Despite the popular mythology surrounding the jazz club culture of New York in the 1950s and 1960s, surprisingly little research has investigated the ways in which that city’s jazz musicians navigated an ever fluctuating network of gigs and sessions in an attempt to earn a living. Some information related to wages, job security, and the various interlocking and at times co-dependent scenes that formed the basis for jazz activity in New York can be gleaned from reading interviews, biographies, liner notes, and *Metronome* and *Downbeat* magazines, but there has been no study that speaks to these issues explicitly. This chapter therefore offers an important preliminary step toward addressing the day-to-day economic realities of jazz musicians in New York during the mid-twentieth century. The lives of working jazz musicians present a picture of an original gig economy—a professional life predicated upon temporary, often low-paying engagements that afforded little or no job security, limited access to unemployment and health insurance, and rarely linked together into seamless stretches of employment, particularly for that majority of players who worked outside the mainstream jazz canon.

Given the lack of preexistent research I therefore turned to musicians who had been active on the New York scene and simply asked the awkward question, “so, how much did you get paid?” In doing so, a fascinating picture of subsistence, ambition, mobility, and scenic interdependence began to emerge. Vibraphonist Warren Chiasson, for example, played for an extended period with George Shearing yet only found economic stability in the original Broadway run of *Hair*, while saxophonist Don Palmer worked frequently with the Latin bands of Tito Puente and Machito and led a varied career as substitute player to support his jazz interests. Saxophonist Lee Konitz and bassist Peter Ind participated in the gig economy from positions that were slightly more rarefied, given their status within the jazz community, yet which were also simultaneously precarious in ways that many may find surprising. Even though the 1950s and 1960s were decades of rich and significant jazz activity, a paid gig in an established club would come around infrequently (perhaps more often for those in the rhythm section), and therefore for all but a select few, a living had to be cobbled together from one-nighters and other forms of musical employment that may have been related to, though perhaps not actually, jazz. With performance opportunities further limited by New York’s convoluted set of “cabaret laws” (1926–1990), “jazz musicians experienced their lives as scuffling for a living” (Chevigny 1991, 5).

Scenes are areas of social and cultural space in which individuals circulate, maneuvering consciously and unconsciously away from or toward a central object or activity—here jazz. Scenes often share their liminal spaces—their boundary areas—with other scenes, and what is commonly
referred to as the New York jazz scene of the 1960s is perhaps best thought of as a single, clearly bounded entity, but rather as a closely related set of micro-scenes which drew upon one another. While jazz artists associated with recording contracts might have occupied the most obvious of these jazz scenes, only those with significant commercial cachet might have occupied this one scenic sphere exclusively, and even then not at all times during their career. Rather, most musicians occupied multiple scenes at once, traversing various professional and interpersonal networks as they traded their various skills and associations for paying work that kept them, somehow, in jazz. The musicians I spoke to moved with regularity between the worlds of the unpaid jazz rehearsal band; the advertising studio; the Broadway pits; jazz clubs; network television orchestras; dance bands; and myriad social engagements:

In many cases I would be subbing in some band and not know that the guy sitting behind me on trombone was Kai Winding or somebody I would have known. Things like that happened quite often on those sorts of gigs. There weren’t enough jazz gigs for anyone, really, other than like Stan Getz, and those guys . . . [so other well-known but not as commercially successful players] did whatever they had to do to make a living. And you’d find some really surprising guys on [club dates]. Those guys did all kinds of things. Some of them probably did rock and roll records because they paid well . . . better than any jazz gig.

(Don Palmer, personal communication, January 10, 2017a)

This network of scenes was related to, yet also separate from, the mainstream public-facing jazz scene, which had at its heart well-known clubs such as Birdland (until 1965), the Village Vanguard (ongoing), the Five Spot (until 1967), and the Half Note (on Hudson until 1972, then 54th until 1974). By trading upon musical skills not necessarily specific to jazz, and through the development and maintenance of large social networks, musicians could move frequently and fluidly from one scene to another (e.g., Palmer); exist primarily in one scene and then another (e.g., Chiasson); or occupy one scene for the most part while moonlighting largely anonymously in one or more of the others (e.g., Konitz).

