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Jazz and Musical Works: Hypnotized by the Wrong Model

ABSTRACT

It is difficult to place jazz within a philosophy of music dominated by the concepts and practices of classical music. One key puzzle concerns the nature and role, if any, of musical works in jazz. I briefly describe the debate between those who deny that there are musical works in jazz (Andrew Kania) and those who affirm that there are such (Julian Dodd and others), and I distinguish between claiming that there are no musical works in the jazz tradition and the more provocative claim that they are not performed in jazz performances. I argue that each side of this debate is partially right and that the first step toward resolving the puzzle is to reject inappropriate concepts of a musical work. In particular, Kania's and Lydia Goehr's accounts, derived from classical music practice, are rejected as general accounts of musical works. I then contrast the norms governing work performance in classical music (the *werktreue* ideal) with the practices governing performances of works in jazz, which I call realization or staging. Finally, I propose a model of jazz appreciation that incorporates a role for jazz works and that fundamentally differs from the way that classical musical performances are appreciated.

"You can't improvise on nothin', man."

—Charles Mingus[1]

"One of the oldest questions in jazz is what's improvised and what's composed."

—Ben Ratliff (2016)

I. INTRODUCTION: THE DEBATE

Andrew Kania argues that jazz is a musical tradition of performances without works:

> So why should an art with *only* performances and no works be considered inferior to one with *only* works (such as sculpture) or one with both works *and* performances (such as classical music)? . . . Since performances are different kinds of things from works of art, yet are the primary focus of critical attention in jazz, I conclude that jazz is a tradition without works. (2011, 400)

Although his argument collapses the difference between denying that jazz has *musical* works and denying that it has *art*works, it is clear that at the least he means to deny that there are musical works in the jazz tradition. As he puts it, "unlike classical music, jazz is not a *work*-performance tradition" (400).

Julian Dodd (2014) explicitly disagrees and so, implicitly, do Young and Matheson (2000) in their account of the metaphysics of jazz. *Contra* Kania, these writers express the entirely natural assumption that there are musical works in jazz just as there are in many other forms of music.

In this article I argue that, in spite of their overt disagreement, both Kania and Dodd are right—at least in their core insights. Dodd is right to insist that there are musical works in jazz and in jazz performance. But equally Kania is right to argue that jazz performance differs from performance of works in classical music in ways that are so significant that we have to view the jazz tradition of musical work performance as fundamentally different from the classical music performance

tradition. In Section II, I briefly review the case for saying that Kania's claim taken literally is wrong. This leads to a clearer formulation of his no-works thesis. In Section III the claim that there are musical works in jazz and that the no-works thesis is misguided is supported by rejecting inappropriate concepts of a musical work. Typically, these are normative accounts; in particular, Kania's and Lydia Goehr's very different accounts are rejected as general accounts of musical works. Section IV is devoted to amplifying the proposed (descriptive) account of musical works in jazz and to contrasting the identity conditions for their performance in jazz with those governing performance of works in classical music. Section V questions generalizations about jazz based on the concept of "standard form" jazz. In Section VI, I propose a model of jazz performance appreciation that includes a role for jazz works that fundamentally diverges from the role musical works play in classical music. (I will use "jazz works" as short for "musical works in jazz.")[2] In Section VII three objections to the proposed model of jazz appreciation are briefly considered.

II. *PRIMA FACIE*, THE NO-WORKS CLAIM IS WRONG

If we had the space, it would be easy to list thousands of jazz compositions, from Jelly Roll Morton's "King Porter Stomp" to Steve Coleman's "Harmattan"[3] (most first-rank jazz musicians these days compose pieces for their own performance), with the following, entirely incomplete list of compositions falling in between: "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" (Mingus), "Mood Indigo" (Ellington), "Chelsea Bridge" (Billy Strayhorn), "My Song" (Keith Jarrett), "Giant Steps" (Coltrane), "Milestones" (Miles), "Night Life" (Mary Lou Williams), "Un Poco Loco" (Bud Powell), "Queer Notions" (Coleman Hawkins), "Round Midnight" (Monk), "Footprints" (Wayne Shorter), and "Lonely Woman" (Ornette Coleman).[4]

Thus, one issue that is at stake, although not the primary focus here, is the respect due to jazz musicians as composers. Kania's position clearly implies that we should have admiration for jazz musicians as improvisers but not as composers.[5] However, in the jazz world the musicians mentioned above and countless others are explicitly respected as composers, and their musical artifacts are regularly called compositions. As Dodd points out, "Prima facie, the jazz *cognoscenti* treat standard form jazz as ontologically akin to classical music" (2014, 277). So, since there are musical works in classical music, there are musical works in jazz unless there is a compelling reason to deny this. As Dodd notes, "People knowledgeable about jazz speak and act as if 'Straight, No Chaser' is a multiply performable entity" (277). Given Dodd's systematic rebuttal of Kania's reasons for denying that there are musical works in jazz, I will assume that no compelling argument has so far been offered for the counterntuitive conclusion that there are no musical works in the jazz tradition.

We thus have the *prima facie* compelling inference:

1. X is a musical composition;
2. Therefore, X is a musical work

where 'X' may be replaced by any number of "pieces," for example, "Epistrophy" by Monk and Kenny Clark. Monk and Clark are credited with creating this composition; hence they created a musical work.[6]

That said, caveats should be noted. Not all composed musical artifacts are musical works. That category is reserved for completed musical artifacts meant to be performed as self-sufficient musical artifacts. Hence: musical sketches, parts of larger works, musical exercises, sound tracks to ads, movie or TV sound tracks, and so on are composed but not all are works.

