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The Birth of the Cool of Miles Davis and His Associates
(review)

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homage to pioneering Russian music scholar Gerald Abraham. His summary is worth quoting in full:

And so the fact that . . . Abraham's work is by now largely outdated will never make him any the less my hero. When my own pupils confess to cold feet, when finishing their dissertations or awaiting their early publications or on the eve of a conference appearance, at the prospect that someone will show them up as wrong, I take pleasure in owning up to my own corrected errors and reminding them that there are far worse things one can be than wrong: one can be lazy; one can be incompetent; one can be dishonest. If one is diligent, competent, and honest, one need not fear being wrong. (p. 23)

As Taruskin proclaimed many years ago in another context: "Sew that into a sampler and hang it on the wall" (in his *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1995], 231).

Beyond its important lessons in scholarly practice, the essays in *On Russian Music* introduce readers to a wide range of topics and facts. To pick just one: the earliest musical treatise to appear in Russia (by Nikolai Diletsky in 1679) is also the first book to contain a chart of the circle of fifths (p. 59). Best of all, the essays invite further listening. They send the reader to the CD player, MP3 player, or turntable (or when lucky, the concert hall) again and again, making us hear, and often rehear, the music under discussion, as is true especially of the essays on Dargomyzhky's *The Stone Guest*, Shostakovich and Beethoven ("Hearing Cycles"), Rimsky-Korsakov, "perhaps the most underrated composer of all time" (p. 166), and Myaskovsky (chap. 25; despite the postscript on p. 293, at the time of my writing the Svetlanov set of Myaskov-

sky's symphonies Taruskin reviews *is* currently available from Warner music; the beast has been rebagged [16 CDs, Warner 2564 69689-8]). Taruskin praises critic Harold Schonberg as "a matchless connoisseur of romantic piano playing" in *The Danger of Music* (p. 35), but in this book he reveals himself to be a matchless connoisseur of Russian music, a certifiable "record geek" (to borrow his own phrase on p. 289). Based in no small part on his extensive listening and concert attendance, he becomes an eloquent advocate for overlooked or misunderstood creators such as Glinka, Dargomyzhsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Weinberg, and especially Tchaikovsky, in Taruskin's provocative assessment "perhaps the most disciplined and sophisticated creative artist nineteenth-century Russia ever produced" (p. 90).

Taruskin declares that he "[looks] forward to the rapid outdated of the contents of this book" (p. 23), a remark that nicely complements his earlier announcement that "I, for one, am content to sit back and await the discoveries and interpretations of my colleagues, the direction of whose research I am in no position to predict. I love surprises" (p. 27). The scholarship that supersedes Taruskin's will nevertheless be indebted to the firm foundation he has painstakingly built. Research on Russian music is currently burgeoning; surprises (most of them pleasant) are appearing with increasing frequency. That so much of this recent work is of such high quality largely is a result of the examples provided by Taruskin in these essays and his other Russian music scholarship. If some of this recent effort is still lacking, then we have his strong example of diligence, competence, and honesty to drive us to improve it.

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OUTSIDE THE "WESTERN ART MUSIC" CANON

The Birth of the Cool of Miles Davis and His Associates. By Frank Tirro. (CMS Sourcebooks in American Music, no. 5.) Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2009. [xxv, 196 p. ISBN 9781576471289. \$45.] Music examples, illustrations, bibliography, discography, appendices, index, compact disc.

The Birth of the Cool is the title of the 1957 album containing eleven recordings by Miles Davis's nonet from three Capitol ses-

sions in 1949 and 1950. The nonet consisted of an unusual instrumentation, including a French horn and a tuba, which,

according to Gil Evans, "was the smallest number of instruments that could get the sound and still express all the harmonies the Thornhill band used" (Nat Hentoff, "The Birth of the Cool," *Down Beat* [May 2, 1957]: 16). The Claude Thornhill Orchestra was indeed a significant inspiration for the nonet, with three members previously associated with it: Gil Evans, Gerry Mulligan, two primary arrangers, and Lee Konitz, alto saxophonist.

The nonet recordings, along with the 1949 recordings by Lennie Tristano's sextet, are commonly regarded in jazz historiography as seminal of a style known as cool jazz, although the style category did not yet exist at the time of the release of the recordings. Cool jazz, a style and period designation, has been characterized by a more relaxed or less aggressive approach than bebop, hence "cool" as opposed to bebop's being "hot," and is represented mainly by white musicians, major exceptions being Miles Davis and the members of the Modern Jazz Quartet. However, there is a lack of consistency and coherence in what is conventionally considered cool jazz, and thus it is a questionable historical rubric that involves problems of periodization and categorization in arbitrarily labeling musicians of diverse styles and sensibilities. Its inherent problems and contradictions can be understood in the context of the tendency toward canonization in jazz historiography, which Scott DeVaux discussed ("Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography," *Black American Literature Forum* 25, no. 3 [Fall 1991]: 525–60). Another problem of cool jazz is the negative connotation of being unemotional and cold, reinforced by the racial and stylistic dichotomy of white musicians representing "cool" jazz and black musicians "hot" jazz.

