There was a time, not too long ago, when Wynton Marsalis was the modern-day King of Jazz. Displaying a rare combination of extraordinary musical skills, intelligence, wit, confidence, charm, and good looks, he entertained, impressed, and inspired audiences through both his brilliant performances and his eloquent advocacy for what eventually became known as neoclassical or neotraditional jazz. Marsalis’s hold during this time—roughly the middle 1980s through the first decade of the new millennium—was such that he shaped everything from how and what jazz musicians should play to what they should say and wear on stage. Given his widespread exposure, the specificity of his narrative, and the fervor with which he expressed his vision of jazz, it should come as no surprise that some musicians, journalists, and scholars began to bristle at what they perceived to be Marsalis’s excessive influence, even as others continued to celebrate his accomplishments and champion his cause.

Whatever one feels about Wynton Marsalis’s efforts, I think we can all agree that his days of dictating which sounds, looks, names, and places get recognized and valued as authentic jazz are over. Truth be told, they have been for a while now. As early as 2003, author David Hajdu, in an article for The Atlantic called “Wynton’s Blues,” asked “What happened to Wynton Marsalis? That may be like asking What happened to jazz?” (Hajdu 2003). Hajdu’s piece points to both Marsalis’s near monopoly on the genre at the time and a hunch that the trumpeter’s authority might be waning. In hindsight, we can see that Hajdu’s instincts were correct. Yes, Marsalis still possesses some of the most formidable chops ever to touch a trumpet, and he maintains an extraordinarily well-paying gig as Managing and Artistic Director of Jazz at Lincoln Center. Despite these ongoing successes, however, it is clear that the world’s jazz participants now feel less awed, guided, emboldened—or threatened or infuriated—by Wynton Marsalis than they were those few years ago. Most jazz people today simply ignore the neotraditional party line (some younger musicians may not know it ever existed), and jazz’s current leading lights embrace a broader array of musical practices and aesthetics than ever before. So now that Wynton Marsalis’s long—and, to some, despotic—reign has drawn to a close, we are all free once again to perform, compose, present, enjoy, narrate, celebrate, denigrate, and teach any and all jazz styles without looking over our shoulder to see if his neotraditionalist jazz police are tracking us down. It’s a liberating feeling.

I wonder, though, if we aren’t going to miss Wynton before too long. Perhaps we are missing him already. For whether or not one agrees with how the neotraditionalists created or depicted jazz in their heyday, one cannot deny that they configured a remarkably coherent and consistent vision of the music, or that their vision found an extraordinarily large and receptive audience.
Equally true, though perhaps less often talked about, the specificity and success of the neotraditional message also provided many of us scholars and teachers with a handy “hegemonic discourse” against which we could fight or which we could subvert by offering our own, alternative visions of this music. So, with Marsalis and the people and institutions with which he is most closely associated—Lincoln Center, the writers Albert Murray and Stanley Crouch, the Ken Burns documentary—now moved to the margins of jazz relevance, we might have to rethink and adjust how we conduct our business of writing about and teaching this music going forward. It seems an appropriate time, then, to explore which aspects of the neotradionalists’ formerly dominant jazz narrative are likely to persist—maybe even should persist—and which of these will change, recede, or vanish as we head further into what we might now call the postneotraditional era.

To get us started, it will help to name some of the norms that Marsalis and like-minded figures upheld as marking jazz’s identity, value, and meaning. Below I outline six categories through which we can understand what the musicologist Robert Walser once described as Marsalis’s “neo-classical agenda” (Walser 1999, 334). To be sure, these categories overlap in many aspects and there are other ways in which we could configure them. But parsing things in this fashion allows us to get a handle on some of the key issues that shaped jazz practices and meanings during the neotraditionalist years and continue to resonate in some ways today. So, before we completely relegate Wynton Marsalis to the dustbin of jazz history, let’s take a moment to consider what he and his peers actually wrought.