In the everyday sense, then, it is obvious that musical works exist in the jazz tradition. But this does not capture the problem that I believe underlies Kania's argument. His denial is focused on the nature of jazz performances. Accordingly, a more instructive way to formulate the no-works thesis emphasizes his search for a musical work in a jazz performance:

(NWP) There is no musical work in a jazz performance—that is, a jazz performance is not a performance of a musical work.

Failing to find a musical work in jazz performance, it is natural to regard the notion of musical works in jazz as vacuous. I propose that the motivation for such a no-works thesis is based on implicitly assuming normative notions of what counts as a musical work. In the next section I

argue that two such accounts of what a musical work is are either implausible (Kania) or do not support NWP (Lydia Goehr) and hence NWP should be rejected.

III. HIJACKING THE CONCEPT OF A MUSICAL WORK

To understand how the discussion of musical works in jazz could have taken such a counterintuitive turn we need to distinguish the descriptive sense of "musical work" from various normative or evaluative concepts that do not track the ordinary concept of a musical work. "Normative" concepts of a musical work are accounts that are value laden, presupposing ideals about what a musical work should be—in this case, influenced by a classical music model of how works are treated in classical music—and counting only those as true musical works.

The descriptive or everyday sense of "musical work" governs the way the jazz musical world in fact identifies and re-identifies musical artifacts intended for performance. As Dodd says of works in the classical music tradition, they "are *repeatable* (that is, multiply instantiable) entities whose instances are their respective individual performances" and "in composing a work of classical music, a composer specifies a complex condition that a performance must fully meet in order to be a correctly formed (that is, accurate) performance of the said work" (2014, 277).[7]

Musical works in jazz, at least in the case of jazz "standards,"[8] tend to be much thinner in Stephen Davies sense (2001, 20)—that is, they are less detailed descriptions of all the possible musical variables that could define a musical work—than are post-1800 works in classical music. However, in arrangements the resulting jazz work becomes thicker—for example, specifying particular keys and instrumentation—although still affording significant room for variation and improvisation. These works are created by publicly notated scores or publicly exemplified musical structures (by performances and/or recordings), with or without lyrics, that are intended to be autonomous pieces that can be performed as complete works (or come to be treated as such by subsequent musical practice). They can be composed by an individual or developed through a group process—especially important for jazz—or even emerge over time anonymously as is the case with much folk music. That musical works in this descriptive sense can come into existence retroactively also explains why we treat the instrumental part of popular songs as individual works.[9]

In the descriptive sense of "musical work" even minor pieces are musical works, Beethoven's "March for Military Band" (WoO 19) as much as his *Hammerklavier*. The existence of a work is especially secured by publishing (for example, Orlande de Lassus), copyrighting (Ellington), or at least preserving the instructions encoded in a score (Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*). The *Oxford Dictionary of Music* says that Lassus "[w]rote nearly 2,000 *works*, mainly motets, madrigals, masses, canzonas, *chansons*, and psalms" (Kennedy and Kennedy 2013, 480, my emphasis). His works were published in 1555 in Venice and 1556 in Antwerp *inter alia* (Haar). Gary Giddins tells us that Ellington's "legacy is immense: some fifteen hundred copyrighted pieces, including swing instrumentals, ballads, ... piano solos and piano-bass duets ... blues ..." (1998, 106). These are works of music, hence musical works.

A musical work in the descriptive sense is not necessarily a good or profound piece. In contrast, one normative sense of "musical work" associates the concept with substantial, formally sophisticated works in the Western classical music tradition. One could call this the Romantic concept of a musical work since the veneration of classical musical works seems to have blossomed in the Romantic age with the rise of Beethoven worship. David Horn usefully delineates some of the connotations of this normative sense of "work." Among the associations of "work," he says, are achievement of an identifiable author who has shown creativity and that creativity lends authority; the work has originality; and this gives it potential for status, rank, and canonization (2000, 18–19). Although Horn suggests that there is discomfort in applying such an exalted concept to much pop music, there is nothing here that would not apply to many musical works in jazz.

Unless, of course, one has an elitist view that only some works in the classical tradition, specifically the masterworks, possess the right amount of creativity, musical originality, depth, and formal substance to merit the commendatory title "musical work." In any case, no such elitist notion is Kania's official reason for erasing works from jazz. His is a two-part inference: (1) a musical work is (must be) an artwork, and (2)

there are no artworks in jazz; hence, (3) there are no musical works in jazz. Although this is a valid inference, both premises are suspect.

The basis of Kania's argument is his search for an artwork in musical performances.[10] Since in classical music the relevant artwork in a performance is the musical work, this leads to the general claim that to be a musical work a musical 'object' must be a work of art. Depending on how we are to understand the concept of an artwork, this requirement appears simply to change the ordinary meaning of "musical work."[11] But it would be wrong, he claims, to think that this move depends upon appealing to an evaluative sense of "artwork." He says "The sense of 'work of art' that we are concerned with is not an evaluative one" (2011, 398).

