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JAMMING THE RECEPTION: KEN BURNS, *JAZZ*, AND THE PROBLEM OF “AMERICA’S MUSIC”

BY STEVEN F. POND

◇

INTRODUCTION

In 2001 the nation paid more attention to jazz than it had for a long time. With its first aired episode on 8 January, *Jazz*, a film by Ken Burns,¹ continued the filmmaker’s string of epic documentaries on American life. The project stands as Burns’s most ambitious.² The film’s ten episodes (nineteen hours of film) were broadcast on the PBS network over four weeks, with an estimated thirteen million viewers on the first day alone.³ Since then, the film has been distributed in both VHS and DVD formats, along with a companion book coauthored with Geoffrey C. Ward⁴ (henceforth, the Ward book), and several compact disc sets, including a five-disc set culled from the series, a “best of” compact disc, and twenty-two disc-length anthologies of featured performers.

A coordinated onslaught of *Jazz* images, sounds, and products, as well as the enormous marketing effort accompanying them, did more than just purvey a set of products that year: it fostered *Jazz* (and jazz) as a topic of national discussion—in print, on television, at the dinner table, and on the Internet. In this study I examine Burns’s penetration into the national consciousness, and how his version of jazz history is received and critically evaluated.

Steven F. Pond is assistant professor at Cornell University. This essay is a greatly expanded version of a paper originally presented at the Society for Ethnomusicology conference in Detroit on 26 October 2001. The author wishes to thank American Musicological Society members Mark Davenport, Susanne Dunlap, Denise Gallo, Gayle Murchison, Michael O’Connor, James Parsons, Bill Rosar, Michael Strasser, and Richard Wexler for graciously consenting to be quoted for this project.

1. *Jazz*, a Florentine Films production, prod. and dir. Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, written by Geoffrey C. Ward, ca. 19 hrs. (PBS DVD B8262D, distrib. Warner Home Video [2000]), 10 DVDs. Broadcast on the Public Broadcasting System 8–31 January 2002.

2. I refer in this article to the ten-episode film (whether in its broadcast, videocassette, or DVD form) as “the series” or “the film.” I refer to the myriad products marketed under the *Jazz* moniker as the “Burns collection.”

3. Chris Morris, “Advent of a New Jazz Age?—Artists, Labels, Retail Swing with Ken Burns,” *Billboard* 113 (10 February 2001): 1+. “According to a Legacy representative, *Jazz* debuted to an audience of 13 million viewers on Jan. 8. While all of the Burns-branded records had been selling steadily since their Nov. 7, 2000, release, they took nearly every slot on the Top Jazz Albums chart after the series hit the air.”

4. Geoffrey C. Ward, *Jazz: A History of America’s Music* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000).

Reception studies generally do not include the Internet as a site of criticism. Along with more traditional reception media, I pointedly include the World Wide Web's role in several types of reception that I call "official," "quasi-official," "submerged official," and "indie." The Internet has changed an important aspect of the critical apparatus. The exchange of information and opinion is dramatically speeded through this easily shared medium. The resulting ease of communication tends to momentarily blur critical hierarchies, increasing the exchange between expert and aficionado. Reception studies can benefit from this opportunity for an enriched perspective. The *Jazz* project is a case in point: this widely dispersed critical pool raises a cluster of objections to Burns's version of jazz history.

JAZZ AND ITS IMPORTANCE

Judging by the marketing effort that supported it, it is not surprising that *Jazz* was no ordinary miniseries, but rather a cultural event. A few provocative news items illustrate the effort and its rewards. First, the film trade publication *Hollywood Reporter* announced in November 2000 that Amazon.com had created a partnership with Burns to launch an online store with a catalog of thirty-five thousand items related to *Jazz*.⁵ Second, a *USA Today* article in January 2001 announced that halfway through the showing of the ten-episode series, sales of related merchandise had already topped fifteen million dollars.⁶ (Contextualizing this point, Carolyn Kleiner estimates total domestic jazz album sales in 1999 were roughly twenty million dollars.⁷) Third, nine months after the series aired, two of the anthology albums from the Burns collection were *still* on Barnes & Noble's Top Fifty Jazz List.⁸ Fourth, elsewhere on the same Web site, interest showed up in the print version of *Jazz*, too. On that same date the Ward hardcover book was still the second-best-selling jazz book title for Barnes & Noble—the soft cover was fourth. While sales figures for the Burns-marketed albums are not public, the fact that nine months after the film's initial broadcast two of them remained on the Top Fifty list highlights the staying power of the *Jazz* package in the jazz market.

5. "All That 'Jazz': Amazon.com Partners with Ken Burns to Introduce a Specialized Music Store," *Hollywood Reporter* 365 (3 November 2000): 12.

6. "Ken Burns, the Brand: A Marketing Boomlet; Sales of Videos of Ken Burns's Documentaries, Companion Books and CDs Have Earned Over \$600 Mil in Retail Revenue," *USA Today*, 31 January 2001. See also Ron Stodghill [II], "The Man Who Keeps Jazz on the 'A' Train," *Business Week*, 25 May 1992, 56–58.

7. Carolyn Kleiner, "New Orchestral Maneuvers Win Fans," *U.S. News & World Report*, 11 September 2000, 87.

8. Source: <http://www.barnesandnoble.com> (accessed 22 October 2002).

The popularity of the Burns project may have been predictable, given the large-scale marketing effort behind it as well as a core of related factors: (1) Burns's established reputation for well-produced, engaging historical documentaries; (2) the nationalistic portrayal of jazz as uniquely American, as America's Classical Music; and (3) Burns's portrayal of jazz as sophisticated African American music, a music conspicuously successful as *art* despite its race-torn surroundings.

Burns also demonstrated his ability to create demand, not only for the sights and sounds of jazz but also for mugs, T-shirts, cars, and other jazzy merchandise. Articles in the *PBS 2001 Annual Report*⁹ and *Advertising Age*¹⁰ report, among other efforts, the commitment of three thousand Starbucks stores to play selections from the compilation compact discs through the month of January. The articles also describe the distribution of press materials, study guides, and the Ward book to six million middle-school students, paid for by General Motors, a major contributor to the project.¹¹ The strategy paid dividends in media buzz: virtually every major newspaper, family magazine, webzine, and radio and television network in America displayed feature articles on the series in the days and weeks leading up to its broadcast. Overtly in the form of paid print and broadcast advertising and free in the form of interviews and reportage generated with the aid of publicists' skills, a huge investment in publicity assured the Burns project's success. Thanks largely to these efforts, *Jazz* and jazz music were on everyone's radar screen, at least in the winter of 2001.

Of course, reception as viewership, sales, or media buzz does not necessarily imply deep or lasting impact on our understanding of jazz. But the impact of *Jazz* in that pivotal year intensified, by way of an interesting one-two punch. First, the promoters of the Burns project also focused on building a strong *Jazz* presence in college survey classes; second, at virtually the same moment as the series broadcast, the Smithsonian Institution pulled from its catalog the multi-compact disc anthology, *Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz*.¹²

Consider the effect of decades of agitating for jazz in college curricula by, among others, *Down Beat* magazine and the International Association

9. Public Broadcasting System, *PBS 2001 Annual Report*, http://www.pbs.org/insidepbs/annualreport2001/text/jazz_text.html (accessed 25 March 2003).

10. "GM Composes Effort Supporting Burns' *Jazz*: General Motors Will Support Its Sponsorship of Ken Burns' Documentary, *Jazz*, with an Integrated Marketing Push That Includes Educational Posters and Viewing Guides; Has Teamed with Universal Music Group Records and Sony Corp to Develop Compact Discs," *Advertising Age* 71 (11 September 2000): 62.

11. This is all the more significant, considering the fact that the documentary form is falling on hard times, with grant budgets tightening at an alarming rate.

12. *The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz*, rev. ed. (Smithsonian RD033 [1987]), 5 CDs.

of Jazz Educators.¹³ Not only are over a hundred postsecondary schools now offering courses on jazz, but the courses are heavily enrolled, often more so than other, more traditional music classes.¹⁴ These jazz courses generally are situated in schools of music, which have a primary mandate to develop “chops” rather than ground the student in cultural or historical knowledge.¹⁵ The College Music Society’s *Weekly Electronic Music Vacancy List* for 5 October 2001, for example, includes thirteen academic job openings that mention jazz.¹⁶ All but five are strictly applied or conductor positions, and of those, four specify jazz theory or jazz as merely a secondary interest. This means that a film series like Burns’s might be attractive as a shorthand historical introduction for those schools that do not yet provide a jazz history course.

Even for those teachers who do offer history surveys and whose primary interest is jazz history, the time to change texts, and therefore course content, is likely close at hand. Nearly every college text on jazz written in the past quarter century has centered its listening examples on the *Smithsonian Collection*.¹⁷

On a related educational front, Alfred A. Knopf, publisher of the Ward book, donated one thousand copies to the United Negro College Fund and its member schools.¹⁸ The availability of these materials in college classrooms, as well as the complementary offerings from the Burns collection, could not have been timed more fortuitously. With the *Smithsonian Collection*’s disappearance, the Burns collection is in a position to become the heir-apparent in the jazz canonizing business, possibly, as with the *Smithsonian Collection*, for as long as a generation. Further, if listening trends continue, these college students will likely take their place

13. *Down Beat* has long advocated for jazz studies on college campuses. Further, the magazine’s long-time editor, Dan Morgenstern, has headed the Rutgers University Institute of Jazz Studies (founded in 1952) since 1976.

14. Graham Bartle, “Index of Program Areas: Jazz and Popular Music Schools and Programs: United States of America,” in *International Directory of Music and Music Education Institutions* (Nedlands, Western Australia: Callaway International Resource Centre for Music Education at The University of Western Australia, 1996), 589–91. See also *1999–2000 Jazz Education Guide* [special supplement to *JazzTimes*] (Silver Spring, MD: JazzTimes, 1999).

15. Bartle, 589–91. See also International Association for Jazz Education (IAJE), <http://www.iaje.org> (accessed 25 May 2003). My statement comes from an analytical review of approximately half of the 158 programs listed in Bartle.

16. College Music Society, *Weekly Electronic Music Vacancy List* (5 October 2001; choice of list date is due to its prime position in the academic job announcement season). Available by paid subscription; see the society’s Web site at <http://www.music.org> (accessed 22 May 2003) for information.

17. Prominent examples include the following: Mark C. Gridley, *Jazz Styles: History & Analysis*, 8th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002); John F. Szwed, *Jazz 101: A Complete Guide to Learning and Loving Jazz* (New York: Hyperion, 2000); Frank Tirro, *Jazz: A History*, 2d ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993); Lewis Porter, Michael Ullman, and Ed Hazell, *Jazz: From Its Origins to the Present* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993).