**Boundaries and Definitions**

I imagine that very few people reading this chapter ever fully embraced Marsalis’s definition of jazz, which boils down to a combination of the musical elements “blues” and “swing.” Despite our reticence to accept such a simple equation, however, we do need to acknowledge the effectiveness of Marsalis’s campaign. For no one has ever been as successful as Wynton Marsalis at articulating and disseminating such a neatly circumscribed vision of jazz (or any other genre, for that matter). Recall that he was just 27 years old when he published an article called “What Jazz Is—and Isn’t” in the July 31, 1988 issue of the *New York Times* to help kick off the inaugural season of his Lincoln Center series. Marsalis himself could probably not have predicted just how widely and quickly his neotraditional message would spread, but the immediate impact of that message sent jazz people scrambling to respond. Recall just how many performers (and not just the young ones) during the 1980s and 1990s swapped their casual stage garb and original compositions for tailored suits and a repertoire of tunes by Duke Ellington and Thelonious Monk in tribute to “the tradition.”

Of course, the real genius of Marsalis’s strategy was not merely how well he was able to define clear boundaries for the jazz genre. Rather, it was that, by building off and reworking the established reputations of individuals like Ellington and Monk, as well as Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, and a handful of others, Marsalis eventually positioned himself to be seen as the one contemporary jazz musician whose performances and demeanor best exemplified the very same qualities set forth in his own definition of jazz. (I trust we all know whose voice opens and whose music closes the Ken Burns (2001) documentary.)

Ultimately, the very specificity and narrowness that helped Marsalis’s blues-plus-swing definition gain a foothold in the 1980s and 1990s appear to be the same traits that have led to its gradual decline. There were (and are) simply too many musicians, listeners, educators, and writers who refuse to reduce jazz to a short list of fixed musical essentials. Those of us who belong to this cohort can all feel a sense of vindication as Marsalis’s model falls by the wayside. That said, we might want to ask ourselves: if we refuse to define jazz as Wynton Marsalis does, how do we define it? What is “jazz” that it can maintain an identity while covering such vast and changeable sonic, geographical, and cultural terrain? It would behoove us to have a response at the ready. I think we
can most successfully accomplish this goal by emphasizing that jazz, like every other genre, isn’t just a style or collection of musical techniques or forms, but rather an evolving idea or actually a constellation of ideas and narratives. Of course, these are shaped by and refer to certain sounds. Ultimately, however, identities, meanings, and values are configured by how people write and talk about those sounds, as well as how they create, sell, listen, and dance to them. For my part, I have begun using the spaghetti metaphor: jazz as a messy bowl full of noodles, with each strand representing a different way of making and understanding the music. This may not be quite as neat and pithy as Marsalis’s definition, but it gives us a starting point from which to communicate how jazz and its various cultures actually work.

The Past

Another way that Marsalis and his colleagues refashioned, if only temporarily, a dominant jazz narrative is in how they portrayed the music’s relationship to its own past. Before the neotraditionals came along, jazz people had tended to extol musicians who not only crafted an identifiable style for themselves, but who also gave sound in a larger sense to a shared notion of their own place and time. The primary goal of many an aspiring jazz professional in the pre-neotraditional years was to absorb the lessons of yesterday’s heroes but then bring something new to the table, or at least to look and sound like “today,” however that happened to be imagined at the time. Consider that many beboppers in the 1940s and 1950s dismissed Louis Armstrong as old-fashioned, and that Miles Davis’s near-mythical status was earned in large part by seeming to stay always one step ahead of the critics. This philosophy is summed up in the image of Ornette Coleman and his group staring out defiantly from the cover of their 1961 release *This Is Our Music*. We can’t be exactly sure who gets included in the “our” part of the record’s title. But given the demeanors and postures of these young musicians, the provocative titles of Coleman’s releases immediately preceding this one (*Change of the Century*, *Shape of Jazz to Come*), and the music the group made, jazz participants at the time could read this as an invitation to become part of something new, hip, now, perhaps subversive.

Alas, those of us who followed the reasoning of that pre-neotraditional era were wrong, or so the writer Stanley Crouch tried to convince us in a 2002 article for *JazzTimes* called, “The Jazz Tradition Is Not Innovation.” Here Crouch argued that each succeeding generation of jazz artists does not change the music in any fundamental way or even bring it up to date. For Crouch, good performers were those who had mastered what he saw as the basic, unchanging elements of jazz, which, augmenting slightly Marsalis’s two-part definition, he cataloged as “4/4 swing, blues, the meditative ballad, and the Spanish tinge” (Crouch 2002). In the neotraditional view, then, jazz musicians should not seek to reject, modify, or add to the approaches of their forebears. Rather, they should concern themselves with approximating, even replicating, the now-timeless truths of jazz as codified in the first half-century of the music’s recorded existence.