If there is a subtle normative element in the Kania argument, it occurs in the requirement that he claims an object must meet to be an artwork. He says:

> What do we mean when we say that a particular type of entity is "the work of art" in some tradition? I suggested above that at the very least we seem to mean that it is a primary focus of appreciation in the tradition. (397)

To this conception of artworks he adds the denial that jazz 'pieces' are in fact a primary focus of appreciation: "no sound structure that any jazz performances share is a primary focus of critical attention in the jazz tradition" (397).

This reasoning is doubtful for several reasons. Granted that it is unexceptional to look for "the" artwork in a nonperforming art (painting, poetry), it is doubtful that this is an appropriate approach to performing arts. In such arts there are often multiple objects of appreciative and critical attention. In 1892 Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* exhibited two putative artworks when it was performed: Tchaikovsky's music (op. 71) and choreography by Petipa and Ivanov. Similarly, there were several artworks exhibited in a performance of *Parade*: Satie's music, Massine's choreography, and Picasso's sets and costumes.

So to look for "the" artwork in a jazz performance is to foreclose the possibility that there are multiple artworks (for example, song, arrangement, performance), and thus that the song (for example, "Epistrophy") is a work even though not the only one being exhibited.

Given this, a further assumption is needed to erase that 'piece' as a musical work in jazz. The criterion that Kania uses for this purpose is that an artwork must be the or a *primary* focus of "critical attention" (397, 400) or "primary focus of appreciation" (391, 397, 398, 399).

The same set of principles led Kania in "Making Tracks" to deny that rock songs, such as the Beatles' "Norwegian Wood," are musical works.

> *[S]ongs*—the very thin structures of melody, harmony, and lyrics—[are] pieces of music that may be performed, that is, instanced in live performances. However, these pieces of music are not the, or even a, primary focus of critical attention in rock, and thus are not musical *works*. (2006, 404)[12]

The denial that rock songs are musical works carries over into his account of jazz.

Unfortunately, it is unclear what is meant by "critical attention" in this account.[13] But if critical attention refers to what actual critics write about, then perusal of jazz writing will find references to both works and performances. Certainly jazz works have received critical attention. Here are some examples from Kernfeld (1995): Monk's "*Misterioso* provides a sample of his peculiar gift [insertion of unpredictable phrases] to jazz rhythm" (30). Of Mingus's "Fables of Faubus," Kernfeld says "the composed theme is vastly more interesting than the improvised solos" (110). He describes Ellington's "Ko Ko" as "brilliantly paced, moody, churning tone painting" (114). Moreover, jazz composition has been subject to musicological analysis.[14]

As Dodd implies, critical attention is not what makes a musical piece a musical work.[15] Is it a necessary condition of being a musical work or an artwork? Yes, in a way: every musical work *affords* critical attention, as do musical performances, solos, and so on. But whether an object *elicits* critical attention depends on the interests of the listener–critic and the properties of the work as well. There is no reason to think that jazz works cannot afford critical attention.

More central than critical attention is musical appreciation: what gives musical pleasure, what do knowledgeable listeners attend to in jazz? Suppose it is granted that in most performances of jazz standards the musical work takes a secondary (if often essential) role. It does not follow that it is not also *an* object of appreciation, for example,

forming part of the content involved in appreciating an improvisation on a theme in the original work.[16] Jazz performance is, of course, much more multidimensional as a site of appreciation than classical music performance. During an individual performance appreciation could include one or all of the following: the song, the arrangement (horn section riffs, for example), the various dimensions of a given performance, the qualities of solos/improvisations, and so on. In the 1930s, for example, attention of fans would have been on how strongly the performers could swing; for example, the dancers would respond and appreciate most strongly the swing or lack of it in a performance. But in addition to the various dimensions of a jazz performance, the works themselves have pleasurable properties: their melodies, their rhythmic complexities, their emotional charges.

The likely motivation for requiring that a musical work be a primary object of appreciation in a performance is an implicit commitment to the classical music model of appreciation. In the classical tradition musical works are primary objects of criticism at their premiers and, if they enter the repertory, often subjects of musicological analysis. Moreover, works are always in the foreground of musical enjoyment after many hearings. But, as I suggest below, the parallel to classical music appreciation is seriously misleading for jazz.

A widely influential account of musical works, very different from Kania's search for the artwork but also anchored in the classical music tradition, is due to Lydia Goehr in *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (1992). Her account would seem equally to support NWP. Goehr proposes that the concept of a musical work is socially constructed and only came into existence around the time of Beethoven as a result of the evolution of musical practice and the development of nineteenth-century art theory. From Beethoven onward, the classical music world came to treat musical compositions, especially instrumental works such as a Beethoven symphony, as high artworks, on a par with paintings and poems. Thus was born what Goehr calls the 'work-concept.' To be true art, musical compositions had to have and be treated as having the character of expressing the thoughts and intentions of a genuine artist, rather than that of a craftsman grinding out functional or entertainment music. So this conception of a musical work, like Kania's, ultimately turns on a normative conception of what counts as a musical work.