18. “GM Composes Effort Supporting Burns’ Jazz,” *Advertising Age*.

as part of the core jazz audience, a position they tend to retain as they grow older.¹⁹

What I have described so far, of course, is reception mediated by marketing, and therefore it is an engineered reception. The idea is to take a product and create a need, or expand an existing need. In this case, the product is both jazz (the music) and *Jazz* (the film and its many subsidiary offerings). Sales have been brisk. The book and compact discs, released in time for Christmas, quickly became the sales focus of Tower Records, Barnes & Noble, and other sales outposts. The full accounting has not been released, but has been described as “staggering.” This kind of reception brings tears to a marketing executive’s eyes.

But this “reception” can also be dismissed as spin-doctoring. The proof of *Jazz*’s impact lies in how the project has been received and evaluated during and after the film’s broadcast, and how deeply this impression has penetrated.

RECEPTION STUDIES GENERALLY

Reception Media

Because dialogue about the project has been pervasive, the potential impact of *Jazz* to become the dominant narrative of jazz history is long-term and profound. I say “potential” because, despite sales figures, response to the project has been anything but uniform. The hotly contested reception of *Jazz* reflects the latest skirmish in the long battle over the identity of jazz. In past years, this conflict has played out in reviews, op-ed articles in news and industry journals, and in scholarly writing. In addition to the traditional print and broadcast media for these discourses—newspapers, magazines, scholarly journals, radio, and television—the Internet is becoming an increasingly important site for opinion-mongering. This represents a change, not only in where opinions are traded, but also in the impact of the exchanges themselves. The change has occurred because the Web’s structure promotes access that is inexpensive, relatively egalitarian, and immediate. The Internet provides new sites for reception, sites significant for their proliferation and their resistance to master

19. In the most recent large-scale demographic review of music audiences, Scott DeVaux points to a strong correlation between college education and “liking” jazz. Using 1992 data from a national survey commissioned by the Research Division of the National Endowment for the Arts, DeVaux finds that although only 5 percent of respondents to the survey liked jazz as a genre “best of all,” 42 percent of respondents with “some college education” preferred jazz, and the percentage jumped to 54 percent for those with college degrees. With respect to age of the respondents, he points out that jazz attains its highest overall popularity (41 percent) with the 25–34 age group, declining gently through the 55–64 age group (30 percent), to reach 21 percent for the over-74 group. See Scott DeVaux, *Jazz in America: Who’s Listening?* National Endowment for the Arts Research Division Report, 31 (Carson, CA: Seven Locks Press, 1995), 37–38.

narratives. Opinions promulgated in the official media, whether they have attached themselves to the Web or not, are less likely to be swinging the heavy bats they have in the past. With the Internet, the official voices are becoming only part of a democratized, cacophonous crowd of claimants to the truth.

What Normally Counts as Reception?

Reception studies in music typically pay close attention to periodical reviews and monographs and (less often) publicity, feature articles, and advertising.²⁰ Academic journal reviews and monographs, as well as reviews and articles in “name” newspapers, periodicals, and industry magazines, operate as what I call official reception, that is, they are for the most part adjudicated, or at least edited, and are published in scholarly journals or periodicals that traffic in “objective,” informed reportage and evaluation. Examples of academic reception show up in *American Music*, *Popular Music and Society*, and *Jazz Research*. Examples of the journalistic kind can be found in the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Review of Books*, and—targeted specifically to a jazz readership—*Jazz Times*, *Jazzis*, and *Down Beat*.

In comparison to the sphere of jazz writing, other areas of critical inquiry operate within a comfortable hierarchy: a review article by a renowned scholar of nineteenth-century music tends to carry more weight than a review by a critical journalist, even a respected one. In jazz, such a hierarchy cannot be assumed. Often journalistic writers will cite academic writers to buttress their arguments, but citations are just as likely to flow the other way. Distinctions between town and gown are blurred in more ways than one: journalistic writers also contribute to the wealth of books on jazz published every year. Although their books are rarely published by university presses, they *are* regularly cited in university-published academic writing.

Further, the academic and journalistic spheres of official criticism are somewhat permeable, a fact that is illustrated in the authorship of an-

20. For example, David Bernstein's 2001 article on the reception of John Cage's music, and Alain Frogley's 1996 work on reception of Ralph Vaughan Williams adhere to this norm. An exception to “reception” as solely “critical reception” is Adrian Beaumont's 1998 case study, in which the project is pointedly *audience* reception, with the “case” subjects being educated listeners, but unexposed to new music. See David W. Bernstein, “‘In Order to Thicken the Plot’: Toward a Critical Reception of Cage's Music,” in *Writings through John Cage's Music, Poetry, and Art*, ed. David Bernstein and Christopher Hatch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 7–40; Alain Frogley, “Constructing Englishness in Music: National Character and the Reception of Ralph Vaughan Williams,” in *Vaughan Williams Studies*, ed. Alain Frogley (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1–22; and Adrian Beaumont, “Expectation and Interpretation in the Reception of New Music: A Case Study,” in *Composition—Performance—Reception: Studies in the Creative Process in Music*, ed. Wyndham Thomas (Aldershot, Hants, Eng.; Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998), 93–104.

thology and reissue album liner notes. Retrospective reissues, whether collected as anthologies or reissued as historically important albums, routinely contain liner notes recalling the creation of the music and assessing its historical importance. Producers or other industry figures write many of these notes (Columbia Records’ Michael Cuscuna and Fantasy’s Orrin Keepnews come to mind), but so also do journalists (Chris Albertson, Bill Milkowski) and academics (Lewis Porter, Scott DeVeaux, Gunther Schuller). Further, journalists can themselves be academics. Dan Morgenstern, formerly editor of *Down Beat* and current director of the Institute for Jazz Studies at Rutgers University, exemplifies this.²¹

What is missing from this hierarchy, and what calls its plausibility into question, is the jazz musician. Musicians complain, often publicly,²² that jazz criticism is made up of a caste of Brahmins whose credentials do not include making music of their own—a charge rarely leveled at the scholar or journalist of nineteenth-century music. The result is that neither journalists nor academics carry an automatically high “believability quotient.” Who, then, can speak for jazz? A reception study must uncover other opinionated voices; there are plenty.

Less Common Inclusions in Reception Studies

Besides “official” reception, there is a slightly less respected kind, which might be called quasi-official. Letters to the editor, especially to those same or equivalent journals, constitute an example of this. Quasi-official commentators are not bound to the same standard of objectivity as in official reception, but they do carry the weight of considered opinion. This is especially true when the journal is a prestigious one.

Still other receptions abound, though ignored by most reception studies. The Internet is home to two of these: “submerged-official” and “indie” reception.

21. The appellation “academic” presents a further problem. The other common names being “scholar,” “intellectual,” and “researcher,” I find no satisfactory substitute. Clearly, research is an activity that anyone doing what I call “official” reception is likely to incorporate. Also, “intellectual” and “scholar” describe producers George Avakian and Orrin Keepnews as well as, for example, Porter, DeVeaux, and Schuller. While I acknowledge the clumsiness of implying that nonacademics are not scholarly, on the one hand, or that intellectuals outside academe are less credible, on the other—neither case is true—I use the word here to denote scholars whose written work is principally published in scholarly, adjudicated journals or by university presses, regardless of whether they do this work under the direct auspices of an academic institution. I thank Denise Gallo for bringing this issue to my attention.

22. See for, example, Willard Jenkins, “Wynton Bites Back: Addresses His Critics,” *NJSO Journal: The Quarterly Publication of the National Jazz Service Organization* 5, no. 1 [ca. April 1994]; reprinted in Lewis Porter, *Jazz: A Century of Change: Readings and New Essays* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 260–68. Over the past decade or so, many jazz musicians have become college faculty. Lacking Ph.D.s, however, the vast majority of them are hired as lecturers or artists-in-residence, without full membership in the academic club.

Submerged-official reception is shadowy but long on impact: communiqués and short exchanges circulate among experts whose published work is often the essence of official reception. These communications, typically taking place on Internet electronic mailing lists, may never find their way to print. The exchanges do, nonetheless, exert influence on the thinking and writing of the scholars and journalists who participate in this high-level loop of opinion and fact. Electronic mailing lists constitute the latest format of casual research- and opinion-sharing that crops up from time to time.²³ That which begins as submerged-official reception often becomes official.

Indie reception is significant, if only for its sheer volume, and holds a prominent place in this study. My use of the term indie recalls another use of the term, deriving from a recurring pattern of inattention by recording industry giants to emerging music trends, to their eventual dismay. Two examples of this pattern: the major record labels ignored rhythm and blues, as they fostered rock and roll in the 1950s; and, later, they failed to recognize the democratization and increasing availability of sampling software, which allowed the rise of a subversive hip-hop industry. The independent producers' proclivity for sampling and recontextualizing previously released material has loosed a sampling (and soon after, an MP3) culture that now threatens to dismantle the majors' control of their own products. Similarly, independent-minded fans and non-sheepskinned scholars have long contested canonized historical narratives on jazz. Excluded from, and perhaps dismissive of, the official reception apparatus, these indies' comments are unheeded by critical "majors."

RECEPTION OF JAZZ: OFFICIAL, INDIE, QUASI-OFFICIAL, AND SUBMERGED-OFFICIAL

Official Reception and Jazz

Several reviewers have written about *Jazz*, and I mention a few here: Francis Davis's review for the *Atlantic Monthly*,²⁴ David Hajdu's piece in the *New York Review of Books*,²⁵ and Ben Ratliff's *New York Times* article.²⁶ Each of these reviews addresses issues surrounding the Burns project, and I will refer to them throughout.

23. For example, such exchanges were printed in newsletters during the rise of musicology and ethnomusicology in the United States. In the case of ethnomusicology, these missives led to the formation of the Society for Ethnomusicology, and the newsletter in 1953 was eventually transformed into the journal *Ethnomusicology*.

24. Francis Davis, "I Hear America Scatting," *Atlantic Monthly*, January 2001, 76–78+.

25. David Hajdu, "Not Quite All That Jazz," *New York Review of Books*, 8 February 2001, 31–33.

26. Ben Ratliff, "Fixing, for Now, the Image of Jazz," *New York Times*, 7 January 2001, Arts and Leisure section.

Critical reception is assumed to be independent of the work being criticized. Jazz artists and their critics portray themselves as independent, even antagonistic. Writers, both academics and journalists, are careful to preserve their autonomy and, therefore, their integrity as critics. Both parties, however, live in an ecosystem: reviewers and artists depend on each other to maintain their own viability. Two intersections illustrate the point.

The first is the permeable border between the academic and journalistic spheres of writing on jazz. Journalists and academics often wear each other's hats, exchanging ideas and data, as in the case of liner-note authorship, and refer to each other frequently, exchanging ideas and data, both in print (official reception) and in private communication (submerged-official).