Canadian saxophonist Don Palmer moved to New York in 1959 to study with alto saxophonist Lee Konitz and pianist Lennie Tristano. Fresh from four years in the Royal Canadian Artillery band where he played clarinet and flute (but not saxophone), Palmer ended up capitalizing on his sight-reading skills as a means to paid musical work to augment his jazz playing. Importantly, these ad hoc jobs at times proved direct conduits to meaningful personal and performance opportunities in jazz. The cost of living in New York during the 1960s was still reasonably low, and Palmer was able to rent an apartment on 53rd Street and 8th Avenue in the heart of Manhattan’s theater, concert, and studio districts, despite a lack of predictable income. In conjunction with his ability to double across the woodwinds and to sight-read reliably, this location was an essential aspect of his scenic mobility. Palmer quickly developed a professional profile as a “sub”: a substitute player called in to attend rehearsals, performances, recording sessions, or portions of engagements that the regularly employed player could not attend. Last minute and short-term, these jobs nonetheless provided financial solvency (if not stability) and a network of social connections that eventually afforded him an enviable, almost accidental access to high-profile engagements at the Village Vanguard and on record with producer Teo Macero.

A lot of it [working as a substitute player] happened because I was living on 53rd street, and I could get there [to a theatre or studio] very quickly, and the word got out . . . that opened up a lot of doors that wouldn’t have if I’d maybe lived in Brooklyn. Sometimes I’d wake up and not have a gig for the rest of my life, and then I’d get a call and
an hour later I’d be sitting in a studio somewhere. All the Broadway show work I got started with a guy calling me up and asking if I could get there in 10 minutes and I said yeah. I didn’t think it was a big deal. And then I started getting these other calls. And sometimes it was just to finish or begin a gig, and the guy would show up in the middle and I’d just go home. And he’d pay me, and usually for the whole night, because I’d just saved his ass.

(Don Palmer, personal communication, January 10th 2017a)

As is often the case in any sort of scenic environment, it is as often who you know as much as what you know that can open a door to opportunity. Palmer found this often to be the case as his activity as a substitute player across a variety of interlinked scenes (jazz, Broadway, studio, session, etc.) significantly increased his professional and social exposure, oftentimes well beyond the scope of his current status in other regards (age, experience, reputation). Rock and roll shows, for example, would often tour into New York, bringing only minimal instrumentation and hiring out for extra parts, including horn sections. After having been called on short notice to play in such a manner for the Four Tops at Carnegie Hall, Palmer was frequently hired to play behind them on their New York engagements. On one such occasion, waiting to sound check with a variety of bands slated to perform a revue-style rock show at Madison Square Garden:

there must have been 15 of us or something, and there was this one guy pacing around, looking really nervous, and so being the nice Nova Scotian I am, I went over and said “is everything alright man?” and he says “yeah, but I have do this sound check and my group is not going to go on for at least an hour and I [also] have a record date in about 20 minutes” and I look down and he’s carrying an alto and I say “hey, I’ll do your sound check for you, I’ve got to be here anyway,” and he says “you’d do that for me?” and I say “sure, it’s no big deal” and he says “what’s your name?” and tell him and he’s gone. Like running out the door before I’d even finished my last name. That was Friday. Saturday the phone rings and the guy says “this is Jerry Dodgion” and I knew who that was, though I wouldn’t have recognized him, and he says “what are you doing Saturday night?” and [I] knew he was the lead alto on Thad’s band . . . and I say “nothing” and he says “do you want to come play with the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis band?” And it was sort of like [someone asking] how’d you like to pitch for the New York Yankees? And when I got there the guy [that I’d done the sound check for] was sitting there in the lead alto chair. The guy that I had helped out. And I guess I did well enough that he called me. . . . I don’t know how many times [but quite frequently]. I was subbing always on second alto. And if it was Jerry who wasn’t there the regular second alto player would play lead.