By separating and systematizing certain earlier practices and ignoring others, Crouch worked to inscribe what Eric Hobsbawm and others have famously called an “invented tradition,” wherein the diversity, complexity, and all around messiness of what people actually did in the past is smoothed into a stable and coherent narrative of that past (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). The neotraditionals’ strategy is understandable. Finding themselves squeezed on one side by a more visible and varied cohort of “freer” musicians (for example, Art Ensemble of Chicago, the Don Pullen–George Adams Group, some aspects of Keith Jarrett, some aspects of Pat Metheny) and a stylistically diverse constellation of fusion and smooth-ish groups on the other side (for example, Al Jarreau, Bobby McFerrin, Kenny G, David Sanborn, Steps Ahead, Weather Report, and, again, some aspects of Keith Jarrett and Pat Metheny), and with the way ahead blocked by MTV-style rock and other popular genres, the neoclassicists during the 1980s carved out their own space by
"looking backward" (Nicholson 2005, 53–76). Their efforts focused on what the scholar Svetlana Boym described as "restorative nostalgia," which "manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past." As Boym notes, restorative nostalgics "do not think of themselves as nostalgic; they believe that their project is about truth" (Boym 2001, xviii). Indeed, jazz’s neotraditionalists did present their aesthetic as the genre’s one and only authentic path.

Like the neotraditionalists’ model of jazz’s ontology, their reverence for the music’s past was too stultifying to survive for long. Even the saxophonist Sonny Rollins, one of the neotraditionalists’ own heroes, stated “Jazz has got to keep moving: It is important to get new music, new melodies” (Timberg 2012). The fact is—and despite Crouch’s pronouncements—jazz did transform fundamentally, even during the decades that he and like-minded commentators hail as the music’s golden age (roughly 1927–1967). And as we can hear in jazz’s recent well-received conversations with hip-hop, rock, country, soul, pop, and European classical music, as well as with sounds and styles adopted from other cultures around the globe, we have returned to an aesthetic that values change and a sense of the present time and place over an essentialism intent on rehashing previously established models.  

Yet while I have no regrets in bidding adieu to the neotraditionalists’ reverent recreations of an imagined pure jazz past, we should concede that we have all benefited in various ways from the long glance backward that Marsalis and others facilitated. If the neotraditional era did nothing else, it forced us to deal more consciously with our own history. To be sure, jazz musicians reflect and configure notions of jazz history unconsciously all the time, via certain tunes they play, or the instrumentations they employ, or how they dress or interact with audiences on stage. Marsalis and others foregrounded that process, though, in somewhat of an ironic twist, by sparking renewed interest in jazz’s early years, Marsalis also helped generate some of the most compelling and insightful jazz scholarship ever, scholarship that would end up problematizing his own agenda.

For example, had Marsalis not tried so hard to convince us of his particular view of Louis Armstrong (that is, the Promethean artist struggling mightily against the evil forces of a banal popular music industry), perhaps the music historian Elijah Wald (2012) would never have felt compelled to publish his own findings on Armstrong, which, among other things uncovered the long-ignored mutual admiration between Armstrong and the white bandleader Guy Lombardo. For those of you who are not familiar with Guy Lombardo (and why would you be? His music and persona don’t fit our narratives of how jazz developed), his band, the Royal Canadians, was one of the most successful “sweet jazz” ensembles of the 1920s and 1930s. Before our recent wave of scholarship by Wald, and also Jeffrey Magee (2005) and John Howland (2009), and others, many of us had accepted all too easily the perceptions, ossified even before the neotraditionalists came along, of a racial binary equating hot jazz with blackness and sweet jazz with whiteness, that we had begun to lose sight of the complexity and diversity of early jazz cultures. (One little known fact unearthed by Elijah Wald: Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians held the attendance record at Harlem’s Savoy Ballroom in 1930!) (Wald 2012, 37).