Frank Tirro's *The Birth of the Cool of Miles Davis and His Associates* does not critically examine these issues, as will be discussed below. Instead, he focuses on the nonet recordings in explaining their historical significance, the formation of the nonet, characteristics and emergence of cool jazz, stylistic predecessors, and analysis of the music. Characterizing cool jazz as "restrained, relaxed, excellent, and, during the 1950s, fashionable," he defines the main areas of discussion as "the general or period style and . . . the performance, com-

positional, and arranging characteristics" (p. 17). In terms of performing style, Tirro points out soft and straight tone with little vibrato, moderation in volume and tempo, a quiet rhythm section, especially "minimalist, non-obtrusive drumming" (p. 88), and motivic construction of the melody in the solos. Although he devotes much discussion to performance, it is arranging and composing that he stresses, particularly compositional techniques derived from Western classical music, such as impressionist harmony, described as non-functional parallel chords; polychord or polytonality; counterpoint, although employed little in the nonet recordings; mixed meter or polymeter; and thematic development. In emphasizing these elements, his notion of cool jazz borders on "third stream" jazz.

Tirro views cool jazz as an entirely positive phenomenon and throughout the book underlines the historical significance of the nonet recordings on the basis of their impact and popularity. For example, he states that the music of the nonet "helped reshape modern jazz" (p. 142) and is "now regarded among the masterpieces of jazz and a cornerstone in the history of American music" (p. 143). At times, however, Tirro gives the impression of belaboring the point. His positive assessment is contrasted with the ambivalent and mixed evaluations in jazz historiography. Martin Williams, for example, considered cool jazz conservative and regressive when measured against Charlie Parker's style as "a yardstick of modernity" ("Bebop and After: a Report," in *Jazz: New Perspectives on the History of Jazz*, ed. Nat Hentoff and Albert McCarthy [New York: Grove Press, 1959], 294). Although Tirro reports negative views, for example, by Bill Cole, Ian Carr, and Joe Goldberg, he does not engage with the fundamental issues involved in the style category that underlie such historical evaluations.

A question that draws much of Tirro's attention is the emergence of cool jazz and its predecessors. In a way he is tackling the assumption implied in the album title: did Davis's nonet give birth to the new "cool" style? He answers that it did not; he argues that "cool jazz was in the air, omnipresent among modern jazz musicians in the late 1940s," as there were "other artists working with many of the same ideas and tech-

niques" (p. 19). In other words, it was manifested by "separate and diverse, yet interrelated, musical elements and events" (p. 20), and was "catalyzing in several locations of the United States" (p. 28). Interestingly, Tirro's explanation resembles Leonard Feather's "kindred souls" theory about the origin of bebop, which proposes that despite the tendency to focus on Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, "other musicians simultaneously were arriving at the same conclusion . . . without having been aware of each other's existence" ("Bebop, Cool Jazz, Hard Bop," in *The New Story of Jazz: From New Orleans to Rock Jazz*, ed. Joachim Ernst Berendt [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978], 98). Tirro's case in point is the Dave Brubeck Octet, whose music "displays many of the same concerns as the music of the Miles Davis nonet," especially "similar orchestrational ideas," although "the New York musicians were totally unaware of Brubeck's endeavors" (pp. 27, 28). Tirro believes that the octet embodied significant elements of cool jazz, including influences from impressionist and neoclassical styles, quartal harmony, counterpoint, polytonality, polymeter, and non-jazz forms. Another indirect predecessor of cool jazz, according to Tirro, is Bix Beiderbecke, whose influence is stressed because his 1920s compositions feature impressionist harmony, and also because Tirro considers him an important influence on Lester Young, a tenor saxophonist commonly cited as a precursor of cool jazz. However, Tirro only briefly mentions Frank Trumbauer, a much more significant and direct influence on Young's unique style; although Young stated that he liked Beiderbecke, he repeatedly acknowledged Trumbauer as a crucial influence during his formative years, as can be illustrated in several interviews reprinted in *A Lester Young Reader* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

In comparison with his earlier book (*Jazz: A History*, 2d ed. [New York: W. W. Norton, 1993]), Tirro's 2009 publication shows interesting departures. In his 1993 textbook Tirro emphasized the close connection between bebop and cool jazz, considering the latter a development, or a sub-style, of the former. In contrast, his 2009 publication treats cool jazz as a separate style from bebop, and focuses more on ar-

ranging and composing as an essential component of cool jazz. However, these two books are similar in their target audience, that is, undergraduate students, except that the 2009 publication is more intended for musicians. This book can be useful as an introductory text because it provides a wealth of information and exhibits detailed pedagogic attention. For example, Tirro offers explanations for very basic musical terms and concepts, and the "Personalia," prepared by Michael J. Budds, even includes entries on Bach and Beethoven. In addition, the accompanying compact disc can be an effective tool for readily introducing students to the music.