(Don Palmer, personal communication, January 10, 2017a)

The Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra was established as a rehearsal band in 1964 when, having written charts for the Count Basie band that Basie had then declined to play, Jones suggested to drummer Mel Lewis that they establish a rehearsal band that could make use of the arrangements and for which they could write on a regular basis. A rehearsal band was (and still is) in large part an exercise in musical and professional goodwill in which players commit to performing music, often newly written and untried, generally without payment. Arrangers and composers used rehearsal bands as an opportunity to hear their work, and the players generally welcomed an opportunity to play good charts (often by accomplished composers/arrangers) in what was usually very fine, peer-selected musical company. In New York rehearsal bands often met in the afternoon at any
one of the city’s many rehearsal spaces, or on Monday nights, the usual off-night for Broadway houses and clubs.

There were all kinds of guys who would make rehearsal bands, because it was either a favour to the writer . . . most of the rehearsal bands were organized by guys who were writers, or arrangers at least. Because that way you got to hear your music, and if there were some mistakes certainly the guy playing it will tell you, because it was always very friendly, those things, or you’d hear the stuff and think of different things to do and you’d find yourself playing music by well-known arrangers or composers.

*(Don Palmer, personal communication, January 10, 2017a)*

Despite being jazz players of some significance, both Jones and Lewis were also employed by the New York studios: Jones by CBC and Lewis by ABC. Not coincidentally, the original roster of players for their orchestra drew heavily on personal and professional connections in the studio scene: trumpeters Jack Rains, Cliff Heather (both with CBS), and Snooky Young (formerly of the Count Basie Orchestra and the trumpet section leader for NBC’s *Tonight Show* band); pianist Hank Jones (on-staff at CBS); saxophonists Jerry Dodgion and Eddie Daniels; bassist Richard Daniels, who worked the studios, jazz gigs, and classical engagements; and others who were, as Mel Lewis described, “all nice cats and experienced jazz musicians, as well as studio players who could read music with lightning speed” (Grouse 1998/1999, 586–587).

Though originally formed as a rehearsal band, the orchestra came together so well that with the assistance of critic Dan Morgenstern and disk jockey Alan Grant, it debuted at the Village Vanguard on February 7, 1966. Vanguard owner Max Gordon agreed to pay $18 per player, and to see how long the experiment continued to draw an audience (Grouse 1998/1999, 588). As the popularity of the band outstripped the expectations of all involved, opportunities for substitute players emerged; jazz gigs such as the Vanguard Orchestra were labors of love, but the studio musicians who made up the orchestra’s core were often professionally committed elsewhere. Palmer continued to sub in for Jerry Dodgion until 1974, and his booking diaries confirm that a Monday night at the Village Vanguard paid as little as $20 in May of 1974, and a two-night engagement with the Orchestra in Toronto, Canada, paid $100 in July of the same year (Don Palmer, professional engagement diary, 1974).

While substitute roles in jazz gigs often presented artistically satisfying work but didn’t pay particularly well, the New York studio scene presented an almost inverse relationship to finance and art. Vibraphonist Warren Chiasson considered infrequent work in the Manhattan studio scene as an important aspect of his ability to survive as a working jazz musician. Recording an advertising jingle for one of the New York firms would pay the relatively princely sum of $37 for a one hour and twenty minute call, more if the job required assorted percussion, for which Chiasson would be paid above the usual union scale rate, or if the session ran over the allotted time. Advertising work was regulated by the American Federation of Musicians (AFM) in a way that most jazz gigs were not and offered the added benefit of contracts that at times paid residual fees, and from which deductions were taken toward government unemployment insurance.

*[One of the things] that kept me going was doing jingles . . . . A jingle for 1 hour 20 mins would pay $37 dollars and you would get residuals from time to time, if it ran. So this was like, a chance for you to survive. I’ve got one here [in his engagement diary] on Thursday Feb 28th 1963, for an advertising agency, and that paid $94.50. So that must have run overtime. They tried to keep everything under an hour, or under the hour and 20 minute deal, but sometimes they’d have a big orchestra [and things would take longer].
And I would usually play a lot of percussion. Marimba, xylophone . . . in addition to my [vibraphone] work. I would get paid for a double if I played assorted percussion.

Unemployment Insurance . . . that was also an option. And that would pay you maybe $37.50 to keep you going. Places that you worked that were covered . . . this wouldn’t include cash gigs, but I was doing jingles, so they took tax out for that, and that’s how I got my unemployment.