According to Goehr's account composers came to see themselves as producing 'works' that had the properties of "autonomy, repeatability, permanence, perfect compliance—concepts associated with the work concept" (1992, 119). For such intentions to be realized a work had to be composed for performance contexts in which such concepts were regulative of musical practice; above all performers had to embrace the ideology of *werktreue*: faithfulness to the composer's intentions as indicated in a score.[17] In E.T.A. Hoffman's words, all the performer's "thoughts and actions are directed towards bringing into being all the wonderful, enchanting pictures and impressions the composer sealed in his work" (quoted by Goehr, 1). In these terms she says, "Central to the historical thesis is the claim that Bach did not intend to compose musical works" (8).[18]

Presumably jazz composers too are not able to intend to compose musical works, since, as Goehr notes:

> Whereas in classical music performances we strive towards maximal compliance with a fully specifying score, in traditional jazz improvisations, where very different notions of compliance operate, musicians seek the limits of minimal compliance to tunes or themes. In most jazz, extemporization is the norm, and it is just this feature that forecloses the possibility of our speaking comfortably of one and the same work (rather than a tune, theme, or song) simply being instantiated in different performances. (99–100)

We can see in Goehr's account putative reasons why jazz compositions are not "musical works" and therefore why jazz performances are not performances of musical works.

First, it might seem that jazz musicians could not compose works because *werktreue* norms are not normative for jazz performances. Hence, even though a 'piece' can be copyrighted and theoretically given a strictly compliant performance (for example, by a nonimprovising student jazz band), if we assume it was originally intended for normal jazz performance, it cannot be a musical work in Goehr's sense because it was not *intended* for performance contexts in which *werktreue* compliance and ideology govern.

Second, such a *werktreue*-intention would be impossible in any case because of the more fundamental point that musical works on this view are only those musical artifacts that are governed by

strict norms of compliance with a score. This is so because that is the meaning of "musical work." We only say that Bach and Corelli composed musical works by a projection of our concept back onto their compositions and accordingly treating them in a way they were not (and could not have been) treated in their original musical context. On this view the 'work-concept' determines the extension of the expression, "musical work." An even more radical absence of *werktreue* norms obviously governs the performance context in jazz.

A third point is Goehr's hint that jazz compositions are so thinly specified ("tune, theme, or song") and so casually treated in performance that it is not possible (or at least 'comfortable') to speak of two performances as being of the same work.

So, grant for the sake of argument that around 1800 a certain set of norms of performance coalesced to more strictly govern thought about and performance of most pieces of classical music, norms such as strict compliance with more fully specified (thick) scores, respect for the work (involving preservation and editing of scores), concern to interpret it to capture the composer's intended meaning, viewing at least an instrumental work as having an autonomous meaning, and so forth. Does it follow that there are no musical works in the jazz tradition?

I believe this follows only if we embrace the view that the work-concept not only came to regulate the thought and actions concerning classical music works after 1800, but that it represents the current meaning of "musical work" in general, that whatever "musical work" referred to before 1800, the 'work-concept' notion spells out the conditions or criteria that determine what counts as a musical work *today* across the musical world. We can project this referring expression to earlier pieces in the classical tradition because we can treat them *as if* they had been musical works and accordingly perform them according to *werktreue* norms. But given the performance practices in jazz and the nature of jazz pieces, this is not possible.

The problem with this reasoning is that it is not a plausible interpretation of the descriptive meaning of "musical work."[19] A simpler account of the music world's entrenched inclination to see musical works throughout the entire classical music tradition as well as in the jazz tradition is that the concept of a musical work is much as Dodd's template spells it out and as Davies's picture of thin-to-thick works fills in. What Goehr has described, if we grant her description of music history, is that the new conception that came to the fore in the nineteenth century is a *specific type* of musical work, a type which has come to be the norm in the classical music tradition, not a concept that governs the meaning and extension of the general concept of a musical work.

In summary, neither of these accounts of musical works provides a plausible justification for NWP. Hence, given that it is so counter to ordinary thought and talk about jazz performances, it is reasonable to reject NWP.

IV. AMPLIFYING THE CONCEPT OF A JAZZ MUSICAL WORK

Jazz grows out of the popular music tradition. As such, musical works in jazz have been treated in musical practice much as songs generally are in that tradition, which is to say in a very different way than works in classical music. They are most often thin structures that, although intended to be treated casually, can be multiply instantiated; performances are intended to be and are received as of a given song/work. Although Goehr expresses discomfort with this claim, her discomfort only makes sense if these works are thought of as works *per impossible* in the classical music tradition. But that discomfort is unnecessary from a social construction point of view of musical works in general. Clearly, in popular music practice the criteria for performing a given song or work are vague and flexible; performers' intentions might be sufficient for new works by contemporary jazz players, but for familiar pieces, as Dodd mentions, recognizability-by-the-listener is a central criterion. Speaking of a performance that Chick Corea labels a performance of *Sophisticated Lady*, Dodd notes:

> For although this performance contains no *obvious* (that is, *straight*) statement of the melody, it certainly instantiates a good deal of the work's melodic (and harmonic) shape, and it is this fact that explains why the performance is *recognizable* as a performance of "Sophisticated Lady." (2014, 280)

Thus, a fundamental reason why jazz works differ from classical musical works is that the identity conditions for a performance to count as

a performance of a given musical work in jazz are much less strict or simple, and they are even more flexible than they are for popular songs with lyrics.

There are several reasons why.

First, usually there are no lyrics to identify an instrumental jazz work. Hence, even though they have evolved from popular music, re-identifying jazz works in performance is not a process grounded in the same way as it is for popular songs with lyrics, where even counterintuitive arrangements of songs (for example, Dylan's songs as gospels) are nonetheless clearly performances of the named song because, along with the familiar musical themes, the same lyrics are sung.