Scholars are not the only ones who have found relevance in Marsalis’s turn to the past. Many jazz musicians, even those who have opposed the neotraditionalist wave, have also gained a broadened historical perspective on the music. We can hear the reemergence of certain instrumental techniques—horn glissandi, trumpet growls, stride piano—that jazz musicians had virtually ignored for decades, though now reworked to suit contemporary needs. Players as stylistically varied as Don Byron, Ethan Iverson, Jason Moran, and Nicholas Payton have all demonstrated a keen awareness of and influence from fairly distant forebears. Compare, for instance, Moran’s freewheeling version of “You’ve Got to Be Modernistic,” composed by the 1920s stride-style pianist James P. Johnson, with the neotraditionalist Marcus Roberts’s efforts toward restorative nostalgia on Johnson’s “Carolina Shout” (Moran 2002; Roberts 1993). We can note, too, how the neoclassicists effected a trend toward a darker, woodier sound from the acoustic bass than had been
in the case during the 1970s and early 1980s. (In the process, they also tried to stigmatize the use of electric bass as jazz heresy. Like so many other neoclassical aesthetics, however, that prejudice is also fading. Note the recent use of that instrument by such artists as Ben Allison, Avishai Cohen, Matthew Garrison, Sam Minaie, Kaveh Rasteger, and others.)

The point is, Marsalis and friends did us all a favor when they obligated us to re-explore the past. They reminded us of the remarkable creativity, skillfulness, joy, and beauty that early jazz artists brought to the table and gave us some new/old sounds to re-explore, even as the neotraditionalists’ overly neat and simplistic storytelling compelled us to challenge their ideas and rethink how we consider jazz during its earliest decades, and so how we hear, create, and value jazz today.

Cultural Hierarchy

It is no secret that, for the neotraditionalists, jazz is not merely one genre among many. Above all, the neotraditional outlook holds jazz separate from—and better than—virtually all other forms of music, save perhaps some European classical works. Popular genres are especially anathema to the neotraditional aesthetic. In that view, jazz musicians may borrow certain melodies or forms from Tin Pan Alley or other pop idioms, but their jazz practices somehow magically transform and elevate the supposed banality of popular tunes to the realm of timeless art (Porter 2002, 291). Not that Marsalis, Murray, and the like invented this trope. Jazz musicians and their supporters had long toiled to have their efforts viewed as high art rather than “mere” entertainment. The late pianist and educator Billy Taylor lauded jazz as “America’s Classical Music” long before the birth of Jazz at Lincoln Center, as did the writer Grover Sales (Taylor 1986; Sales 1984). Indeed, it is doubtful that Lincoln Center’s braintrust would have even considered adding a jazz series had a high art valuation not already been established for that genre; institutional shifts do not come out of the blue. (Imagine if, say, Giorgio Moroder or the Bee Gees had tried to found a Disco at Lincoln Center series in the 1980s. It is highly unlikely that their efforts would have gone very far.) That said, it was the neotraditionalist proselytizers who most forcefully and effectively pushed the jazz-as-high-art narrative, their efforts aided by Marsalis winning Grammy Awards for his recordings of trumpet concerti by Haydn and other canonical figures from the European classical tradition.

Now, we are all very familiar with this aspect of the neotraditional aesthetic, but I do want to point out a few aspects of the lingering effects of cultural hierarchy on and in jazz. First, we should acknowledge that even some of us who have challenged the efficacy and accuracy of jazz’s art music status have benefited from that very status. In my own case, had jazz not climbed to one of the top rungs on the ladder of cultural prestige, there might not have been a university job for me, at least not one in a music department, because the vast majority of colleges and conservatories focus solely on what they view as elite genres. And without my academic jobs, I likely would not have had the time or resources to write my books. Without those books, the editors of this collection would not have invited me to contribute this chapter . . . in which I decry, in part, the pervasive cultural hierarchy in jazz.