(Warren Chiasson, personal communication, December 15, 2016)

At times, a reputation for being a steady and reliable substitute could lead to remarkable playing opportunities outside and beyond a player’s usual scope of social and professional influence. Saxophonist Don Palmer, for example, after being sent in as a rehearsal substitute for altoist Lee Konitz, ended up being asked to perform with the ensemble at Newport, and subsequently to record with them. The ensemble in question was led by legendary producer Teo Macero and featured the likes of Konitz, Phil Woods, Al Cohn, George Young, Stan Getz (live), Pepper Adams (recording), Gerry Mulligan (live), Michael Moore, and Jimmy Madison.

Lee had sent me in as a sub for one of the rehearsals, and . . . I couldn’t have sounded so good [in such company] but Teo asked me to join the group. That freaked me out, because it made no sense. Everyone there was a legend.

(Don Palmer, personal communication, January 10, 2017a)

In the same way that his introduction to the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis orchestra had come as something akin to the repayment of a professional debt by Jerry Dodgion, Palmer’s opportunity with Teo Macero came about not simply because of his student/teacher relationship with Konitz, but because Palmer, when regularly employed by the Latin dance bands of Machito (c.1966–1968) and Tito Puente (1969–1972), had occasionally been able to offer similar substitution jobs to Konitz. While Konitz was a welcome and celebrated addition to these jazz-oriented bands, there were times when Palmer suggested Konitz for casual work on club dates and with more sedate dance bands and was turned down because the bandleaders were afraid that Konitz would present “too much jazz” for the situation. At times these employers had no idea what Konitz looked like and he would occasionally take cash jobs using the moniker “Zeke Tolin.” In the 1960s Konitz took out classified advertisements in Downbeat offering his services as a teacher to “singers and players at any stage,” and Palmer recalls being asked to pay for several lessons in advance when he began studying with Konitz in 1959.

Rather than having to integrate himself slowly into the complex and competitive New York jazz scene, Warren Chiasson auditioned directly into the George Shearing band in 1959, debuted with him at Newport on July 2, 1959, and remained with the ensemble until the end of 1961. The band was paid well by contemporary standards, with Chiasson recalling that the $200 per week he was offered at the start seemed like a very big figure at the time. On top of traveling expenses and his $200 a week salary,$ Chiasson discovered that the band was often paid extra for particularly lucrative appearances:

I went to this little diner, and of course I was expecting my $200 for the week or something like that, and then I opened up the pay [envelope] and all these $50 bills and $20 bills started coming out . . . and before I knew it I had over $500 dollars, and [up to that point] I was wondering if I should buy a chicken sandwich or go for the steak . . . and then pulling out all this money, you know I couldn’t believe it. We’d been paid [extra by Shearing] for the concerts. So you know, that was a good week.

(Warren Chiasson, personal communication, December 15, 2016)
In order to keep working, however, the Shearing group spent the majority of its time on the road with few New York residencies. With one-nighters and overseas tours interspersed as necessary or available, the band took advantage of the extended engagements, which were still the norm for nightclub culture, spending as much as a month in larger cities like Chicago, Los Angeles, or San Francisco.

In those days, they were location gigs. If you played the Sunset Strip in California, in LA, you got an apartment for the whole month. And if you did that in San Francisco you got an apartment for the whole month, and you were [just] there. Location. We usually did those [west coast] things in the winter time. If we were in Chicago we played the London House, and we would be there for a month. . . . It was different. It was a different scene. 
(Warren Chiasson, personal communication, December 15, 2016)

In 1962, however, Chiasson left Shearing and began a freelance career in New York, balancing jazz playing with a gigging life needfully oriented toward paying the bills and building a sustainable life as a working musician.