The second is that jazz journalists are routinely called upon to both criticize and publicize jazz performers and performances. The entertainment section of the typical metropolitan newspaper is as likely a venue for feature articles and interviews as it is for criticism. To support these entwined efforts, musicians, whether themselves or through their publicists, routinely provide to journalists and their editors biographical details, anecdotes, interviews, and even prewritten feature articles, as press kits.²⁷ Sometimes the feature writers and reviewers are one and the same. These materials aid deadline-harried journalists who, even in the act of criticism, make considerable use of them. This is not, of course, to suggest that reviewers are not striving for objectivity; the reviews by Ratliff, Hajdu, and Davis are particularly insightful. But while for decades jazz writers have acted as arbiters of taste, many critics' attention, and so that of their readers, has been drawn to certain features of the music or musicians, in disseminated information under at least partial control of the publicist. When the journal or newspaper review appears in the most-read medium, the impact is strong.

Role of the Internet

The Internet complicates the reception ecosystem. The insignificant cost of creating and maintaining Web sites and their easy accessibility via powerful search engines allow any number of opinions to gain wide circulation, bypassing the official publicity mill. In addition to official sites, with the *directed* information they provide, there are other sites, unrelated to Burns and company; the contributors to these sites are not very

27. Not only do record labels support entire departments to provide these materials, but independent musicians are regularly exhorted to develop reviewers and feature writers as part of an overall publicity strategy. See, for example, James Gibson, *Getting Noticed: A Musician's Guide to Publicity and Self-Promotion* (Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 1987).

likely to toe the party line. The number of these sites is impressive: a Web search on 20 March 2001 using the combined keywords “Ken Burns Jazz” yielded 26,400 matches (see fig. 1), and a second search on 17 April yielded “only” 11,600 matches.²⁸ Although a few of these were commercial sites purveying *Jazz*-related merchandise, the rest were all over the map, from adjudicated sites related to scholarly journals, to which I will return below, to homemade chat sites. While it may be possible to discern the scholarly or other credentials of each of these Web sites, what interests me here is the sheer proliferation of opinion. If we estimate a range from two to several tens of thousands of visitors to a site—actually, for some Web sites, for example *Billboard.com*, the hits can easily be in the millions—the reception of *Jazz* is lively indeed, far livelier than a “normal” reception study might describe.

Indie Reception and Jazz

The battle over *Jazz* is being waged by a broad spectrum of folks. A large number of sites are either oppositional to official sites or are sites for specialized readership: information clearinghouses, critical forums, and fan chat sites. They include (official) industry webzines, such as *AllAboutJazz.com* and *Billboard.com*, as well as (indie) musicians’ personal Web pages, fan Web pages, such as *Epinions.com*, and personal Web pages of individuals seeking contact with like-minded Web surfers. The types of contact between individuals range from sharing jazz trivia, whether or not with reference to the Burns series, to lauding their favorite musicians (many of whom are unnoticed by the Burns film), and boosterism of jazz generally. There is often a cultishness about these sites: a protectiveness, a guarded stance toward the critical and academic world, not exactly anti-intellectual, but skeptical of the “merely” academic. Often they are the well-informed voices of aficionados. Together they comprise a significant part of the web of reception, with considerable influence.

Epinions.com

By way of example, *Epinions.com* invites the visitor to get “personalized recommendations and brutally honest, unbiased advice—or get paid to write a review!” Such reviews are clearly deemed more trustworthy, useful, and accessible than those found in academic or journalistic

28. A Web search can be tricky. There is a strong possibility that a search will pick up duplicate entries. Prominent sites (i.e., the official sites) tend to be the ones that are duplicated. But if we were to discount the number by as much as half, the number of sites still nears six thousand. Not hits—sites.

HotBot results: Ken Burns Jazz

wysiwyg://4/http://www.hotbot.lycos.com/?search=1&MT=Ken+Burns+Jazz

LYCOS HotBot | Site Map | My Lycos

Results for Search within these results

FEATURED LISTINGS

- [Buy Ken Burns JAZZ... Here](#) - Find exactly what you're looking for at Shop.ws. As an Amazon affiliate partner, we also have similar...
- [Buy Ken Burns' Jazz at Discount Prices!](#) - Our movies, music and book superstore has Burns' Jazz documentary film masterpiece on VHS...

Search Partners

FROM THE LYCOS NETWORK

- [Burns' Jazz Critiqued](#) - Ken Burns' Jazz series is critically reviewed in FEED magazine.

WEB RESULTS 26,400 Matches 1 - 10 [next >>](#)

Get the [Top 9 sites for "Ken Burns Jazz"](#)

- 1. PBS - JAZZ A Film By Ken Burns: Home**
The companion Web site to the latest production by acclaimed filmmaker Ken Burns, JAZZ celebrates America's greatest original art form.
1/30/2001 <http://www.pbs.org/jazz>
See results from this site only.
- 2. Amazon.com: buying info: Ken Burns JAZZ: The Story of America's Music [BOX SET]**
Popular Music - Artist Name - Album Title - Song Title Classical Music All Products Classical Power Search Explore this album buying info listen to samples editorial reviews customer reviews Customers also bought these albums these o
1/28/2001 <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B000050HVG>
See results from this site only.
- 3. Ken Burns - Ken Burns' Movies, Films, Books and News-- Ken Burns**
Resources News/Home Reviews Resources Festivals Filmmakers Television Official Film Sites News Archive Film Store Film Trailer Top Ten DVD Docs Book Store Site Info Search Feedback Features Ken Burns Revi
3/16/2001 <http://www.documentaryfilms.net/kenburns.htm>
See results from this site only.
- 4. Ken Burns Jazz**

1 of 3

03/20/2001 10:34 AM

Fig. 1. Lycos Web search results

HotBot results: Ken Burns Jazz

wysiwyg://4/http://www.hotbot.lycos.com/?search=1&MT=Ken+Burns+Jazz

NOW LOADING FLASH 4 VERSION NON-FLASH VERSION The Story Of America's Music JAZZ is on PBS now! Click here for the complete broadcast schedule and station finder. Ken Burns is America's storyteller. With The Civil War and Base
 1/9/2001 <http://www.legacyrec.com/kenburnsjazz>
 See results from [this site only](#).

5. Epinions.com - Reviews of Ken Burns' Jazz
 Epinions.com has the best reviews and advice on Ken Burns' Jazz. Get personalized recommendations and brutally honest, unbiased advice -- or get paid to write a review!
 3/15/2001 http://www.epinions.com/mvie_mu-1101828?sp=i2
 See results from [this site only](#).

6. Ken Burns Jazz
NOW LOADING FLASH 4 VERSION NON-FLASH VERSION The Story Of America's Music Ken Burns is America's storyteller. With The Civil War and Baseball , he transcended the subject matter and created events that captivated the nation. Wi
 1/29/2001 <http://www.vervemusicgroup.com/kenburnsjazz>
 See results from [this site only](#).

7. KPLU 88.5: NPR News and All that Jazz
 Jazz is alive as KPLU is the premier internet jazz radio station serving the jazz and blues fans in Seattle, Tacoma and the Pacific Northwest with Real Audio and Windows Media Player.
 1/28/2001 <http://www.kplu.org/>
 See results from [this site only](#).

8. Borders.com - Ken Burns Jazz
 Find in Books Music DVD/Video Customer Service | Shopping Bag | Your Account | Expert Searches Jazz: The Film Jazz: The Music The Artists: A Closer Look After enthralling viewers with The Civil War and Baseball , filmmaker Ken Burns now
 1/27/2001 <http://go.borders.com/boutiques/kenburns/index.xcv>
 See results from [this site only](#).

9. Ken Burns' 'Jazz' History On 28 Discs
 News Index Artist of The Day Special Report This Week's Poll Hot Product New Releases Album Reviews Digital Downloads Gold & Platinum Hits of the Web Billboard Charts Music To My Ears Chart Beat Online Ask Billboard Sites Sounds Tour Finder Live
 1/31/2001 http://www.billboard.com/daily/2000/0810_03.asp
 See results from [this site only](#).

10. Ken Burns Jazz
 Ken Burns film Jazz explores the roots of America's most creative and unique music
 3/3/2001 <http://jazz.about.com/musicperform/jazz/library/weekly/aa011001b.htm>
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1 - 10 next >>

SECOND OPINION

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Fig. 1. Continued

reviews. Pointedly avoiding official reception, Epinions.com offers a simple, standardized review format (see fig. 2): a title, a pro-and-con statement, and an overall evaluation out of a possible five stars. Further, visitors to the site who read these reviews vote on how helpful they are, from "excellent" to "very helpful" to "somewhat helpful," and so on.

Two themes emerge in these Epinion.com critiques of *Jazz*, one laudatory (e.g., jazz as America's music) and the other pejorative (e.g., omissions of key players). Nearly all of the reviewers assign high marks to the series. "MsHooterville's" approving entry, "Jazz 101 and Beyond," arises from the "excellent editing, narration, interviews, historical photos and music." The lone sour note comes from "Jazzlover46," whose "con" overshadows the "pro": "Too many greats left out, and an overemphasis on Louis Armstrong." Overall, the series rates four out of five stars.

New York Times on the Web Forum

Over the past few years, major newspapers and journals have recognized the importance and visibility of the Web, and have launched Web-based editions. Prominent among these is the electronic edition, *New York Times on the Web*, which provides reader forums of its own. The current news format of the electronic edition is made to look like the *Times* print version, but now with hypertext links allowing the reader to go to related stories and features, as well as to see a chronological thread of stories, editorials, and forums that relate.²⁹

Forums like the *Times* operate in the cracks between quasi-official letters to the editors and indie chat sites. Administered by a *Times* staffer, its forums are associated with, but not really "of" the *Times*. Yet, they are a mouse click away from the story: "official" and "indie" made proximal. They are interwoven, although not integrated: it is still possible to tell who is speaking with the authoritative voice. It is questionable, though, who has the last word.


The *Times* maintained a forum devoted to jazz, which amassed over three thousand entries from the fall of 2000 to February the following year. The presence of the discussion thread, if not, strictly speaking, its content, seems to have been tied to the Burns special. We know this because although the thread began the previous fall, the activity on it was most intense from December to February, when the Ward book and *Jazz* compact discs hit the market.³⁰ Since that time, the world has moved on




29. Because the print and electronic versions are often identical and distributed concurrently, I address the print and electronic news media in this section as combined. See <http://www.nytimes.com> (accessed 22 May 2003) for the online version.

30. The series originally was slated for broadcast in the fall season of 1999.


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Ken Burns' Jazz
(6 member opinions)

Ratings Summary
OVERALL: 3.5/5.0
★★★★☆

ACTION FACTOR:  2.0
SPECIAL EFFECTS:  4.0
SUSPENSE:  3.0
Based on 6 member opinions.