Second, and not to be forgotten as we storm the barricades of cultural elitism, musicians have produced a lot of brilliant, moving, beautiful, sublime, insightful, and otherwise meaningful “serious” jazz. Our times would be very different and, I think, greatly diminished, had we not been able to witness performances or heard recordings by Albert Ayler, Paul Bley, Peter Brötzmann, John Carter, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Steve Coleman, Andrew Cyrille, Eric Dolphy, Dave Holland, Abbey Lincoln, Charles Mingus, Paul Motian, Evan Parker, Dewey Redman, Sam Rivers, Archie Shepp, Cecil Taylor, Henry Threadgill, Eberhard Weber, and any number of other supposedly heavy, difficult, or deep performers. These artists have opened invaluable new ways of sounding, hearing, seeing, and being in the world. We need this music.
Even with these important benefits, though, it is equally true that the unremitting promulgation of a high art narrative espoused by some (and not just neotraditionalists) has proven detrimental to jazz’s viability. As fewer people hear themselves or find joy or fun or relaxation in this music, jazz will be forced to retreat ever deeper into itself, mostly via academic institutions. And while I am an active participant in and advocate for school-based jazz education, I also believe that in order for the music to retain its vibrancy, its relevance, it needs to stretch its legs, so to speak, in community-based venues of nightclubs, coffee houses, public parks, and the like. Absent these outlets, jazz will turn, inevitably and perhaps irrevocably, toward that hermetic situation the composer Milton Babbitt (1958) envisioned—and even encouraged—for modernist “classical” composers and their works back in the early 1960s.

The good news is that our current postneotraditional moment seems to be reaching a healthy balance between jazz as relentlessly serious or difficult and jazz as entertainment with broad-based appeal. The successes of artists and groups like Bad Plus, the Robert Glasper Experiment, Snarky Puppy, Esperanza Spaulding, and Kamasi Washington make it clear that the broader world is taking notice of this renewed openness and inclusive spirit. We can also see this new-found equilibrium or interplay between high and low in the 2013 opening of SFJazz Center, San Francisco’s answer to New York’s Lincoln Center. The center’s Mission Statement reads in part, “SFJAZZ explores the full spectrum of jazz, from the music’s origins in the African American community to its diverse present-day expressions around the world” (SFJazz.org 2017). True to its word, the calendar during the center’s opening season featured concerts by McCoy Tyner, Brad Mehldau, and other usual suspects of contemporary serious jazz in the US. But it also included performances by the Ethiopian soul-ish, pop-ish, jazz-ish singer Meklit Hadero, and the Berlin-based Max Raabe and his Palast Orchester, which covers tunes by everyone from Cole Porter to Britney Spears, all in a deadpan, campy Kurt Weill-meets-Paul Whiteman-meets-Talking Heads vibe. In other words, SFJazz is a neotraditionalist’s worst nightmare . . . even as it replicates the big-dollar/big-donor model of subsidized funding that Jazz at Lincoln Center brought to the fore.

How jazz’s renewed engagement with popular idioms will go over with the majority of jazz journalists and educators remains to be seen. So much effort has been poured into making jazz a highbrow art form that many well-meaning advocates (and certain upscale corporate sponsors) may be loath to see that narrative undermined. Even so, the postneotraditional move by some jazz people toward the popular, the danceable, sometimes the downright goofy, will strengthen the music, artistically as well as commercially.

Gender and Sexuality

Stanley Crouch’s explanation for why certain writers have criticized Wynton Marsalis—namely, that these writers are jealous of the trumpeter because, in Crouch’s words, Marsalis “has access to . . . a far higher quality of female than any of them could ever imagine”—must certainly rank among the most demeaning and ridiculous public statements ever uttered by a recipient of a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, but it also sums up the pervasive sexism that continues to surround neotraditional aesthetics and practices (Hajdu 2003). As of February 2017, when I am writing this, there still had yet to be a female member of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra. How can that be when the likes of Geri Allen, Terri Lynn Carrington, Anat Cohen, Tia Fuller, Ingrid Jensen, Linda Oh, Angelica Sanchez, and so many other outstanding women have been playing in and around that city for years? Jazz at Lincoln Centre (JALC) adoption in 2016 of a “blind” audition process suggests that the organization may be changing its dated ways. This is a welcome development because there simply is no defending this locker-room mentality in any jazz culture, and the sooner this aspect of neotraditionalism goes away, the better for everyone.
Race and Ethnicity

Among the neotraditionalists’ principal mantras has been that playing jazz well requires focused study: of one’s instrument, of music theory, and of history. Their narrative serves as a powerful counter to longstanding notions of jazz musicians, particularly black musicians, as possessing abundant “natural” and “instinctive” abilities, but lacking the intellectual capabilities that musicians of European descent supposedly possess to theorize how they go about learning and creating their works. (Murray 1989 [1976], see also Berliner 1994; Porter 2002) Debunking these primitivist understandings of African American cultural achievements is one legacy I hope will linger from the neotraditional era. That is not to say that I am calling for a color-blind narrative of jazz history. Quite the contrary, I believe race should remain at the forefront of our discussions of jazz aesthetics, pedagogy, and historiography.