Second, there is not a sharp conceptual distinction between work and arrangement in jazz. Arrangements are essential and ubiquitous in jazz, even if some are simple and even if some are 'head' arrangements. Both the composition and the arrangement might seem to have a claim to be a musical work. However, jazz performance practice strongly favors denoting the song as what is performed, even though a few arrangements are so creative (for example, Gil Evans, Don Sebesky) and take songs to such new musical places that they can claim to be new, if derivative, works.[20]

Third, the conventional boundaries of same "musical work" in jazz performance practice compared to the conventions of common practice classical music are vague and elastic. Jazz musicians—at least for new music—sometimes stretch these boundaries by giving the same title to a live performance and a track on an album that is significantly different.

Fourth, there is much less emphasis on originality for jazz works. Consider Mary Lou Williams's arrangement of Berlin's "Blue Skies" for Duke Ellington's band as "Trumpets No End" (recorded 1946). Duke calls it a "takeoff on Blue Skies" in the 1947 Carnegie Hall concert.[21]

Fifth, the distinction between improvised solos and jazz works can become blurred when a solo becomes famous in its own right. An example is Lennie Tristano's celebrated improvisation based on "All of Me," which has become treated as a work in itself: "Line Up."[22]

Such factors illustrate that musical works in jazz are governed by different norms of compliance in performance and accordingly have a different role than works in classical music, not that they do not exist or have no role at all.

V. GENERALIZATIONS BASED ON A NOTION OF 'STANDARD FORM' JAZZ CAN BE MISLEADING

One of the ways that jazz compositions seem to be misplaced in the Kania–Dodd debate derives from their appeal to a notion of 'standard form' jazz. It is tempting to understand this according to the reductive pattern of a jazz 'standard' melody straightforwardly instantiated at the beginning[23] and plainly reprised at the end of the performance, while the heart of a performance is a sequence of improvisatory solos that define it as a jazz performance. Here is how Kania introduces this notion: "I take as my primary target 'standard form' jazz, where a paradigmatic performance consists of a number of solo choruses framed by a pair of statements of the head" (2011, 392). If this description is reductively understood in the way I've just suggested, the work (song) itself can come to seem of little importance compared to the solos. If there are no works of any significance in 'standard form' jazz, then there are no works in the jazz tradition, or so Kania implies.[24]

Such a picture of 'standard form' performance tends to go along with the common view of jazz as a soloist art, with heroic figures from Louis to John Coltrane and Miles. As Frederick Garber says, "Most jazz historians affirm that Louis Armstrong made jazz a soloist's art" (1995, 70). However, the focus on solos ignores the importance of the freedom of the whole group interacting in a quasi-improvisatory way throughout a performance even in 'standard form' jazz.[25] More important, there are many genres of jazz: swing, big band, West Coast, Latin/Brazilian, stride piano, jazz fusion,[26] and free jazz that can have different musical structures and different musical emphases. It is important to question the overly simple picture of 'standard form' performance as the paradigmatic characterization of jazz in general both because of the complexity and diversity of the past jazz tradition and because of the directions contemporary jazz is now taking.

One example of the complexity of the jazz tradition that the simple view overlooks is the plethora of tightly notated works ranging from swing band arrangements for many of the great jazz bands (for example, Redman's intricate arrangement of Fletcher Henderson's "The Stampede" [1926]) to Gunther Schuller's and George Russell's compositions in "third stream" jazz, Gil Evans's arrangements for Miles Davis, Sam Rivers's and

Bob Brookmeyer's compositions for large groups, and so on. Moreover, focus on 'standard form' overlooks the now common case of jazz performers writing their own complex compositions and, in many cases—for example, Tomika Reid and Roscoe Mitchell—composing pieces that are similar to pieces composed by contemporary classical composers and hence with as good a claim to be musical works as the classical pieces.

Nonetheless, simply stating that works both exist and are performed in jazz misses the crucial difference between the practice of work performance in classical music and in jazz. Kania is right to look at the jazz tradition as *sui generis* with respect to musical works and their performances. Moreover, this difference in compliance conditions is connected to a significant contrast between jazz and classical music appreciation.

VI. THE APPRECIATION OF JAZZ PERFORMANCE

Although there are common elements between the musical appreciation of jazz and appreciation of classical performances (for example, appreciation of instrumental virtuosity), appreciation of jazz performances involves applying a fundamentally different model from that appropriate to classical music performance. Central to appreciation of classical music is what I will call the Interpretation model. Classical performance is governed not only by *werktreue* norms of fidelity to the score, but also by the idea that through this faithful performance the listener is exposed to the work from the performer's perspective, the performer's interpretation of the work.[27] Different performers will bring out different facets of the classical work. The listener's attention is on the performance and simultaneously on the work (Nanay 2012), and hence on the relation of the performance to the work as well.

For jazz appreciation, on the other hand, it is difficult to find a simple model that will apply to the whole of the jazz tradition with its rich variety, from thoroughly orchestrated performances to completely free jazz, from early Cecil Taylor playing Monk's *Bemsha Swing* in 1955 (where there are recognizable if transposed and distorted elements of the Monk composition)[28] to later Taylor performances, which, although given titles, do not seem to involve recognizable themes or structures that were meant to be repeated in multiple performances. That said, and focusing on performances of works, I propose that the most significant feature of the jazz model of appreciation is a negative one: it does not relate works and performances as the Interpretation model does. The originating musical work is only one element to be considered in a jazz performance, and it (the work) is attended to by the listener in a different way than the listener attends to a classical music work.[29] The jazz work may be elaborated, embellished, manipulated, or deconstructed, taken as a launching pad for the players' and arranger's styles and interests. The jazz model does not treat such performances as *interpreting* the work, as bringing out the meaning or special properties of the work.