 **Help others decide and earn money!**
Write your own opinion.

Recommending	Not Recommending	Both
Member opinions on Ken Burns' Jazz		
Sort by Product Rating	Sort by Date Written	Sort by Opinion Rating
★★★★★	In The Spirit Of Black History Month Celebration by charles Pros: A true American Musical Art Form; Cons: Some great names are not mentioned	Jan 22 '01 Very Helpful
★★★★★	Ken Burns' Jazz: Jazz 101 and Beyond by Mchosterville Pros: Excellent editing, narration, interviews, historical photos and music; Cons: Impossible to cover all great musicians, even in 19 hours.	Jan 23 '01 Very Helpful
★★★★★	No, Jack! It won't make you an expert! by Anuzachan Pros: A very fine introduction to what was our true American music and became the world's Cons: None. An introductory work, bright, beautiful... No less and certainly no more, OK?	Feb 09 '01 Very Helpful
★★★★★	Jazz by Ken Burns and PBS-Midterm by mike holmes Pros: A thorough examination of the American art form: jazz Cons: A little too much emphasis on early jazz	Jan 23 '01 Very Helpful
★★★	Jazz gets most, but not all, of its due by Jazzlover46 Pros: If you've forgotten how much you love jazz, this film will remind you. Cons: Too many greats left out, and an over-emphasis on Louis Armstrong	Mar 16 '01 Very Helpful
★★★★	It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing! by zenzazmons Pros: An excellent timeline of America's first original music! Cons: Focuses on certain individuals while only touching on others.	Feb 06 '01 Very Helpful

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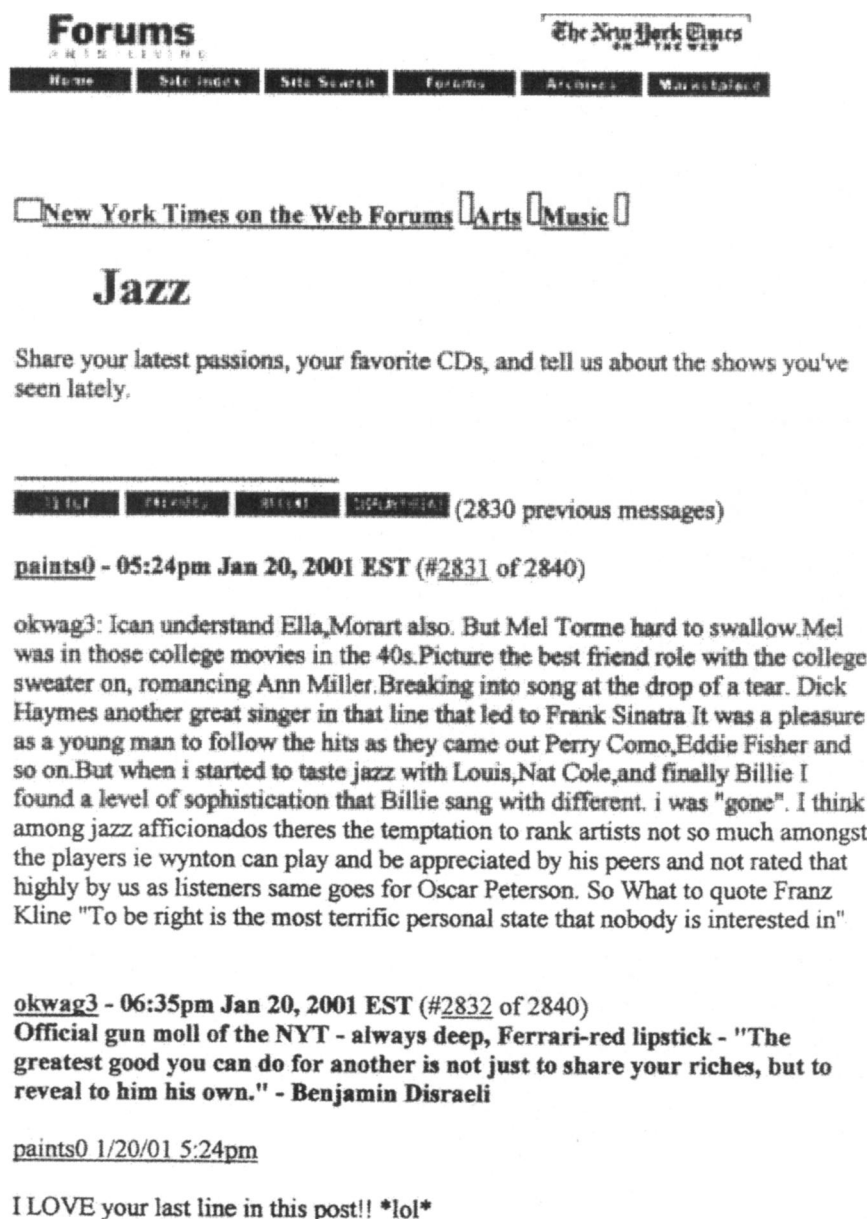
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Fig. 2. Epinions.com reviews

to other topics of interest; the forum for jazz is no longer being maintained by the *Times*.

While the reviews in Epinions.com are pithy but generally favorable, the commentary in the *Times* forum quickly begins to focus on the film's shortcomings. A snapshot view of these postings, as of the third broadcast week (see fig. 3), is summarized and arranged by topic and date (see



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Jazz

Share your latest passions, your favorite CDs, and tell us about the shows you've seen lately.

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[paints0](#) - 05:24pm Jan 20, 2001 EST (#2831 of 2840)

okwag3: I can understand Ella, Morart also. But Mel Torme hard to swallow. Mel was in those college movies in the 40s. Picture the best friend role with the college sweater on, romancing Ann Miller. Breaking into song at the drop of a tear. Dick Haymes another great singer in that line that led to Frank Sinatra. It was a pleasure as a young man to follow the hits as they came out. Perry Como, Eddie Fisher and so on. But when I started to taste jazz with Louis, Nat Cole, and finally Billie I found a level of sophistication that Billie sang with different. I was "gone". I think among jazz aficionados there's the temptation to rank artists not so much amongst the players ie Wynton can play and be appreciated by his peers and not rated that highly by us as listeners same goes for Oscar Peterson. So what to quote Franz Kline "To be right is the most terrific personal state that nobody is interested in"

[okwag3](#) - 06:35pm Jan 20, 2001 EST (#2832 of 2840)

Official gun moll of the NYT - always deep, Ferrari-red lipstick - "The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches, but to reveal to him his own." - Benjamin Disraeli

[paints0](#) 1/20/01 5:24pm

I LOVE your last line in this post!! *lol*

Fig. 3. The New York Times on the Web "Forums"

But I don't really care about Mel's acting.

His version of "A Cottage For Sale" I'd put up against Sinatra's "In the Wee Small Hours" ANYTIME as THE broken heart song. I almost can't bear to listen to it when I'm in a GOOD mood!!

And Mel's rendition of "These Foolish Things".... *oh my... *sigh**

IMO, Mel doesn't sing a phrase so much as *make love* to it, he can be so intimate. Sometimes, I think he and the mike should be behind closed doors. ;-)

okwag3 - 06:36pm Jan 20, 2001 EST (#2833 of 2840)

Official gun moll of the NYT - always deep, Ferrari-red lipstick - "The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches, but to reveal to him his own." - Benjamin Disraeli

Re: Patricia Barber:

An acquired taste. I wish she wouldn't do EVERYTHING at tempo = "funereal."

But her song "Silent Partner" on her *Modern Cool* CD is to DIE for. (And whoever is playing trumpet on that cut is an uncanny sound-alike for Miles.)

("Let It Rain" on that CD is also a winner.)

singinsumo 1/20/01 3:49pm

--*blush*--

You're sweet. Thank you. ;-)

chipstern - 09:08pm Jan 20, 2001 EST (#2834 of 2840)

credo quia absurdum

Wow, don't like Billie or Mozart and actually liked the way Dinah Ross sang Billie's songs.

PatPatPatPatPatPatPatPatPatPatPatPat....

Sigh....you are fast fading from my radar screen. Somebody help me.

By the way, I loved the Supremes and all of the early Detroit-Motown...and I was listening to THE MAGIC FLUTE when I read this post.

Fig. 3. Continued

NY Times forum discussion prior to advertising blitz for *Jazz* (no mention of Burns or *Jazz*):

Isn't Creative Musician redundant?... by *mimfilms1* - Dec 29, 00 (#2546 of 2841)
singinsumo -- Your point's well-taken (about mv)... by *barnesgene* - Dec 29, 00 (#2547 of 2841)
Great article about Chico O'Farrill in today's... by *mimfilms1* - Dec 30, 00 (#2549 of 2841)
owing to a discussion here some months ago... by *chris563* - Dec 31, 00 (#2553 of 2841)
Just saw a recent performance by the Chick Corea... by *paulaedelstein* - Dec 31, 00 (#2554 of 2841)

Forum Discussion as pre-broadcast advertising heats up:

Was in Border's on New Year's Day and saw the book... by *barnesgene* - Jan 3, 01 (#2577 of 2841)
Ken Burns invented jazz, don't you know... by *chipstern* - Jan 3, 01 (#2578 of 2841)
saw a commercial on PBS for that Ken Burns thing... by *chris563* - Jan 3, 01 (#2579 of 2841)

Forum Discussion on the day of and the day after the first broadcast segment (8-9 Jan.: 37 of 41 postings devoted to Burns's *Jazz*):

WYNTON MARSALIS IS NOT A JAZZ ARTIST!... by *21cb1* - Jan 8, 01 (#2599 of 2841)
21cb1 I second that emotion... by *paints0* - Jan 8, 01 (#2600 of 2841)
21cb1 1/8/01 1:46am I have you ever considered... by *bird_33* - Jan 8, 01 (#2601 of 2841)
I really like Wynton's classical CDs and have... by *barnesgene* - Jan 8, 01 (#2602 of 2841)
but think of all the neat-o archive footage this... by *chris563* - Jan 8, 01 (#2604 of 2841)
Bird, Maybe a more apt analogy might be... by *pk2031* - Jan 8, 01 (#2605 of 2841)
Well, if the Burns thing turns out to be a bust... by *kollington* - Jan 8, 01 (#2606 of 2841)
Oh, yeah -- the Burns jazz documentary... by *decougar* - Jan 8, 01 (#2614 of 2841)
Just A Footnote: It might be fun to have Wynton... by *bird_33* - Jan 8, 01 (#2615 of 2841)
Uhh, this Wynton cat has, at least, a genius for... by *chemins* - Jan 8, 01 (#2616 of 2841)
Steam is picking up on all of this... by *chipstern* - Jan 8, 01 (#2617 of 2841)
The way I see it, Marsalis is for those people who... by *greatwhitenorth0* - Jan 9, 01 (#2618 of 2841)
Wait until you see the way Burns and Co... by *chipstern* - Jan 9, 01 (#2625 of 2841)
Who IS Ken Burns anyway?... by *maxwebster3* - Jan 9, 01 (#2626 of 2841)
chipstern 1/9/01 10:26am Well, you have an... by *thriden1* - Jan 9, 01 (#2627 of 2841)
Well I surprised myself. I started to get... by *nedned7b* - Jan 9, 01 (#2628 of 2841)
I'm with Chip one hundred percent on this one... by *trenwell1* - Jan 9, 01 (#2629 of 2841)