I realize that not everyone ascribes to the idea of jazz as a “black music.” At the very least, some believe that that position has been overplayed, especially by scholars from the United States. One non-American scholar at a jazz conference a few years ago told me straight up: “You Yanks are always so hung up on race. Get over it!”

It is true that many jazz scholars from the US are vigilant when it comes to this issue. But rather than dismissing those efforts, I suggest that they be considered steps toward historical accuracy and fairness, attempts to avoid other iterations of that all-too-common cycle over the past century that saw white musicians receiving disproportionately higher accolades (and pay) compared to their African American counterparts within the same genre. It is crucial, for instance, that we always ponder the circumstances that enabled Benny Goodman to be crowned King of Swing, even as Goodman was patterning his own band on Fletcher Henderson’s ensemble.

Lest you think that such travesties of cultural and social justice could only happen in the United States, consider that in 2015 the English magazine music radar offered its ranking of “The 30 greatest blues guitarists of all time.” This publication ranked Stevie Ray Vaughan number one, with B.B. King second, Robert Johnson third, and Jimi Hendrix fourth. Rory Gallagher (5), Peter Green (6), and Eric Clapton (7), came in ahead of Buddy Guy (8), Muddy Waters (9), Albert King (11), Son House (12), and Freddie King (14). Jack White and Joe Bonamassa rated higher than Albert Collins (17), Elmore James (18), and Blind Lemon Jefferson (21) (Music Radar Team 2015).

No doubt, the magazine editors’ geographic location affected their assessments. (The Irishman Rory Gallagher as the fifth greatest blues guitarist of all time???) But so does race. It is crucial that we—as historians, musicians, teachers, human beings—maintain a sense of when and where cultural works and their aesthetics originate and develop. Yes, we need to take with a grain of salt Stanley Crouch’s absurd pronouncements about what he sees as the inadequacy of many non-black jazz musicians. And yes, we need to question and explore how and why various notions of blackness—as well as whiteness and Latin-ness, and Asian-ness—are configured. At the same time, though, the immense contributions to jazz by African American musicians, dancers, listeners, and writers, along with the history of racism and racialized understandings and misunderstandings by non-black participants of black cultural creations, requires that we keep the complex and oftentimes contradictory notions of race on the front burner for the foreseeable future.

The fact is, race has always been a central factor in how people understand and value jazz. So it must remain a central factor in jazz scholarship and pedagogy. What is more, given the troubling events in Ferguson, Missouri, and far too many other places in and beyond the US over the past few years, our efforts toward understanding race and ethnicity within the history of jazz might offer some sorely needed insights about race and ethnicity in general.
Nationality

Perhaps no issue has proven more irritating to jazz scholars outside the United States than the neotraditionalists’ near-constant invocation of “jazz as America’s music” trope. Conceding that jazz might have been born in the United States (US), they argue that the music has always been restlessly international (McKay 2005; Atkins 2003; Prouty 2012). Indeed, some writers have suggested that American-made jazz has lost its vitality, with Wynton Marsalis embodying all that is wrong, not just with the neotraditional sub-genre, but also with American jazz in general: it’s provincial, overly competitive, individualistic, brash, arrogant, corporate. A sort of musical equivalent to Donald Trump. Against these understandings, such commentators depict jazz outside the US as more creative, egalitarian, humble, up to date, and/or spiritually imbued than its North American counterpart (Nicholson 2005).

Even with Marsalis out of the way, this binary pitting US jazz against the rest of the world will not be as easy for those advocates to maintain. In fact, that stance may be more difficult to uphold precisely because Marsalis is no longer as visible or powerful as he once was, for he won’t obstruct certain folks from seeing just how deeply ingrained Americanist understandings remain among jazz communities in many parts of the globe. The truth is, those attitudes persist almost as strongly with audiences outside the US as inside. In 2016, Paris’s Sunside Jazz Club—one of the top jazz venues in France—sponsored its 25th annual American Jazz Festival, a six-week celebration of touring professionals from the States. Similarly, a cursory glimpse at the calendar of the Blue Note Tokyo nightclub reveals American acts appear at that establishment at least three times as often as Japanese acts. Given the booking practices at these and other successful venues, it is clear that more work will need to be done to give non-American jazz musicians their full, much-deserved, due. That said, I would guard against any efforts that try to pull jazz in the rest of the world up by bringing American-made jazz down.