All of the clubs paid about the same. You didn't make too much money. You basically did it because it was a real chance [to play jazz]. A lot of great musicians were in the same boat as you were. They were glad to get the gig.
(Warren Chiasson, personal communication, December 15, 2016)

Chiasson's booking diaries from the 1960s bear out the notion that jazz gigs for the most part paid meager wages. An engagement at the Five Spot in February 1963 paid him $100 for the week, Birdland in 1965 in a band that included Art Davis and Frank Strozier paid $22 for a single evening, a “weird little disco gig” with Jim Hall and Jimmy Rainey paid $175 for the week, and the Five Spot again in 1965 netted $15, and this with Billy Higgins in the band. 11

In addition to low-paying jazz work and the studio income that augmented it, Chiasson received royalties on a tune he had written for Shearing—“My Own”—that paid several hundred dollars a year for a time, spent intermittent bouts on unemployment insurance, and kept club dates that paid in the neighborhood of $25 a night. Being able to play a wide range of mixed percussion and being accustomed to classical music performance from his time in the Royal Canadian Artillery Band, Chiasson also found himself involved in several “Third Stream” projects in the early 1960s.

In Autumn of 1962 I started doing some modern classical concerts along with Teddy Charles, because he was into avant-garde classical music . . . we would do these reading sessions, going over this classical repertoire, rehearsal stuff. And eventually I would do a concert with Gunther Schuller about modern classical things. . . . I did a concert called Perspectives of New Music that was done at Carnegie Recital Hall (14th March, & 18th April 1963), and we did compositions by Gunther, Eric Dolphy was on flute and bass clarinet. I think that gig paid maybe $150 or $200 if that. Maybe $100.
(Warren Chiasson, personal communication, December 15, 2016) 12

In 1968, however, Chiasson was hired to play the original Broadway run of the musical Hair, a gig he expected to last only a few months but that ended up providing him with four-and-a-half years of steady employment and a large proportion of the pension upon which he now depends.

I got a pension from [Hair]. After the first year I hated doing it. [I]t interfered a lot [with playing jazz]. But I made good money. It was a little Broadway house on 47th called the
Sitting In and Subbing Out

Biltmore . . . it was a small house and they couldn’t have a big orchestra, [so] they had to give you extra money for that [for doubling]. We got paid extra for being on the stage and not in the orchestral pit. They tried to put a scrim up so that we couldn’t be seen but to their credit the actors didn’t want that . . . they wanted the full presence of the musicians, so we got paid extra for that. And so my salary was around $800 a week. And on top of that I would get recording dates [in the daytime]. So I did OK. I was kind of living middle class for a while.

(Warren Chiasson, personal communication, December 15, 2016)

While it’s perhaps unsurprising that relatively obscure players such as Don Palmer and Warren Chiasson worked notable jazz clubs for fairly non-descriptive wages, it is worth emphasizing that many well-known jazz artists of the period worked for similarly modest fees. Lee Konitz recalls that working a week at a club like the Vanguard, Half Note, or Five Spot with a band of experienced and well-regarded players might pay him $250 a week,13 and Joseph Termini, co-owner of the Five Spot, recalled that the club paid $76 per week for a sideman and $90 per week for a leader; in other words, $12–$15 per night over a six-night week for performances which ran approximately 9pm–2:30am.14 The Thelonious Monk Quartet earned a combined $800 per week ($200 per musician, $30 per night), something of an extravagance and a considerable financial risk for the club (Chevigny 1991, 50). While these wages might initially appear to be sufficient given the cost of living at the time, one must bear in mind that these sorts of jobs were temporary and didn’t represent anything approaching a steady or predictable monthly income, even for well-known players.

Cost of living was still low in the 1960s and was perhaps the main thing that allowed both New York-based jazz musicians to survive and jazz clubs to remain in business: a symbiotic relationship of low wages, low cover charges, and cheap rent. Warren Chiasson recalls that his rent in 1962 was $40 a month for the lower-east side walk-up he shared for a time with saxophonist Don Palmer, at a time when both the New York Times and a subway ride cost five cents.15 Bassist Peter Ind, perhaps best-known for his association with pianist/educator Lennie Tristano, agrees that while wages for jazz work were perilously low, the overall economic picture in New York during the 1950s and 1960s enabled most jazz players to cobble together some sort of living and, in conjunction with the artistic outlet the music afforded them, to feel reasonably accomplished.