Forum Discussion after 3rd broadcast (11 Jan: 35 of 42 postings):

Bix Second Best and Derivative?... by *ahaim* - Jan 11, 01 (#2661 of 2841)
Dare I say it, I'm starting to get burned out on... by *kollington* - Jan 11, 01 (#2664 of 2841)

Forum Discussion after 2nd week (18 Jan.: 10 of 16 postings):

When is Burns going to get to E.I.I.A. for heaven's... by *okwag3* - Jan 18, 01 (#2785 of 2841)
Some earlier poster wondered why *Jazz* only... by *celfan1* - Jan 18, 01 (#2788 of 2841)
earlier when I mentioned dave brubeck in a post... by *chris563* - Jan 18, 01 (#2790 of 2841)
YAAAAAANNNNNNNN!!!!... by *maxwebster3* - Jan 18, 01 (#2791 of 2841)
Before we completely Burns out on this thing, I'll... by *mimfilms1* - Jan 19, 01 (#2808 of 2841)
As for JAZZ: For narsisistic bores to prance and... by *macdonald12o* - Jan 19, 01 (#2809 of 2841)

Forum Discussion as the series draws to its close (no Burns discussion):

Check out Jack Teagarden's take on "A Cottage for... by *johnshade1* - Jan 21, 01 (#2835 of 2841)
chipstern 1/20/01 9:08pm Oh no!!!!... by *okwag3* - Jan 21, 01 (#2836 of 2841)
Tahiti, at the rate you're going, we'd be lucky to... by *chipstern* - Jan 21, 01 (#2837 of 2841)
Are you referring to Django Reinhart? by *celfan1* - Jan 21, 01 (#2838 of 2841)
Norris Turney, sax man with Ellington band dies at... by *lynn99* - Jan 21, 01 (#2839 of 2841)
I'm just wondering if anyone has yet heard the new... by *trenwell1* - Jan 22, 01 (#2840 of 2841)

Fig. 4. Summary of the *New York Times on the Web* “Forums”

fig. 4). The Burns series discussion picks up steam just before the film’s first broadcast and quickly becomes the main topic. Gradually, the discussion of *Jazz* falls off, until by 21 January, it is no longer mentioned.³¹

One feature of these discussions is their anonymity. It is rare for a contributor to use a real name. And yet the breadth of knowledge and depth of involvement is remarkable. There are several tangential discussions that demonstrate this, for example a discussion on Burns’s treatment of singers.

31. This silence changes, of course, with the broadcast of the final segment on 31 January. I address that final segment below.

Responding to a comment a few days earlier, that Burns has slighted jazz singers generally and Ella Fitzgerald specifically, one commentator has likened Fitzgerald to Mozart. A discussion ensues about other omissions and undervaluations, now centering on male singers of the forties and fifties. “Okwag3” places Mel Tormé in the group of underappreciated artists. “Paints0” complains,

I can understand Ella, Mozart also. But Mel Tormé hard to swallow. Mel was in those college movies in the 40s. Picture the best friend role with the college sweater on, romancing Ann Miller. Breaking into song at the drop of a tear.

“Okwag3” rejoins:

But I don't really care about Mel's *acting*. His version of “A Cottage For Sale” I'd put up against Sinatra's “In the Wee Small Hours” ANYTIME as THE broken heart song. I almost can't bear to listen to it when I'm in a GOOD mood!!

By the next afternoon, “Johnshade1” joins in:

Check out Jack Teagarden's take on “A Cottage for Sale” if you want melancholy.

And so it goes, a set of running conversations and debates about favorite performers and recordings, sharing opinions and arcane information. Against this backdrop of expertise, the *Jazz* series seems not so much a provider of information as Ken Burns's final exam, before any number of jaundiced schoolmasters, red pencils at the ready, challenging whether Burns gets it right. Indeed, “getting it right” is one of Burns's overriding goals, as he spells out in the short documentary, *The Making of Jazz*:

It's intensely satisfying, as opposed to having a daily deadline, where you have to turn something out quick, but you don't have time to get it completely right. Here we have an opportunity to get it completely right. We keep working with it, with our hands and with our minds, and most importantly with out hearts, until we get it right.³²

These forums feature highly independent opinions, placed in opposition, not necessarily to the conclusions of the official reception, but to its assumption of authority, asserting an authority of their own.

32. Excerpt from *The Making of Jazz*, a short documentary on the film's creation, included on the DVD for episode 1.

Quasi-Official Reception: The Blue Ribbon Opinion Survey

In addition to review articles, newspapers often feature opinion surveys. As in the case of letters to the editor, opinion surveys require reaction, not objectivity. In the "man on the street" survey, the reader has few expectations; but surveys of experts hover between the realms of official and indie. For the opinion piece, "Watching *Jazz* for Its High Notes and Low,"³³ the *New York Times* posed the question "Is the Burns series a fair representation of jazz?" to musicians and other prominent people involved in the jazz industry, or affected by the music and culture that *Jazz* portrays. I shall call this article the Blue Ribbon Survey.

The Blue Ribbon Survey includes comments by Jon Faddis, a leading trumpeter who came to prominence as a protégé of Dizzy Gillespie in the 1960s; Joe Lovano, a saxophonist who has recently become nationally prominent, although he has been on the New York jazz scene since the 1970s; and Joshua Redman, one of the most visible "young lions" to emerge in the early 1990s, a beneficiary of the Wynton Marsalis aura. Also included are avant-garde composer and jazz educator Ran Blake; musicologist Scott DeVeaux; historian Robin D. G. Kelley; Michael Dorf, owner of the jazz club, The Knitting Factory; and critics Martha Bayles and Terry Teachout.³⁴ Since the survey features a cross-section of musicians, critics, industry figures, and academics; because it features reactions rather than scholarship; and because the opinions are anything but unified; the respondents operate at a quasi-official level, i.e., they give considered but largely unedited opinions in a respected forum.

Where is this respected forum located? You will find the print version at the newsstand, but you will also find it on the Web, in the *New York Times on the Web's* op-ed site. The fact that one would expect to find Ben Ratliff's (official) review, the (quasi-official) Blue Ribbon Survey, and the (indie) jazz forum side by side *only* on the electronic version demonstrates how the Internet blurs boundaries of reception.

Submerged-Official Reception, *Jazz*, and the Web

During the past several years, the Internet has become home to an increasing number of such official organs. In addition to the *New York Times on the Web* there are Web versions of the *Boston Globe*, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Review of Books*, and the *New Yorker*, as well as such targeted official journals as *Jazz Times*, *Jazziz*, *Down Beat*, and *Billboard*. Academic societies also make use of the Web: the American Musicological Society

33. "Watching *Jazz* for Its High Notes and Low" [opinion forum], *New York Times*, 7 January 2001, Arts and Leisure section.

34. The respondents had all seen advance tapes of the series.

(AMS), International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM), Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM), and Society for American Music (SAM) all have Web sites.³⁵

In times past, we might not expect to read analysis and opinion from the world of musical scholarship until some months and years after an event. But in the fast-paced world of the Internet, even scholarly discussion is on the fast track. In addition to the indie electronic discussions already mentioned, which are often well-informed but largely ad hoc, academic organizations maintain electronic mailing lists of their own. That is, they distribute e-mail discussions vetted by an administrator, like the newsletter exchanges in the early days of American musicology and ethnomusicology, but now discussions can take place over hours and days instead of weeks and months.

The AMS's online discussion became particularly lively around the time of the *Jazz* broadcast, and centered on a core of issues nearly identical to those addressed by the official, quasi-official, submerged-official, and indie sites of reception we have encountered so far. It is when we consider these myriad voices together that themes emerge, themes which undermine Burns's discourse on jazz, as "America's [Classical] Music."

RECURRING ISSUES

The voices in this complex tapestry of reception raise recurring issues that I discuss in the remainder of this study: (1) the problem of obscuring the music by talking over it or by playing clips instead of whole pieces—whether this technique moves the film along or does violence to performances as complete works of art; (2) the short shrift given to the past forty years in the final episode of the series—whether it does or does not trivialize important historical movements; (3) the omission or underemphasis of several key players—it does or does not unfairly omit great jazz figures; (4) the portrayal of music history as social history—it does or does not fixate on race relations; and (5) Burns's construction of jazz as "America's music," an issue closely related to, if not inseparable from, Wynton Marsalis's prominence in the project.

Regardless of what side one takes on these issues, one thing is clear—*Jazz* is at the center of a struggle for an explanation of jazz music's role in society and its value as music.

35. The Web addresses for these are: <http://www.boston.com/globe/>, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>, <http://www.nybooks.com/>, <http://www.newyorker.com/>, <http://www.jazztimes.com/>, <http://www.jazziz.com/>, <http://www.downbeat.com/>, <http://www.billboard.com/>, <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/music/ams/>, <http://www.iaspm.net/iaspm/welcom.html/>, <http://www.indiana.edu/~ethmusic/>, <http://www.american-music.org/> (all accessed 22 May 2003).

Talking Over the Music

The (quasi-official) Blue Ribbon Survey's Lorraine Gordon, owner of the Village Vanguard, expresses unhappiness over the intrusion of expert commentary in the film:

Every time I found myself moved almost to tears by the eloquence of one gorgeous image after another, up popped some so-called expert to tell me how to understand everything that I'd just seen. The voice-over narration was far less intrusive; it actually complemented the visuals pretty effectively.³⁶

Members of the American Musicological Society are less forgiving on a related topic. Throughout the month of January, members of the (submerged-official) AMS electronic mailing list criticized the Burns editorial decision not to play songs in their entirety, but rather to play them as background under commentary by talking heads. Burns himself was certainly aware of the potential for criticism on this issue, or so his spin in the film indicates. In an interview segment within *The Making of Jazz*, he describes several types of relationship between music and text in the film. He explains his editorial choices: "sometimes we talk about a tune while it's playing, but we talk in it, among it, in the pauses. Sometimes we're talking about a *kind* of music and it's in the background. Sometimes it is just background" (14 January 2001).

To some, the DVD version of the film presents a partial solution. Mark Davenport, of the University of Colorado at Boulder, points out to the AMS electronic mailing list members that there are three full-length song performances at the end of each episode. "These additions are wonderful, especially with the quality of picture and sound on DVD," he says. "I'm sure I'll use these in class" (14 January 2001).

The issue is of vital interest to AMS members, whose work in colleges and universities involves teaching as well as research. Teachers routinely struggle with the thorny pedagogical problem of how to call attention to musical features as they are happening in real time and simultaneously stay out of the way of the sound. Burns's use of 497 separate pieces of music in the film magnifies the problem further.