Despite certain assertions made in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere, jazz is not dying in the United States. Spend some time in most any city (or on most any college campus, for that matter) and you will hear remarkably vibrant, creative, contemporary jazz music. How else to explain that ECM Records, the label that put European jazz on the map, has stepped up its efforts to record Americans Ralph Alessi, Tim Berne, and others—not in Oslo or Munich, but in New York City. ECM’s President Manfred Eicher himself produces many of these sessions. Thus, while I agree that we can shelve the “Jazz as America’s music” trope in the way that Wynton Marsalis, Ken Burns, and others have presented it, it would be a mistake to write off the backward, conservative Yanks just yet.

The Shape of Jazz (Historiography) to Come

Whatever one may have thought of Wynton Marsalis’s efforts, it is clear that they have left a lasting and in many ways positive impression on many aspects of jazz. Our writing and teaching should reflect that recognition. Scholars and educators are not passive, objective chroniclers of this music’s history. What we write or say, whom we choose to name or ignore in our classrooms, conference papers, and publications influences who gets heard as (good, or bad, or authentic, or inauthentic) jazz. As such, it is incumbent upon us to keep our ears, eyes, hearts, and minds open, to assess fairly and honestly, as we seek to acquire a better sense of the who, what, where, and why of jazz’s pasts, presents, and possible futures. That said, what a joy it will be to explore and celebrate the full vast range of creative musics that emerge under the jazz umbrella in the coming years and to rethink the world’s many and changing jazz cultures as we head further into our postneotraditional era.
After Wynton

Notes

1. This chapter is adapted from a keynote address I delivered at the Rhythm Changes: Rethinking Jazz Cultures conference in Manchester/Salford, UK, April 2013. I thank Tony Whyton for inviting me to speak at that event and also Tony, Nicholas Gebhardt, and Nichole Rustin-Paschal for inviting me to contribute this chapter to their collection. Additional thanks to Daniel Goldmark, Dana Gooley, and Robert Walser for their comments and suggestions.

2. The music that Wynton Marsalis and his cohort made since the 1980s has been termed, among other things, neoclassical, neo-classical, neo-traditional, and neotraditional. I am going with the latter moniker because the term “tradition” so often appears in discourse from and about Marsalis and like-minded commentators.


4. For more on the spaghetti metaphor, see Ake (2016, 27–28). As I note in that essay, my food metaphor differs markedly from Marsalis’s frequent reference to jazz as a delicious and spicy “gumbo.” Jazz’s various strands aren’t always so tasty. They can be bland, even noxious (i.e., racist, sexist, homophobic).

5. The most influential study on the process of and stakes surrounding genre formation in jazz remains DeVeaux (1991). For an outstanding exploration of how genres function and are formed beyond jazz, see Brackett (2016).

6. A handful of the countless examples of such musical crossings: Pablo Aslan’s jazz-tango fusions, Uri Caine’s Mahler Project, the remarkable self-productions by the British wunderkind Jacob Collier, Bill Frisell’s country-flavored albums, Lionel Loueke Trio, Rudresh Mahanthappa’s Indo-Pak Coalition, and Dafnis Prieto’s Proverb Trio with rapper Kokayi.

7. For more on the troubled history of electric bass in jazz, see Wright (2015).

8. For more on the importance of jazz-making outside the music’s traditional urban centers, see Collier (1993).

9. For a pointed critique of Babbitt’s stance, see McClary (1989).

10. Thanks to Dana Gooley for pointing out that, despite aesthetic differences, SFJazz seems to have based its funding structure on the model that Jazz at Lincoln Center established for elite non-profit jazz institutions.

11. For more on the sexual politics surrounding Marsalis and his compatriots, see Pellegrinelli (2000); Roth (2008); and Stewart (2007). For more on gender and sexuality in jazz, see Tucker (2008) and Rustin and Tucker (2008).

12. For more on perceptions of both race and nationality as they play out among jazz musicians, journalists, and scholars in Europe, see Whyton (2012).

References


