but if we attend to specific situations it is clear that a rose growing wild in an abandoned yard is quite different from a rose elegantly displayed in a crystal vase (Stein 1922).⁹¹ Those roses do very different kinds of work. Attending to specific social and historical situations helps us avoid essentialist myths that so often work their way into music scholarship. A musician is not a musician is not a musician.

Attending to local musical practices also helps turn scholarly attention away from concern for those musical works and performers deemed the best and toward music’s concrete social functions that do not necessarily depend on abstract valuation of musical objects. Even when different communities regard the same work as a masterpiece, the effect of the work may differ. For instance, at The Chambers, playing Horace Silver’s difficult and highly regarded tune “Nica’s Dream” allowed everyone to participate,

⁹¹ This line “A rose is a rose is a rose” first appeared as “Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose” in Gertrude Stein’s 1913 poem *Sacred Emily*. Although taken as an affirmation of identity, it is not clear that Stein intended that meaning and she often noted the changing meanings of words over time.

because everybody knew all the parts from the original recording, but playing that tune at The Negro League Café was an opportunity for most of the participants to have just a small taste of the musical virtuosity they dreamed of acquiring. As my fieldwork shows, members of particular musical communities define their own relationships with musicians they recognize as great. They might define great musicians as intimidating reminders of their own musical limitations, but they might also define these musicians as inspirations, teachers, neighbors, and friends. The nature of greatness is constructed through community practices and does not simply lie at the heart of a musical or artistic object itself.

In fact, music need not be great in order to do the kinds of social work that are a central aspect of musical practice. Musicians move and breathe together; they develop social bonds and aesthetic values even in what seem to be the worst performances of the most banal songs. They need not change musical history to change their own. Considering only music deemed great or important says little about its social functions and more than likely says a lot about the class position, values, and prejudices of academic writers. Attending to star performers and recordings may also attest to the dominance of certain modes of producing and commodifying music. Ours is a musical world increasingly dependent upon the rationalized mechanical reproduction and enhancement of a handful of songs sung by a handful of stars. Musical practices that resist easy commodification do not enhance anybody's market share or bottom line. Attending to local face-to-face musical practices helps bring other voices and values into academic understandings of music and thus helps to sustain cultural practices marginalized and suppressed in a capitalist economy.

Finally, taking local musical practices seriously as ways of intersubjectively constituting selves and communities offers a unique perspective on the construction of emotions. Musical practices provide people with culturally and communally specific ways of emotionally being themselves. What feels like pleasurable, integrated wholeness in one situation feels like the disintegration of self in another. Square dancers, singers of Latin chant, and punk musicians feel themselves through musical practice in very different ways. When I experience passion or anger, they seem real, but they often call forth sonic memories that would be unimaginable in other times or places. Attending closely to musical practices is a way of understanding how emotions that feel essential and universal are produced through very specific social practices. They are neither universal nor even general categories of feeling dictated by dominant structures. Attention to face-to-face musical practices calls into question general assumptions of musical value, identity, and the emotional experience of the self. It also reveals that selves are not single unitary things. The self is constituted intersubjectively through community practice, and most people participate in a variety of communities. The self is more of a constellation than an essential core. Self-expression is not the revelation of authenticity, but a particular kind of performance in a particular community. Performances shape community and communities shape performance practices.

Jazz seems to have a life of its own. It is “America’s music,” “black music,” and “the infinite art of improvisation.” But the great music and categories of jazz live in the everyday practices of face-to-face musical communities like those at The Chambers, The Negro League Café, and The Tropical Den. Academic disciplines mobilize social categories in different ways to different ends, often recognizing and valorizing dominated

communities. However, for ethnomusicologists, binary categories ought to be questioned and not accepted as given, categories like jazz musician and non-jazz musician; amateur and professional; men and women; and African American and white American ought to be questioned and not accepted as given. We serve the people about whom we write by understanding how and why they construct their identities through their everyday practices. In his 1958 essay “Golden Age: Times Past,” Ralph Ellison wrote that the jam session is “the jazzman’s true academy” (Ellison 2001, p. 60). If my fieldwork shows anything, it shows that there is no such thing as *the* jam session or *the* jazzman. People learn and play jazz in many ways to many different ends, none truer than the others. Each way is true to the particular time and place of performance, and for those people brought together in community as they walk in rhythm along intersecting musical pathways, making the song and the city their own.

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