Instead, a way to view most jazz performances of jazz works is to view them as a sort of realization or staging[30] of the musical work, somewhat analogous to the way theatrical pieces can be staged in a very wide variety of ways and with cuts and transpositions. We might call this the Realization model. However, the analogy is not complete. The main reason why is that although the norms for performing stage works allow great freedom for the staging, the text is still to be largely followed (with allowances for cuts, substitutions, and so on); moreover, a theatrical staging is still a sort of interpretation of the work. In contrast, improvisation is central in jazz and expected even within a structure as complex as the "Rootie Tootie" at the Town Hall concert.[31] To take these points into account, I suggest that we call the special relation of musical work to its performance in jazz a *Jazz*-realization. However, we must not take the analogy of a realization as suggesting that the performance is aimed at casting light on the work itself. Nothing could be further from the truth for jazz. To appreciate a jazz performance of a work then is to hear it as a jazz realization.

In addition to the negative property of *not* hearing the performance of a work as an interpretation of the work, I propose that there is a positive property of jazz appreciation: a jazz performance is heard as necessarily unique. Not just unique in the way that any classical music performance is (given the usual variation of musical nuances) but unique because the experience is genuinely of music-making-in-the-moment; the performance is heard as spontaneous *as a whole* even when also heard as partly structured by an external pattern. Another way to put this is that a successful performance is heard as organically *developing* rather

than being predetermined as a whole and in detail by the musical work.[32] The performers respond to each other and to the music that has gone before—with the piece or the arrangement in their heads as well; they strive to play something in the moment appropriate to what has gone before and is going on in that moment.[33] Hearing that appropriateness is a key part of the listener's experience of the moment-to-moment organic development of successful jazz performance.

Do these features of the jazz model of appreciation preclude a significant role for the jazz musical work? No. However, the function of musical works clearly varies widely across the jazz spectrum. We can usefully distinguish three cases across this spectrum of work performance.

Case 1: At the far end of the spectrum of jazz performances is totally free jazz: a pure improvisation in which there is (presumably) a moment-to-moment response to what has been played. In such a case there is no musical work being performed.[34]

Case 2: An intermediate case, common in contemporary jazz, occurs when musicians play a composed work that is not recognizable to the average knowledgeable listener in the way that a jazz standard or popular song is. Certainly, structural elements will be obvious: instrumentation, rhythms, harmonic structures, themes, melodies, and improvisations may seem obvious, but the distinction between work and improvisation may not be obvious or definitive if the work is not in a familiar jazz form, such as a bebop or blues form. There may be an obvious overall structure as when the performers move toward some sort of climax. There is a sense of a beginning, middle, and end; even in an unusual case it will not seem to be just a series of episodes.[35] Because the work in this case is not familiar, the multifoldness of jazz appreciation characteristic of the next case will be only partial for that listener. Nonetheless, it is a jazz realization.

Case 3: At the other end of work performance from free jazz is the familiar case in which the musical work is recognizable (it may even be the primary object of attention). In this case full multifoldness applies. It involves attention to all the elements of the jazz performance: the voice and individual phrases of a soloist, for example, as well as the relation of these to the shifting textures of the other players including the rhythm players, the piano comping and figurations, other instruments' riffs, and all of this to the work being performed in the mental background, and so on. Even if it is in the background, there is also the musical pleasure of hearing the song as realized in the performance. This is not to say that such awareness is always or even usually the primary element of appreciation of the performance. The work can be the main object of attention, as in Mingus's *Fables of Faubus*, or it can be secondary as in the famous improvisations on *Body and Soul* by Coleman Hawkins (1939). It can also be an equal partner as in the brilliant versions of *Epistrophy* by Steve Lacy[36] and Eric Dolphy.[37] In these latter cases, the work plays an essential role: we cannot appreciate the musical imagination exemplified by the solos without being simultaneously aware of elements of the work.

In sum, I believe that the positive characteristic of jazz appreciation applies in each of the three cases. The uniqueness of each performance is guaranteed by the freedom of interaction and by the improvisations of various instrumental voices in each case.

VII. OBJECTIONS

Objection 1: Self-sufficient appreciability is missing. To distinguish musical works from musical artifacts that do not fit even the everyday concept of a work, we have seen that more is needed than a notated score, copyright, and intentions that the artifact be performed. To be a musical work, a musical object should be appreciable in itself. Yet, according to the jazz model, jazz works provide musical and structural elements to be used in performing a realization of those elements. So, although jazz pieces are copyrighted and intended for performance, they are not musical works in the way that classical pieces or even rock songs are.

Answer: Insofar as this objection presupposes the compliant performance practice of classical music as the only way to be autonomously appreciable, it begs the question. A jazz work, although thin, is itself appreciable in a realization in the sense that musical and expressive properties typical of musical works are apparent in the recognizable elements of various jazz realizations of the same work (for example, the rhythmic excitement of performances of "Cotton Tail" (Ellington)). Although a jazz work will typically have musical properties that reappear in various realizations, it is true that one of the main ways

some pieces are valued (*Tea for Two*?) is as much by what can be done with them as by the intrinsic properties common to most of their performances.

