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MUS 362

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Bebop and Bop

Bop was a fairly natural next step for ultra-skilled musicians whose ears had become very trained to modes and chord resolutions. If people know the resolutions and scales, then they're basically transformed into the effect of notes, so bebop is for 'desensitised' musicians who know so much that pop conventions are the basics, and more on that later. If it was a video game, they'd be playing in hard mode all of the time. But there's a reason that players play in hard mode. They feel that it's the real game, they prefer the challenge. Easy mode just doesn't do it for them anymore and though the real game is harder, it's the real game. For some musicians, that is emphasised "Bop"!

Bebop was and is syncopation, standard swing rhythm established with some members playing double-time for the effect that makes it sound like bebop a la Louis Armstrong on West End Blues. It's onomatopoeia for the name as the end of phrases make that sound; and also, it's wrong note jazz because it was enharmonic, but the players liked those tensions and resolutions (or lack thereof) with their flat fives and so on.

Swing was really huge. It was pop, but it also had room for players and improvisation, and it required real technique to do well. It had its own fashion and lifestyle associated with it. But as with any cultural movement, when it's

dead, it's gone, and then from its ashes came several genres including rock, Prog-Jazz, jump music, and bebop. Granted these all had elements of other genres as well, but they filled in the space where swing was, replacing big danceable symphonic swing with its fashion with the small groups and driving rhythms, and sunglasses and goatees of bebop (and the other genres' respective associations).

What changed was that the next generation wanted a new style as well as black socio-economic limitations that led to combos being more practical than big bands (Stewart A., 135). Additionally, there were some people who wanted to move backward in a white direction i.e. Dixieland, but those who appreciated more African-descended rhythmic elements in their jazz were more progressive and were coming to new places. Jazz became kind of hip and insider though because pop was still racist; and also, jazz broke down into such nuanced genres that people's ears had to be pretty good to even know what they were listening to. So to counteract that racism you had a genre of "intense self-consciousness of reclaiming what white musicians had usurped from the artistic forbears of the musical innovators" (Colapietro, 1).

Overall, Bebop came out of desensitisation. Musicians were comfortable with so many resolutions and licks that they threw them in as if they were notes. The question is: How far does it go? It's not an unusual thing for musicians to 'quote' songs live, so why not reference a song that does it well and bring its power into your own tune? Yes, it's a natural evolution, but it feels a bit lazy. Looking at world music, there are so many degrees of tones, and even before jazz there were compositions like Pierrot that inspired chance and then minimal music. So basically, good jazz players have not only

had to be the best musicians around, but they've had to pick and choose their favourite ideas while doing their best to be impartial and achieve their artistic objective. It seems somewhat impossible, but some have made it happen. So it feels natural to condemn and praise musicians for their incredible ears and abilities that have surpassed the pop-scape. Jazz has been described as an evolution of music, and this kind of thing confirms the realism of the assertion and the chaos of evolution.

And from there came Hard Bop, a genre very friendly to the 'Harlem Nights' style nightclub circuit interactions and elements that Charles Mingus, Thelonius Monk, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, and other 'black' black artists gravitated to. It had improv, intensity and speed. It wasn't just accepting of improv and breaking new ground but focused on it. Additionally, it welcomed newer harmonic elements based on intentional enharmony. Hard Bop was a harder bop, and it reflected the growing urban climate of many black people, particularly when viewed in a post-African/African-American context.

Cool Jazz evolved in tandem and had some crossover with artists like Davis, but players like Steve Getz and Dave Brubeck defined it more consistently. Cool Jazz was more supportive of composition melody and so was a better vehicle for singers like Sarah Vaughan and Ella Fitzgerald. It allowed for freedom like Hard Bop but had more of a measured approach and was less chaotic (though not the most chaotic i.e. Free).

They say that hindsight is 20/20, but it can still be difficult to see the forest for the trees. Mixing metaphors is a good way to obscure the truth while supposedly clarifying and expounding because two abstracts are combined.

So when you have a cultural phenomenon and a counter-cultural phenomenon, it can be hard to see their roles perfectly even with that 'perfect' vision and perspective. In pop, you had the disco stud Giorgio leading to bands with reactionary music like Depeche Mode singing 'aint no disco' while using techniques originating from disco and then becoming one of the most prolific bands ever.

In Bebop you had Giant Steps and So What both with coming from Bebop but making different statements about complexity. Musicians could stop being so judgemental, but for so many musicians, that judgement is the driving factor that leads to creation. It's a tough balancing act, but it's a lesson future generations can learn from those of us who were swallowed up by this mentality. There is also socio-cultural expression and revolution i.e. black bop v white swing or more nuanced Davis-progress v Marsalis-regression. Some musicians choose to avoid the discourse altogether (Stewart J. 3) As Bebop, the music will always be there, but the intentions breed obsession, which is crucial for high-musicianship music.

Works Referenced

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