Again, the DVD release offers a partial answer. At the viewer's option, the title of a song currently playing is displayed, and displays full discographical information at the end of the film segment. In many cases the full recording is available in the various accompanying compact discs to the film. The approach assumes that the viewer will take the trouble to locate the recording and listen again, with the commentary freshly in

36. "Watching *Jazz* for Its High Notes and Low."

mind. It may be clumsy, but it does invite repeated listening. The rub for the listener, and the deft move for Burns, is that the listener must now invest in more products: the DVD to tell the historical tale and to give listening ideas, and the compact disc set with which to do the actual listening. This makes the music available but expensive. How expensive? Up to five hundred dollars. Here's a conundrum: by purchasing the twenty-two compact discs, the listener supports the artists financially, if not exactly directly.³⁷ At the same time, though, the cost of the products is equivalent to a mortgage payment for over half the country. Underlying the advertising effort then, is a tacit understanding of *Jazz* as for the affluent, no matter jazz music's populist roots.

The Final Episode

The film's final segment, "A Masterpiece by Midnight," set off a torrent of argument. According to the official synopsis from the PBS Website, "during the '60s, jazz is in trouble . . . ; jazz is searching for relevance . . . ; jazz loses the exuberant genius of Louis Armstrong and the transcendent artistry of Duke Ellington . . . ; [and] a new generation of musicians emerges, led by trumpeter Wynton Marsalis." In his *Times* review, Ben Ratliff articulates the most common critical response:

The film's heroes of the last 40 years are Dexter Gordon . . . and, of course, Wynton Marsalis. The "avant-garde" is summed up by bits about the Art Ensemble of Chicago, which is almost ridiculed by the process of editing, and Cecil Taylor, the only musician in the film to be disrespected by one of its talking heads.

According to Mr. Burns, this is what happened in the 1970s: the deaths of Ellington and Armstrong, the start of Miles Davis's jazz-rock period and the stateside return of Dexter Gordon. When it comes to fusion, the film gets hopelessly square. The script talks about the use of "electronic" bass instead of electric. . . . The 1980s and 1990s are a quick stream of images with no context.³⁸

The strongest rejections of Burns's narrative center on this segment. Across the reception band, experts and aficionados alike rail against the idea of spending seventeen and one-half out of nineteen hours portraying the first half of the century, and collapsing the period 1960–2000 into

37. Revenues certainly find their way to the artists, but the details are not public.

38. Ratliff, "Fixing, for Now, the Image of Jazz." Ratliff refers to the following exchange in the film: With the screen depicting Cecil Taylor rehearsing for a performance, the voice-over relates, "Cecil Taylor once said that since he prepared for his concerts, the audience should prepare, too." The film immediately cuts to Branford Marsalis, who says, "That's total self-indulgent bullshit, as far as I'm concerned" (episode 10: 24:00–24:19).

a single episode—and not even the whole episode. The (submerged-official) AMS electronic mailing list proves to be the exception to these heated reactions. The list members brought this concern up, but tentatively. Saying that since Burns seems to be doing a film not so much on jazz music as a “means to examine the American condition and character,” Michael O’Connor “can even forgive him for quickly running through the later years of jazz since the music has had less of an effect on American society since the 1960s than it did in those years from birth to mass appeal” (24 January 2001).

This view mirrors Burns’s own reluctance to come to terms with a period of jazz history that saw an explosion of styles. Like Burns, O’Connor (and the AMS list generally, judging by the absence of challenges to O’Connor’s post) backs away from questioning the course that left them floundering for a roadmap at the onset of the 1960s.

The (quasi-official) Blue Ribbon Survey response is more forceful yet more divided.³⁹ Cultural critic Martha Bayles sees the fast-forward as reflective of the music, rather than a flaw in Burns’s vision: “If the film falters after 1961, it is because the music did. Jazz verged on chaos in the 1960s. But so did the other arts, and jazz was quicker to right the balance—perhaps because most jazz people know better than to cut their own roots.”

Disagreeing, trombonist Roswell Rudd finds it “odd that the first nine episodes deal with increments of no longer than 10 years while the last, 1961 to the present, focuses on the subsequent demises of the previously acknowledged innovators who peaked in the 1940’s and 1950’s as if nothing of substance was being created thereafter.” “The film suggests that there was no innovation from 1960 onward,” he continues. “This I know to be false based on what I heard, saw and participated in during the period 1958 to 1976 in New York.” Rudd scoffs at Burns’s disclaimer that the recent past is too soon to allow historical perspective, that “40 years is not enough perspective to be able to understand . . . the period under scrutiny.” Ben Ratliff’s (official) review echoes the point, expressing alarm at Burns’s avoidance of recent history. The danger, to Ratliff, is that it seals the identity of jazz as *merely* historical, as belonging to an earlier age and therefore irrelevant in today’s musical world:

Mr. Burns has explained, in his defense, that he did the same thing with *Baseball*—cut short its recent history—because the present is the province of journalists, not historians. I’d suggest that jazz is different from baseball because the game keeps changing. If you are 12 years old and see clips of Ted Williams, you will persuade your parents to buy tickets to a baseball game,

39. “Watching *Jazz* for its High Notes and Low.”

and you will be satisfied: baseball, now, is sufficiently similar to what it was then. If you are 12 and see film clips of Duke Ellington, you will persuade your parents to buy a Duke Ellington record. What will the film do for the sake of live jazz, other than Mr. Marsalis and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra? Not much, besides suggesting that the last 40 years has been uneventful. Sorry, kid.⁴⁰

Robin D. G. Kelley, a consultant on the film, nonetheless in the Blue Ribbon Survey puts distance between himself and Burns's historical outlook:

As a foot soldier among an army of advisers, I proudly bear some responsibility for *Jazz*, although I've never been fully comfortable with the film's neat evolutionary schema. Tracking jazz's evolution requires some agreement over what "jazz" is. Had *Jazz* devoted more time to the music after 1960, the question could not have been avoided. *Just when musicians were exploding the category of jazz . . . the music achieved [social] stature as art music worthy of repertory. In other words, its boundaries were being fixed and called into question simultaneously. . . .* [emphasis added] Perhaps the Ken Burns–Wynton Marsalis conception of history is itself a product of the crisis of definition, an effort to fix the music's boundaries in the wake of a couple of decades of boundary crossing and instability?⁴¹

Kelley's perceptive recant suggests two additional issues, raised in a variety of media, which are closely linked to the problem of jazz's definition and limits. The first of these is the "Great Man" view of history; the second, the attempt to bracket music history off from social history.

The Missing "Great Men"

Across the reception spectrum, commentators grapple with omissions and misrepresentations of prominent jazz figures. Indie critics on *Epinions.com*, for example, complain that Burns omits or underrates key performers and composers. "Charles" (22 January 2001) likes that the Burns film describes "a true American Musical Art Form." On the other hand, "some great names are not mentioned." "MsHooterville," like Charles, bemoans the fact that it is "impossible in [*Jazz*] to cover all great musicians, even in 19 hours" (23 January 2001). Likewise, "Zenjazzmonk" does not like the focus "on certain individuals while only touching on others" (6 February 2001).

Similarly, in the (quasi-official) Blue Ribbon Survey, Jon Faddis, trumpeter and director of the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band, puts forward two of these central critiques:

40. Ratliff, "Fixing, for Now, the Image of Jazz."

41. "Watching *Jazz* for its High Notes and Low."

It gave me the melancholy blues—the sadness that comes from realizing that so many of the significant contributors to our music were apparently not consulted and definitely not represented. . . . [Further,] while I realize full inclusion may not have been feasible, I nonetheless find the omission of James Moody, Bill Evans, Erroll Garner, Keith Jarrett, Benny Carter, and many others curious, if not disturbing.⁴²

Francis Davis, in his (official) *Atlantic Monthly* review, adds avant-gardists Sun Ra and Albert Ayler to the list, as well as Mildred Bailey, Woody Herman, Stan Kenton, Lennie Tristano, Art Pepper, Duke Ellington’s sidemen (as a body), and the many arrangers for big bands in the 1940s.⁴³ The list grows with each commentator. A frequently cited omission is George Russell. And the omission list is not limited to individual performers. Ben Ratliff says in his *New York Times* review, “I think it was a mistake not to include anything about various satellite *genres*, including western swing, klezmer, and rhythm-and-blues; that there’s little more than a peep of Latin jazz since the 1940s is weird indeed.”⁴⁴

Rarely do these various writers question *whether* the Great Men narrative is the proper one; the only disagreement seems to be about who has been left out of the pantheon. Some have gone so far as to snipe at the Great Men that *are* included. We might think of this as “my genius can beat up your genius,” a version of the cult of personality accorded Western “classical” composers for over two centuries.

A few observers smell a rat, though. James Parsons, posting to the (submerged-official) AMS electronic mailing list on 20 January 2001, complains that the series seems “fixated on presenting history in a very traditional way: the accomplishments of the ‘great’ few men (and almost exclusively men).” Parsons’s comment resonates with David Hajdu’s (official) review in the *New York Review of Books*:

As if to leave no doubt that jazz masters deserve the same reverence long accorded Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and other composers in the European tradition, Burns presents his subjects in the terms he would have found in a music textbook three or four decades ago. There is an artistic hierarchy, headed up by Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Charlie Parker; in fact Armstrong is directly compared to Bach repeatedly, and Ellington to Mozart at least once. . . . The ranking being chronological as well as qualitative, a paternalistic narrative is implicit; each master left his innovations—swing time, tone color, abstraction—for the next to pick up and advance.⁴⁵

42. Ibid.

43. Davis, 77–78.

44. Ratliff, “Fixing, For Now, the Image of Jazz.”

45. Hajdu, 31.

As Hajdu points out, when historians insist on portraying jazz musicians in similar terms to canonical Western art figures, they are likely to distort important features. The problem is more than the Great Men choosen: it is the Great Man model itself. Considered together, Hajdu's official review, Kelley's quasi-official comment, and exchanges in the AMS electronic mailing list shed light, both on the problem of the "Great Man" view of history and a related one: the attempt to separate music history from social history.

An exchange on the AMS list illustrates this point, especially in light of Hajdu's review. In the film, Duke Ellington is portrayed as a compositional genius, comparable to Stravinsky and Mozart. Hajdu describes the narrative: Music "flow[ed] effortlessly from his pen, as the narrator describes Ellington composing alone in his locomotive sleeper while the members of his orchestra slept."⁴⁶

Hajdu goes on to point out that, on the contrary, Ellington's way of composing was much more likely to incorporate his sidemen's musical personalities and to sift through their compositional ideas, often in a think-tank-like setting. This is a point made often before, by Richard Crawford,⁴⁷ Mark Tucker,⁴⁸ and others. He continues:

His musicians' improvised solos became part of their leader's compositions. Ellington worked with the members of his orchestra cooperatively and motivated them to contribute ideas. An inspiring stimulus and a profoundly gifted editor, he kept his ears open. . . .⁴⁹

Later in the film's narrative the voice-over mentions Ellington's musical closeness to the harmonic language of Frederick Delius. This moment in the film piqued the interest of Bill Rosar, editor of *Film Music* and a frequent contributor to the (submerged-official) AMS electronic mailing list. Rosar claims that the "Delius" harmonies came, in fact, by way of Broadway composer-arranger Will Vodery, whom Rosar cites as far more influential:

Right off the bat, something troubled me in the account of Duke Ellington's development as a composer, namely, no mention was made (at least that I heard) of his mentor, New York arranger Will Vodery, from whom Ellington himself said he had learned a lot about harmony. . . . Interesting, too, is the fact that Ellington loved the music of Delius, but claimed he was not influenced by it. . . . (12 January 2001)

46. Ibid., 32.

47. Richard Crawford, "Duke Ellington (1899–1974) and His Orchestra," in *The American Musical Landscape*, Ernest Bloch Lectures in Music, 8 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 184–212.