Objection 2: The uniqueness objection. Essential to the jazz model of appreciation is the claim that a performance is heard as unique, a one-off musical experience due to improvisatory passages and freedom of compliance with respect to any work or arrangement. However, a given performance is not *necessarily* unique, and this has been demonstrated by the note-for-note copy of *Kind of Blue* performed by Mostly Other People Do the Killing and by Jean-Yves Thibaudet's note-for-note copies of Bill Evans's recorded songs, for example, "Peace Piece."[38] Uniqueness is not a property that can be heard.

Answer: To hear a musical performance as a jazz performance is to hear it *as* unique in the ways that have been described, for example, to hear a passage *as* improvised. In all but special cases, performances are in fact unique and such passages *are* improvised. To hear a Bill Evans passage as improvised is probably not to make a mistake; in general, this is why reissues of jazz recordings feature alternate takes. To hear Jean-Yves Thibaudet's identical passage *as improvised* is to make a mistake, for his is a *copy* of a recording.[39] It is not, in fact, a jazz performance of "Peace Piece."[40] So these examples do not show that jazz performances are not in fact unique for they do not give us two identical *jazz* performances.

Objection 3: The firebird objection. It would be perverse to consider Don Sebesky's "Firebird/Birds of Fire"[41] to be a legitimate performance of the *Firebird* even though it instantiates themes from it. Similarly, while jazz works may exist independently of the usual performances in which their names are invoked, they are in the same position, that is, the performance bears the same relation to the work (a jazz standard, for instance) as does the *Firebird* to these jazz performances. Hence if these are not performances of such classical works, then jazz performances derived from jazz works are also not performances of those works.

Answer: The inclination to say that the works have not been performed in the case of the *Firebird* (sections) or the *adagio* movement of *Concierto de Aranjuez* in *Sketches of Spain* is prompted by the fact that those works are thick works governed by the norms of classical music performance. As such, the jazz arrangement and performance violates those norms and does not qualify as true to the original work. But jazz works are thin and governed by different norms of work performance; they typically afford and are intended for the sort of openness characteristic of jazz realizations.

VIII. CONCLUSION

I have argued that jazz music is misconstrued when viewed from the perspective of classical music. The classical music tradition is only one of several traditions in Western music. The jazz tradition has developed a different species of musical performance. There are musical works in both traditions, as well as in rock and popular music, and it is a mistake to privilege the masterpieces of classical music as the proper definition for all musical works. The ordinary meaning of "musical work" is commonly applied across the Western musical tradition to a wide variety of types of works. Accordingly, in the ordinary sense, there are many musical works in the jazz tradition. The deeper issue concerns performance of these works. I have tried to show that the loose and often minimal norms of what counts as jazz performance of works are integral to jazz performance and should not be thought of either as a pale imitation of real performance of these musical works or as taking the work as merely a source of inspiration. I have thus argued that Kania is right to think that jazz performance is categorically different from classical performance. However, he concludes that therefore musical works are not performed at all. Contrary to such a conclusion, I have argued that musical works are performed and play important roles in many, if not all, jazz performances. And, finally, I have offered an account of musical appreciation of jazz performances that takes into account the roles that jazz works can play. Jazz is not a tradition without musical works. Rather, it is a tradition that is unique in the way that it treats and appreciates its distinctive musical works.[42]

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1. Quoted in Kernfeld (1995, 119).

2. There are two basic kinds of musical works performed in jazz: (1) those that were composed for jazz performance, such as all those in the next paragraph, and (2) those that come from popular music, such as "My Favorite Things." Unless otherwise noted I will focus on the first or purely instrumental jazz works.

3. See the recording session described by Chinen (2015).

4. I include large ensemble works as well and reject the temptation to deny that a Maria Schneider, Gill Evans, or Stan Kenton composition does not count because the band (minus the solos) is playing from a detailed score throughout.

5. As Kernfeld notes, "Historical, musical, and financial considerations as well have traditionally undercut the status of jazz composers" (1995, 116). Kania attempts to mitigate the negative implications of his analysis this way: "The sense of 'work of art' that we are concerned with is not an evaluative one, thus it would not be a slur on jazz to claim that there were no jazz works in this sense" (2011, 398).

6. Clearly, I am appealing to our everyday Western concept of a musical work and thus to the way that people in the jazz world talk and behave. Surely this is the conceptual level on which we may hope to illuminate the aesthetics of jazz practice.

7. This is not to imply that correctly formed performance is a primary goal in jazz performance or that the same standards apply concerning what counts as correctness. Note that Dodd seems tempted to deny that a jazz performance is a performance of a work, for he suggests at one point, "[w]hether we call a performance which uses a work in this way [as the basis for spontaneous fashioning of music worth hearing] a 'performance of' the work does not really matter" (2014, 285). Hesitation to say works are performed in jazz is natural if we take as fundamental the compliant practice of classical music as the only way to perform a musical work.

8. Jazz standards, however, are far from the only musical works that are performed in jazz.

9. These should be regarded as cases of polysemy; the name of a song also comes to refer to the instrumental part alone. Brad Mehldau is said to play "River Man," and Coltrane played "My Favorite Things."

10. See Brown (2011) for criticism of Kania's methodology. Dodd (2014, 285) regards the concept *art* as obfuscatory.

11. For instance, from the concept that Davies (2001) analyzes. See Dodd's criticism (2014, 289n25).

12. It is false that the songs themselves are not often "a" focus of critical attention given the many articles in academic journals and books on rock songs. For example, see Doll (2011). Popular songs, more generally, have been the subject of serious musicological attention: see Forte (2001) and Jenness and Velsey (2006).