Well it was still basic survival [wages]. You know I couldn’t have really raised a family on that you know. But. . . . I was unattached, and [therefore] it was enough that I felt relatively affluent. And of course what I was thrilled about was coming to New York and the acceptance I received [from other musicians]. Rent was manageable. In 1960 when I got this loft downtown on 2nd Street at Avenue B, I moaned to my landlord [about the rent], and it was something like $100 a month. I never really worried about it too much [about money]. I think the main thing. . . . I didn’t feel extreme financial pressure in those days. Yeah, we’d all moan [about the state of things] but it wasn’t a question of can we pay the bills. [But] it would have been hard to have had a family. And I think a lot of the [other] musicians as they grew older and had families they realized how tough it was.

(Peter Ind, personal communication, January 4, 2017)

One of the factors that both depressed wages for jazz musicians and at the same time enabled the music to acquire a popular enough appeal to remain commercially relevant was the low cost associated with attending a jazz club to listen. Even the city’s most famous clubs—the Village Vanguard, Half Note, Five Spot, and Birdland—charged either a minimal cover charge or relied upon customers ordering a “minimum” charge in food or beverages. The clubs were all relatively
small spaces, with estimates putting the Half Note and Five Spot at a capacity of about 50–70, and the basement location of Birdland on 52nd as being perhaps a bit larger.

The Five Spot was small place. These were all small places. They were all about the size of the Vanguard, but a different shape. The only really big one of the full jazz clubs, was Birdland. It was quite big. And I sat [at Birdland] in the . . . what they called the peanut gallery or whatever name they had for it. And that was the $1.50 seats. I think if you took a table it was different, in a place like that. And the tables were closer to the bandstand, but it was a wonderful sound. I heard every note. Every nuance. I heard John Coltrane with Miles Davis and Philly Jo Jones were $1.50 at Birdland. And the thing I learned how to do very quickly was just sip on the beer, because they wouldn’t throw you out if you had one in front of you. So I’d sip, and listen to 5 tunes, and sip. I don’t remember much paying a cover charge. Like I said, I got Davis and Coltrane for two beers, and if you kept a beer in front of you they’d leave you alone.

(Don Palmer, personal communication, January 10, 2017a)

Harry Sewing, who began going to New York City jazz clubs in 1960 and attended the Half Note numerous times between 1960 and 1965 to hear the various groups fronted by Lennie Tristano, recalls that the music charge might have been $2.50 at the Half Note, and that the food was inexpensive, with a meatball sandwich adding another $1.50 to the bill. At the time, Sewing was working for a charter bus company in New Jersey and recalls making about $3–4 per hour, or about $160 per week before taxes.

In addition to work in clubs and other forms of live performance and studio work, there was at times also work on jazz recordings. It is here that one hopes that future research might make concerted use of whatever archival materials exist for the major jazz labels (Blue Note, Verve, Impulse, Prestige, Black Lion, Pacific, etc.), but anecdotal evidence again suggests that for all but the most commercially successful jazz artists, whatever recording sessions might have meant in terms of prestige or artistic achievement, they often meant very little in economic terms. Peter Ind recalls that when working with Roy Haynes to record “Pastime” and “Ju-Ju” for Lennie Tristano in 1951, he was paid a lump sum of $50 for the session with no royalties, and that such fees were quite standard for short recording dates upon which you were not the leader. If one worked a longer session and was included on an album length release, that lump sum might have been $100 or $150, recalled Ind, but again mostly likely without any provision for the later payment of royalties.

Maybe $100, $150 that was about it. There were [no residuals if you weren’t the leader] and if you stood out for it [more money] there was a kind of unacknowledged black list, so you daren’t ask for more. Yeah, the record company owners and producers [didn’t like to pay much].

(Peter Ind, personal communication, January 4, 2017)

Lee Konitz concurs with this recollection, and suggests that

the money was never enough with the gigs or the recordings. Once in a while they’d slip through an extra couple of bucks and we were very pleased at that, but overall they would get away with paying scale, you know [for the recordings]. [And] I receive cheques sometimes from companies, for a couple of hundred dollars or so, and they don’t specify what they’re for, so I deduce they’re royalties for a recording but I don’t know which ones.