48. Mark Tucker, "Post-Canonical Ellington," *J.S.A.M.* [Institute for Studies in American Music] *Newsletter* 28 (spring 1999): 4–5, 15.

49. Hajdu, 32.

Richard Wexler, musicologist at the University of Maryland, responds:

It’s true, I think, that Ellington learned a certain amount from Will Vodery, as well as Henry Grant and Will Marion Cook. Although he had a year or so of private lessons from Grant, I wonder if he got much more than occasional advice from Cook and Vodery. It’s probably more in keeping with reality to think of Ellington as primarily self-taught. (13 January 2001)

Wexler’s response suggests that Ellington sifted through ideas from his mentors much as he sifted through ideas from his sidemen. Wexler goes on:

As far as his knowledge of Delius is concerned, I wonder if that isn’t pretty much a canard. Put yourself in Ellington’s shoes for a moment: He’s worked hard to develop his very dignified, elegant persona, and he finds himself compared in public to Delius. . . . What kind of response could he make to that? “Nevuh hoid-a him”? Or, “Ah, yes, love him madly”? (13 January 2001)

Rosar agrees that Ellington’s “Delius” language is indirect. According to Rosar—and he cites Barry Ulanov’s 1946 biography of Ellington to support his point—Ellington knew Delius’s harmonic language, but not through close study of Delius. Instead, he writes, Ellington picked it up through Vodery’s Broadway show arrangements (14 January 2001). Rosar quotes Ulanov: “From Vodery, Duke derived a feeling for the pentatonic constructions of Claude Debussy and his followers. . . . It has become customary to ascribe the major classical influences on Duke—Delius and Debussy and Ravel—to direct contact with their music. Actually, his serious appreciation of those and other modern composers came after his meeting with Will Vodery, after his years as, first, an irregular, then a steady ‘audience boy’.”⁵⁰ Further, Ellington himself asserted no direct Delius influence:

In Ellington’s memoir *Music is My Mistress* (1973), a portion of an interview with Ellington is reproduced bearing on the Delius question. He was asked, “You are said to have been influenced by the English composer Delius. Have you ever listened to his music?” to which Ellington replied in the affirmative, “In 1933, in England. When I got there people were saying some of our music sounded like Delius, and when I told them I had never heard Delius, they brought me presents of Delius records by the London Philharmonic, Sir Thomas Beecham conducting. I was hooked on listening, but could not copy a bit of it.”⁵¹ (Rosar, 14 January 2001)

50. Barry Ulanov, *Duke Ellington* (New York: Creative Age Press, 1946), 195.

51. Quoting from Duke Ellington, *Music Is My Mistress* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973; reprint, New York: Da Capo, 1976), 470.

While disputing Rosar's assertion that Vodery was Ellington's mentor, Wexler does allow that Vodery influenced the bandleader. Wexler speculates on how Broadway shows, rather than classical scores, might have exerted influence in Ellington's oeuvre:

In July of 1929, Will Vodery suggested to [his employer, Florenz] Ziegfeld that they include Ellington's orchestra in their latest revue, *Show Girl*. The production also featured Gershwin's *An American in Paris*. It ran for 111 performances, which is to say that Ellington, who in his younger days had cultivated the ability to stand behind a pianist and pick up what he was doing on the first hearing, had 111 opportunities to absorb various things from Gershwin's ballet. This, I'd say, is just one example of how he might have gained some familiarity with the musical language of the time. (16 January 2001)

Burns seems to have strained to include the Delius reference, *pace* Ellington, and yet he and his researchers have managed to bypass the Vodery reference in Ulanov. One explanation is that to lay Ellington's adventurous harmonic language at the feet of Vodery would be to diminish Ellington's imaging as a "serious" composer on the basis of his lack of "real" engagement with Delius's work.

But this kind of anxiety over compositional influence on Ellington assumes the traditional classical hierarchy. In such a scenario, the band or orchestra musicians' role is to implement the ideas in the score, while the *real* game of artistic "catch" is being played over their heads, by the composers. Burns misses the chance to show how the African American cultural practice of quoting becomes a structural element in jazz composition, mirroring the Signifyin(g) tradition in jazz improvisation.⁵² Similarly, given our understanding of Ellington's métier as collaborative—which Hajdu places in the African half of an African American tradition—Ellington's gift is to adopt and edit ideas, to "keep his ears open." The problem is that, in purveying a jazz "Great Man" narrative, Burns gives a misleading impression of how Ellington worked. The portrait we see may be beautiful, but it's not Ellington.

Outside the reception of *Jazz*, though, scholars have begun to question the Great Man orientation. Prominent among them is Samuel Floyd who writes:

52. See, for example, Krin Gabbard, "The Quoter and His Culture," in *Jazz in Mind: Essays on the History and Meanings of Jazz*, ed. Reginald T. Buckner and Steven Weiland (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 92–111. See also Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); and Samuel A. Floyd Jr., *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Gates's respelling of Signifyin(g) asserts a black semiotics; as Floyd's work shows, his morphology has penetrated the discourse of African American musics.

The mannerisms, limitations, and traditions of academic form and substance help give the impression that [jazz] is merely a species of European-derived music, causing both [academically-minded] critics and listeners to miss the point of the music’s real and essential aesthetic power.⁵³

Underlying both the “my genius can beat up your genius” game and the Great Man orientation in general is a struggle for cultural esteem. Since jazz is no longer characterized as popular—for generations now it has captured less than 6 percent of the music market⁵⁴—its value is portrayed in terms of its artistic merit. The most convenient historical model available is the Bach-Beethoven-Mozart transcendent genius.

Since the days of powdered wigs, music historians as well as theorists have discussed the score—written by the solitary composer—as if it were there that the music resides. Only in recent years has a body of scholarship critiqued such an orientation. Jazz scholarship has sadly tended to mirror and reinforce the earlier structuralism: sad because, as Hajdu’s discussion of Ellington points out, jazz music so prominently depends on collaboration, as well as collective knowledge of a store of harmonies, melodic gestures, expressive timbres, and popular song “standards.” The concept of a Great Man has a place here, perhaps, but it is a place heavily mediated by cultural conditions and interpersonal interaction.

The disturbing thing is that the *idea* of Great Men is largely left alone as an issue, even among Burns’s many critics. Rather than use the case of jazz to unpack the mythology of the Great Man, Burns buys into it. His presentation of Armstrong, Ellington, Parker, and others as Great Men merely places a jazz pantheon in a rent-controlled Olympus, next door to the “real” one.

“Music History” vs. “Social History”

In *Jazz*, Burns unleashes nearly five hundred recordings, digests nearly a million photographs, and includes a wealth of film and television clips. Despite the Great Man spin in the narrative, these bits of evidence show jazz as an interactive practice. Commentators express dismay, however, not that Burns should have used these tools to call the solitary Great Man image into question, but that the project did not reinforce it enough. They often complain that Burns highlights social history over the music “itself.”

The problem of Burns’s historical approach is a consuming issue in the (submerged-official) AMS electronic mailing list. Several correspondents voice concern that, with *Jazz*, Burns is obsessing over the history

53. Floyd, 273.

54. DeVeaux, *Jazz in America*, 1–4, 36–37, 56–57.

of race relations in the United States, to the detriment of a discussion of the music. James Parsons says, "All in all, I'd say Mr. Burns views *Jazz* more as a manifestation of American history than of American music history" (19 January 2001). "It seems," he continues, "that the story Burns is really telling is the story of race relations in the US." Denise Gallo, of Catholic University, says, "I always thought the beauty of jazz was that it had no colors (well, only blue, perhaps). That aspect of it has yet to be demonstrated in this series" (12 January 2001).

These members of the American Musicological Society express skepticism over what they see as too much context and not enough style history. Michael Strasser of Baldwin-Wallace College, for example, points to "the relative lack of jazz historians among those who comment on the music" (12 January 2001). To Strasser, Gallo, and Parsons, the *music* should be the topic.

Terry Teachout, in the (quasi-official) Blue Ribbon Survey, echoes these concerns. Teachout wonders where the music is:

"Jazz," says Mr. Burns, "necessarily becomes a story about race and race relations and prejudice, about minstrelsy and Jim Crow, lynchings and civil rights." That may be what *Jazz* is, but it's not what jazz was. *Of course you cannot properly tell the story of jazz without closely examining its cultural context*, but to treat the aesthetic achievements of geniuses like Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington as mere opportunities for historical point making is to distort them beyond recognition. Jazz is neither a war nor a sport—it is *an art form, one significant enough to be chronicled in its own right and on its own terms*, something that *Jazz* scarcely even attempts to do [emphasis added].⁵⁵

Two clauses are significant. The first, a grudging dependent clause, "Of course you cannot properly tell the story of jazz without closely examining its cultural context," is immediately dismissed, suggesting paradoxically in the second clause that "cultural context" is something that can be bracketed off from the music, that "it is an art form, one significant enough to be chronicled in its own right and on its own terms. . . ." Teachout's comment argues, wrongly, that jazz should be considered an autonomous music.

To return to the AMS electronic mailing list, Bill Rosar writes:

Couldn't it have been given a subtitle making clear that it was a social history so that one doesn't mistakenly expect . . . that the series is a history of *jazz*? Of course, social historians are convinced that all history is first social history (read: social and culture criticism), and their work reflects that fact.

55. "Watching *Jazz* for its High Notes and Low."

I for one find, though, that somehow the "[music] history" often seems to get lost in works created from this perspective. As for whether musicology could (or should) rise to the occasion to mount a social history like Burns' *Jazz*, I would ask: Is it the purview of musicology to take on large social issues, or is that not better left to social scientists? (16 January 2001)

To this, Gayle Murchison, of Tulane University, responds:

To look at matters of style, musical systems, or pitch structures alone reveals only one facet of this musical tradition. It seems as though no one on the list has mentioned something very important: the genesis, development, dissemination, and reception of this music was, is, and will be profoundly shaped by race, both in this country and abroad. (16 January 2001)

Murchison is right to point out that jazz music is profoundly shaped by race issues. Bebop, for example, came about largely in the face of the marginalization of black performers in New York during the early 1940s. As black jazz musicians faced an era of shrunken markets for dance bands, constrictive and stultifying big band arrangements, a ban on recording by the powerful New York Musicians' Union,⁵⁶ and a glut of underemployed jazz musicians, clubs like Minton's Playhouse became after-hours gathering sites for playing music, eating free food, showing off, and competing for stage time, in a time-honored African American musical tradition of "cutting." While white and Latino jazz musicians were certainly involved in these developments and even in leadership roles, the tradition was strongly African American. Bebop, in this light, was yet another in a long line of reactions to a dominant mainstream.