13. See Dodd (2014, 285–288) for further criticism of the primary-focus criterion.

14. For example, Norman (1999).

15. Dodd formulates and rejects Kania's position this way: "FA*: A kind of entity K is the work of music within

a given musical tradition Ω only if *K*s are a primary focus of critical attention within Ω[.] What we get is a piece of conceptual analysis that strikes me as quite clearly false. Our concept of a work of music would seem to be rather minimal" (2014, 287).

16. For a similar point in classical music, see Nanay, who argues: "[W]hen we aesthetically appreciate a musical performance, we simultaneously attend to both the features of the performed musical work and the features of the token performance we are listening to" (2012, 606).

17. "We assume further, that the tonal, rhythmic, and instrumental properties of works are constitutive of structurally integrated wholes that are symbolically represented by composers in scores" (Goehr 1992, 2).

18. Goehr's account has been subject to criticism concerning both the claim that there was a radical emergence of a new concept (see Davies 2001) and that the era of Beethoven and the romantic theorists mark the correct time for such an emergence (see White 1997).

19. Compare Dodd's (see n15 above) comment on Kania.

20. André Previn's clever versions of "Get Me to the Church on Time" and "Ascot Gavotte" (on *My Fair Lady* [1956]) show how a jazz arrangement can add substantial musical material and yet be regarded as performing the song.

21. Wayne Marsh's "Marshmallow," based on the changes of *Cherokee*, is another famous example.

22. See Sun (2013).

23. It is a mistake to think that the statement of a piece in jazz performance is always (or even usually) done in a straightforward way. For example, see the deconstructive introduction Joey Alexander gives "Giant Steps" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4V_uaxBVOw).

24. Kania adds, "But what I say should apply to almost all jazz, including free improvisation and performances of highly detailed jazz scores" (2011, 392). If true, this is not because almost all jazz performances conform to a reductive notion of 'standard' form.

25. Improvisation is not just in the solo; it is also in the extended freedom that occurs throughout, perhaps not in swing band arrangements but in the small group performances that the model of 'standard form' jazz seems intended to capture.

26. Kania excludes jazz fusion from his account, but surely much jazz fusion counts as mainstream jazz (for example, Chick Corea's "Spain").

27. See the account of performative interpretation by Levinson (1993). And see Nanay (2012) for simultaneous musical attention (twofoldness).

28. *Cecil Taylor in Transition*, Blue Note (BN LA458-H2).

29. Contrast with '*werktreue*' practice. "Room was to be left for multiple interpretations, but not so much room that interpretation would or could ever be freed of its obligation to disclose the real meaning of the work" (Goehr 1992, 232). The jazz composition does not have a meaning in this sense.

30. I refer to contemporary dance performance terminology: stagings in contemporary dance are often based on a minimal score and leave performers with great creative freedom.

31. This was an extended orchestral arrangement of Monk's original piano solo and can be heard on *The Thelonious Monk Orchestra at Town Hall* (1959, Riverside Records RLP 1138 and multiple rereleases).

32. Brown (1996) gives an account of this sort of appreciation of jazz performance, which he calls "informed listening." He characterizes the experience of listening to improvised music, music made in-the-moment, as the experience of "presence" (365). This results from hearing music that is "created *as* it is played" (365); such music is heard as embodying decisions made while playing, and this in turn leads to a sense of surprise and unpredictability.

33. An anonymous referee notes that some classical music also involves elements of spontaneity. So, is jazz significantly different? He/she gives the example of Glen Gould's Bach performances which, to his/her ear, "strike the listener as if the music is being creatively generated in the moment." Although to adequately explore this issue would require a separate article, we can say at least this: the classical performer is not deciding which notes to play, as the jazz improviser might, but rather matters of tempo, phrasing, loudness, and so on. In contrast, jazz musicians are free to choose from a larger set of dimensions including pitches, phrases, and harmonies. For informed listeners this difference surely leads to two different types of listening experience.

34. A related case, but too various to treat here, is the jam session.

35. Thus, the performance will not be understood as much for its creative play with an originating work as for how it all forms a whole, how the improvisations (often collective) make an overall pleasurable musical experience.

36. On "Remains" (Hat Hut 1992). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLWShjQvXRU.

37. On "Last Date" (Fontana records, 1964).

38. Jean-Yves Thibaudet, *Conversations with Bill Evans* (Decca, 1997).

39. A review of *Conversations with Bill Evans* on *AllMusic* says: "What happens here, though, is the antithesis of jazz, where the notes from spontaneous improvisations are canonized as the Holy Word, not to be tampered with" (Ginell). *Mostly Other People Do the Killing-Blue* is something new: a performance of a recording. I take this to be conceptual art music. For an in-depth account of the implications of MOPDtKBlue for jazz ontology and appreciation see Magnus (2016).

40. It is a general truth that an improvised passage can be transcribed. There are several transcriptions of Tristano's "Line Up," including Sun's (2013). This does not make the original not improvised nor does it make it not spontaneous in its original context.

41. On "Don Sebesky/Big Box" (CTI 1973).

42. For helpful comments I owe thanks to Jennifer Judkins, to the editors of the journal, and to two *JAAC* reviewers.