(Lee Konitz, personal communication, January 8, 2017)
For all but the most famous and commercially successful jazz musicians, the gig economy of the New York scene presented a precarious and fractured network of musical employment. Often predicated upon the cultivation of social networks and through participation in unpaid jazz work such as rehearsal bands, the gigs that enabled most musicians to stay “in jazz” were often only tangentially related to jazz performance practice. Though jazz was the main artistic focus for musicians such as Warren Chiasson and Don Palmer, it was not jazz but rather work in the pit orchestras and studios, country clubs and wedding receptions, and one-nighters in myriad unnamed bars and restaurants that provided the economic wherewithal upon which to base a musical life. Even for artists as well established and well respected as Lee Konitz, the “jazz life” required a constant hustle—a mix of recording dates, live performances, teaching, and cash gigs in an unlikely array of dance bands, orchestras, and studios. While the cost of living in New York in the 1960s largely enabled this gig economy to support functional lives for many jazz musicians, it was, as Peter Ind and Konitz point out, a difficult prospect for anyone with a family.

The increasing institutionalization of jazz has in some ways prompted a developing sense of nostalgia for what many regard to be a golden age for jazz in New York City and beyond: an era when jazz was simultaneously respected as an art and well-regarded as an element of popular culture. Oftentimes, the linked assumption is that jazz was, at least more often than not, better paid “back in the day” than is commonplace now. However, as Iain Anderson points out (Anderson 2002), it was in some ways the very institutionalization of jazz that enabled musicians (many of them black practitioners of less mainstream forms of jazz) to enjoy stable periods of work that were well compensated and directly linked to their performance practices. Given these seemingly contradictory stories—that the current state of economic affairs for working jazz musicians is either worse or perhaps better than it was—we should continue to explore ways toward a more nuanced, locally focused, and realistic approach to the ways in which musicians have had to cope with the economic realities of pursuing lives in jazz.

Notes

1. In New York musician parlance, a country club, wedding, or bar mitzvah engagement was called a “club date” though this did not refer to an engagement or gig playing jazz, or indeed even one that took place in a club venue.
2. Palmer recalls his rent at 53rd and 8th Ave being about $150 per month, and that his next apartment on 85th and Columbus was a bit less than $200 per month in the mid-1960s.
3. The rehearsal band of Thad Jones and Mel Lewis had a Monday night residency at the Village Vanguard since 1966, and continues on today in the same manner as the Village Vanguard Orchestra.
4. And declined to pay for. Thad Jones had to bring AFM proceedings in order to receive payment for the work he’d done writing ten arrangements (Grouse 1998/1999, 585).
5. Chiasson’s engagement diaries from the mid-1960s list several periods where unemployment insurance is listed as a source of income.
6. Palmer has possession of a bootleg live recording of the Machito orchestra recorded in New York in the early 1960s where one can clearly hear Konitz’s tenor solo.
7. Machito would make a point to include Konitz’s name in the stage announcements.
8. Konitz’s decision to leave Lennie Tristano to tour with Stan Kenton in 1952 was in large part motivated by the prospect of a steady $175 a week salary, and Konitz likewise recalls Norman Granz with some fondness for having provided an advance on his Verve recording contract in acknowledgment of his financial situation (Hamilton 2007, 80, 146). Konitz’s first marriage ended during the early 1960s, but the union had produced five children.
9. Downbeat October 8, 1964, pg. 45 and March 9, 1967, pg. 44.
10. Chiasson recalls that after taxes his pay amounted to $175–180 per week, but that those deductions enabled him to apply for unemployment insurance and counted toward his pension.
12. Unbeknownst to the musicians, this concert was recorded and released much later by Schuller under Eric Dolphy’s name (*Vintage Dolphy*, GM Recordings—GM3005D, 1986 [LP]). Chiasson lodged a complaint with the AFM in order to receive due payment for the release (along with other players on the date).


15. When Chiasson moved into his apartment at 569 3rd Ave (a second-floor walk-up with a roof) in 1964 he paid $57.50 per month, an amount that was raised shortly thereafter to $60, at which it stayed for about a decade. In 2014, due to rent control, he was paying just $730 per month for a home in the heart of Manhattan.

References


Ind, P. 2017. Personal communication, 4 January.


———. 2017. Personal communication, 8 January.


———. 2017b. Personal communication, 10 January.