While *The Birth of the Cool of Miles Davis and His Associates* seems appropriate for the main readership, the scope of the book is rather limited. The main limitation is the lack of critical examination of the aforementioned fundamental issues, the conceptual problems of the style category, and the ambivalent evaluation in the context of jazz historiography, especially the implication of inauthenticity. For example, Tirro considers cool jazz an entirely separate style category without critiquing its elusive nature as an artificial construct in the context of the canonization of jazz. In addition, he views cool jazz as a purely musical phenomenon, but there are important social factors that should not be ignored in their impact on the reception and historical assessment of the music. For example, Miles Davis and Dizzy Gillespie indicated that cool jazz was a white appropriation of black music (Davis with Quincy Troupe, *Miles: The Autobiography* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989], 119 and 156; Gillespie, *To Be or Not to Bop* [New York: Da Capo Press, 1979], 359–60). Regarding Davis's statement, Tirro criticizes it as bigoted (p. 5), but later reinterprets it as "bitter words of an aging and ailing African-American artist who was wounded too many times over the course of a long career" (p. 13) and who changed his perspective on racial matters drastically due to suffering "many personal experiences of discrimination" (p. 12). Tirro also notes that "at the time of the *Birth of the Cool*" Davis was still "perceived as 'a nice guy'" (p. 12).

Tirro's confusing explanation of the word "cool" further illustrates the problem. Although he uses references that indicate

two different meanings of “cool,” the “black cool” as part of black consciousness and the “white cool” with a negative connotation, he conflates them rather than sorting through the dichotomy. In particular, he makes a puzzling remark that Miles Davis was “as close to the living embodiment of Norman Mailer’s ‘White Negro’ as one could hope to find” (p. 12). On the contrary, Davis, an African American, would represent the farthest thing from a “White Negro,” a term Mailer used to indicate white “hipsters” who appropriated black culture. In general, the lack of attention to the issue of racial politics in jazz and the problem of cool jazz as a style category results in a simplistic approach; a more contextualized approach would have provided depth to the treatment of the subject.

An important question about the nonet concerns the disagreements over the arranging credits. The case of “Budo” is particularly confusing. Tirro believes that John Lewis arranged it but does not provide any evidence, suggesting instead that it is consistent with Lewis’s other arrangements, which are stylistically more bebop than cool jazz. However, Bill Kirchner attributes it to Mulligan who, according to Kirchner, supplied the arranging credits (“Miles Davis and the Birth of the Cool,” in *A Miles Davis Reader*, ed. Bill Kirchner [Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997], 41 and 44).

Despite its problems, *The Birth of the Cool of Miles Davis and His Associates* is a valuable resource for students interested in the music of Davis’s nonet, and a good companion to the nonet recordings along with the published scores edited by Jeff Sultanof (Miles Davis, *Birth of the Cool* [Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2002]).

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Film Music: A History. By James Wierzbicki. New York: Routledge, 2009. [xv, 312 p. ISBN 9780415991988 (hardcover), \$110; ISBN 9780415991995 (paperback), \$38.95.] Illustrations, bibliography, index.

The past ten years or so have seen a flurry of textbooks published for film music courses. Wierzbicki’s book is billed as “not

the history of film music. Rather . . . a history” (p. xiii) and provides a complement to most of its competition. Instead of the typical approaches of focusing on landmark films and instructing readers in the art of analyzing film scores, Wierzbicki focuses on history as seen through film music criticism and the changing practices of music making in the American film industry. Indeed, this work draws as much on the history of film in general as it does on the history of the music itself. In assembling his narrative, Wierzbicki has done such a commendable job of poring through newspapers and journals that the reader can’t help but long for a source readings anthology to collect the numerous obscure and hard-to-find articles that are cited. Filling out the colorful journalistic diatribes, Wierzbicki places a great deal of emphasis on the realities of Hollywood filmmaking. He recognizes that the film industry is a business that responds to financial, commercial, and legal pressures, as well as to the audience. For Wierzbicki, aesthetic innovations seem to emerge from a realization that film composers are immensely practical people who creatively take advantage of the resources given them, even under the imposition of the strictest deadlines. As a textbook, *Film Music: A History* will be of great use for film music courses with a chronological organization or with an emphasis on “classical-style” Hollywood films. As a resource for film music scholars, it provides a useful overview of the silent, early sound, and “classical” eras and guides the readers toward a wide variety of primary and secondary sources.

One of the strongest sections of the book is part 1, “Music and the ‘Silent’ Film (1894–1927).” In addition to engaging with a wide range of contemporaneous articles in newspapers and trade journals, Wierzbicki draws heavily on the work of Martin Marks (*Music and the Silent Film: Contexts and Case Studies, 1895–1924* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997]), and Rick Altman (“The Silence of the Silents,” *Musical Quarterly* 80, no. 4 [Winter 1996]: 648–718; and *Silent Film Sound* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2004]). The result is a rich, complex picture of the various settings for film viewing and the scoring strategies adapted for each. The lengthy discussion of cue sheets—including com-