Murchison goes on to describe implications for other areas in musicology:

Consider the work of musicologists such as Strohm and Atlas and Lockwood and their studies of Renaissance music. Are they not addressing questions of social history in their work as they study the political organization of the Italian city-states and related questions of patronage; or, the Church, its hierarchy, cultural hegemony and music; or, the courts, patronage, and dedicatory or ceremonial motets? Should these questions be left to the social historian alone? . . . Certainly, the man who profoundly shaped inquiry into this field, the late, very honorable Claude Palisca did not think so.

Then why, when we confront jazz, do we tend to want to relieve ourselves of the responsibility of confronting race? Why do we collectively make the caveat that race and segregation are properly the province of historians and that "musical style" alone is our domain? (16 January 2001)

56. Scott DeVeaux, "Bebop and the Recording Industry: The AFM 1942 Recording Ban Reconsidered," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 41 (1988): 126–65.

Despite the rightness of Murchison's position, she seems to be swimming against a tide roiled by more than writers to the AMS electronic mailing list. Francis Davis, in his (official) *Atlantic Monthly* review, is also unhappy with the privileging of social context:

Bill Evans was the most influential pianist of the past forty years, but all we learn about him is that he once played with Miles Davis and was white. You'd think he was significant only as an example of the black trumpeter's enlightened employment policy.⁵⁷

Davis seeks a discussion of Bill Evans's *style*—his influence at the piano, and his conception of harmony and chord voicing. He wants more attention to the music, and less to biographical and social history. As he says elsewhere, "Does it contribute to our understanding of jazz to know that [Louis] didn't find true love until his fourth marriage? Did we need to spend quite so much time in the Savoy Ballroom?"⁵⁸

To my mind the answer is yes. It is axiomatic that jazz is a medium of self-expression. Aphorisms like "you can't play it if you haven't lived it," "you have to say something," and "jazz is as serious as your life" abound in jazz. But these aphorisms of personal expression also assume the social. It strains credibility to think that jazz can be removed from the context of its creation. First, it is social music, both in its historical ties to dance—despite an ironic stance, at times, toward dance music as "mere" entertainment—and second, it is primarily a group undertaking. To chronicle jazz music "in its own terms" *is* to chronicle it in its cultural and social context.

Jazz as America's Music

The prominent position of Wynton Marsalis as senior consultant bothered several on the AMS electronic mailing list, as it did in the critical press and on the various Web forums. Marsalis, famous as a performer, also has a long-standing interest in jazz history. He does, though, keep close to the historical view, which he conveys throughout the project, that jazz music is deeply invested in the blues (specifically as an expression of African American sensibility) and that jazz musically embodies American ideals of democracy.⁵⁹ Both of these views can be traced to cul-

57. Davis, 78.

58. *Ibid.*, 77.

59. Marsalis has also articulated his views in many writings and interviews. In one exchange with an unidentified interviewer, he reinforces his position that jazz (to be rightfully considered jazz) must swing: Q: "What do you think about European jazz?" WM: "If it's swinging and has some blues in it, I love it." Q: "No, I mean the free style of improvisation." WM: "Many musics have improvisation, so it is possible for musicians to improvise without playing jazz. Are they trying to swing?" Q: "No, but it's not always necessary to swing." WM: "In jazz it is always necessary to be able to swing consistently and at different

tural critic Albert Murray's many writings. These include *Stomping the Blues* (1976), in which Murray describes the blues as a redemptive engagement with the hardship that is the African American experience,⁶⁰ and *The Omni-Americans* (1970),⁶¹ in which he argues (1) that the relationship between mainstream and black culture in the United States is reflexive and mutually dependent, (2) that black people in the United States are as deeply invested in being American as they are in being black, and (3) that this investment and contribution must be recognized and esteemed.

On the face of it, Marsalis is right. But the portrayal of jazz in the film shifts away from being a metaphor for democracy, becoming instead a nationalistic answer to European art music. With Marsalis's orientation, enthusiastically endorsed by Burns, the notion of jazz as "America's Music" joined with the portrayal of Great Men (in terms redolent of the Western art tradition) creates a persistent subtext: jazz is more than "America's Music"; it is "America's Classical Music."⁶²

The show may have avoided an explicit link to classical music, but viewers did not miss the implication. Contributors who respond to Burns and Marsalis on the (indie) Epinions.com Web site do so in generally laudatory terms. Reviewers make strongly worded "pro" statements, particularly about the linkage of Americanism to jazz. "Charles" admires the depiction of "a true American Musical Art Form" (22 January 2001). "Aruzenchin" warns, "It won't make you an expert!" but allows that *Jazz* provides "a very fine introduction to what was our true American music and became the world's" (9 February 2001). Another, "Mike Holmes," notes the "thorough examination of the American art form: jazz" (23 January 2001).

Susanne Dunlap, in the AMS electronic mailing list, sounds a contrary voice. Her post focuses on one implication of the classical allusion, which

has to do with the church-like atmosphere of the modern concert hall, in which audience members are expected to adhere to certain conventions of

tempos. You cannot develop jazz by not playing it, not swinging or playing the blues." The exchange touches on jazz as "America's Music": Q: "You said there was no such thing as European jazz." WM: "I said you can't form a branch of a tree by ignoring the trunk." Later he defines jazz as "musical interplay on blues-based melodies, harmonies, rhythms, and textures in the motion of an improvised groove." Wynton Marsalis, *Sweet Swing Blues on the Road* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), 141–43.

60. Albert Murray, *Stomping the Blues* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976; reprint, New York: Da Capo, 1989).

61. Albert Murray, *The Omni-Americans: New Perspectives on Black Experience and American Culture* (New York: Outerbidge & Dienstfrey, 1970).

62. Burns's inclusion of James Lincoln Collier on the advisory board also makes this clear. See, for example, Collier's books: *Jazz: The American Theme Song* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); *Louis Armstrong: An American Success Story* (New York: Macmillan, 1985); and *Louis Armstrong: An American Genius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

etiquette, and those who do not risk censure. . . . It's a difficult balance to foster a respect for the efforts of composers and performers of all types of music . . . without creating an artificially reverent, fossilized, and alienating aura around these works. (19 January 2001)

Agreeing with her, James Parsons of Southwest Missouri State University points to a cultural divide (20 January 2001). Parsons says that listeners in the Western art music tradition have been conditioned to sit in motionless silence; he likens this to the "19th century notion that music is a kind of religion." In contrast, "the conventions of American popular music invite one to engage in all manner of physical motions and sounds in response to music. One mode of response is participatory while the other is not."

But, of course, what underlies Dunlap's and Parsons's comments is not so much a case of diverging audience traditions per se. They tacitly recognize that the trappings of classical music have long been associated with the upper class. With the aim of according jazz its proper respect as on a par with classical music, Burns and others have portrayed jazz as similar to classical music, in ways that do little to undermine the Western art tradition's superior place in the cultural hierarchy. Worse, the attempt to portray jazz as America's classical music applies an ill-fitting historical model that muddies our understanding of jazz style developments.

Again we confront the distortional problem of the Great Man. By tracing the "greats" he has chosen, Burns is trapped in a Genesis model that obscures much. To say that Louis Armstrong begat Duke Ellington, who begat Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker, who begat Miles Davis, and so on is to promote a counterintuitive "truth." None of these musicians played a *single* style of music. In fact, the history of jazz is replete with musicians who have played several different styles during any particular time period. Nor are styles monolithic: how much does the bebop style of John Lewis really owe to the bebop of Bud Powell or Thelonious Monk, except in the context of the other players on the stand? Further, the various styles of jazz have staying power: bebop, hard bop, fusion jazz, and avant-garde styles are all played today. Why? Because they each present opportunities for personal and interactive musical expression, and they each retain cultural importance.

Burns's inability to portray jazz as a cohesive historical thread in the final segment stems, not from the events being "too recent," but from the basic flaw carried through the first eight episodes, of portraying jazz as a single, cohesive historical thread at *any* given time.

CONCLUSION

I have written elsewhere⁶³ that music is best considered in its many intersections, of individual expression, personal interaction, intertextual interaction, culturally marked aesthetics, market forces, technological limitations and possibilities—in short, a host of interconnections, which I call a “web of affiliations.” Related to Mark Slobin’s description⁶⁴ of musical subcultures as interactive spheres of activity and influence—ethnoscape, ideoscape, finanscape, technoscape, and mediascape—the image of a web, in which all the strands interact more-or-less equally, suits my conception of jazz: the number of angles of vision is indefinite and therefore highly adaptable to the case at hand. Further, the interaction I describe includes the subcultural but also addresses interpersonal and personal threads, all entwined.

It makes more sense to consider jazz music in terms of its multiple engagements. This allows for greatness and personal distinction, but focuses attention on the music as a *practice*, in interaction between musicians, between the musicians and the audience, forebears and descendants, technologies and aesthetics, and on and on. From such a viewpoint, it is not only allowable to do musical history that includes social history; it is imperative to integrate the social into the fabric of the tale.

The various receptions I have described form a pattern of resistance to Burns’s vision. Although the objections are disjointed on the surface, taken together they undermine Burns’s master narrative; the multiplicity of opinions, however, makes it unlikely that a cohesive counternarrative will arise to take its place. What is clear is that jazz is multifaceted and multivalent. It confounds facile explanation. Resistance to tidy histories such as Burns’s reveals both the vitality of jazz creativity and the eclecticism of the people who love it.

63. Steven F. Pond, “Herbie Hancock’s *Head Hunters*: Troubling the Waters of Jazz” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2000).

64. Mark Slobin, “Micromusics of the West: A Comparative Approach,” *Ethnomusicology* 36 (1992): 1–88. Slobin’s use of the “scapes” metaphor is an adaptation of Arjun Appadurai’s 1990 morphology of subculture. Slobin, using Appadurai as a model, describes musical subcultures as interactive spheres of activity and influence—ethnoscape, ideoscape, finanscape, technoscape, and mediascape. Slobin also briefly invokes the term “web of affiliations,” first advanced in another context by Georg Simmel in 1922. My appropriation is an extension of Slobin’s. See also Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” *Public Culture* 2 (spring 1990): 1–24; and Georg Simmel, *Conflict* [with] *The Web of Group-Affiliations*, trans., respectively, by Kurt Wolff and Reinhard Bendix (New York: Free Press, 1955; originally published as “Der Streit,” chap. 4 in *Soziologie: Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung* [Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1908; 3d ed., 1923], 186–255, and “Die Kreuzung sozialer Kreise” in *Soziologie* [München: Duncker & Humblot, 1908; 1922], 305–44).