
Reviewed by royal hartigan

Paul Berliner has contributed a significant study which provides insight into the art of jazz improvisation. (I will follow Berliner’s use of “jazz” in this review, although I prefer the term “African American music,” with specific elements described as the music of King Oliver or of John Coltrane.) While informing his work with prior and contemporary scholarship and addressing theoretical issues, he focuses on the musicians themselves, their words and improvisations, meticulously arranging over fifteen years of interviews, study, transcription, analysis, and original ideas into a sequence which loosely mirrors a player’s musical development.

Beginning with the soundscapes of the womb and infancy, he traces the early musical environments of performers from church, home, school, and community (Part 1, chapter 1) to informal and formal study through jam sessions, sitting in, membership in bands, private practice and study, and colleges and conservatories (chapter 2).

The development of specific improvisational skills by individual players is treated in Part 2. Personal growth as aided by fluency with the repertory of jazz compositions, key transcriptions, aural and written melodic assimilation, tonal and timbral inflection, and harmonic progressions and
forms is discussed in chapter 3 while chapter 4 treats physical and technical mastery and the internalization of motives, phrases, and solos as a repository for melodic invention. In chapter 5 Berliner describes the learner’s expansion of experience as a means of evolving a personal sound: familiarity with a wide range of soloist models and, on a larger scale, the entire heritage of jazz, from New Orleans and swing through bebop and hard bop to modal and free styles.

He moves to a consideration of the varied concepts of time, beat, and rhythmic phrasing as well as chordal, scalar, and theoretical strategies for melodic improvisation in chapter 6, followed by a treatment of how melodic raw materials are realized into concrete ideas for solo construction in chapter 7. Chapter 8 focuses on large scale soloing as storytelling, its difficulties and risks as spontaneous composition, creative solutions to unexpected events in performance, and the dramatic dimensions of such intense ensemble interplay.

Chapter 9 describes the relationship of precomposed musical ideas from previous improvised performance or practice experiences and original ones generated in the moment as a continual cycle of “generation, application, and renewal” (242): the solidification of new ideas into elements of an artist’s motivic, solo, or compositional repertory, and their use, in turn, as fertile ground for yet other spontaneous inventions. Part 2 concludes with a grasp of the issues relating to the long, gradual maturation of a soloist’s art—goals, evaluations, and setbacks (chapter 10). Topics include the multiple approaches to swing, melodic substance, harmonic content, originality, emotional transcendence, technical virtuosity, spontaneity, the development of a personal voice, stylistic changes over time in the jazz tradition and their effects on an artist’s personal style, and critical feedback.

Berliner devotes Part 3 to the musical and social abilities which relate to the interactive, collective dynamics of improvisation. Chapter 11 treats individual and collective arrangements of compositions, their generation, development, revision, and transmission in rehearsal and over successive performances through aural or visual scoring, constituent instrumental and vocal parts, and ensemble direction, all as diverse means of realization of preconceived works.

Performance practices relating to the rhythm section are discussed in chapter 12, with the nature, evolution, techniques, and traditional and changing functions of the bass, drum set, and piano used as models. Instrumental and sectional conventions relating to diverse jazz idioms, stylistic combinations, ensemble repertory, and overall ensemble instrumentation are conceived as guides for strategies of accompaniment.

In chapter 13 he describes the dynamics of collective interaction and realization of a piece in performance, dealing with the creation, maintenance, and malleability of the groove, relations between the soloist and rhythm section, development of an overall ensemble feeling, surprises and challenges resulting from error, and the changing ratio of precomposed to improvised material.

Chapter 14 focuses on the evaluation of group performances, describing the transcendent nature of jazz at its best as well as many factors contributing to unsuccessful experiences, such as lack of musicianship, attentiveness, and/or rapport, or conflicting notions of time, conversation, soloist-accompanist functions, and general taste.

The inner dynamics of ensembles are approached in chapter 15, with an emphasis on the negotiation of conflicts. Areas addressed include the accommodation of musical differences during and outside of performance, hierarchic versus democratic concepts of a group’s organization, the effects of a market business mentality in commodifying jazz and sharpening interpersonal and stylistic conflict, personnel changes and the life cycles of bands, and the value of diverse ensemble and stylistic experiences in a player’s career.

Berliner devotes Part 4 to extramusical factors which affect improvisation and an overall performance, with chapter 16 considering a venue’s size, design, management policy, and acoustics, the rigors of travel, the nature of different audiences, the drama of audience-performer interaction, performers’ dress and demeanor, varying responses to knowledgeable and difficult audiences, and recording studios as performance venues.

His Epilogue looks at jazz as a personal way of life, including its place in the evolution of the world’s musics. Current realities of the global music environment enable jazz as an assimilative artform to embrace diverse global traditions and numerous examples of the emerging crosscultural international scene are cited. He proceeds to discuss improvisation as composition and the lifetime path and mission of jazz improvisors.

Part 5 consists of musical transcriptions of improvised performances with analytical and informative commentary. This section includes examples of short to medium length, as well as four longer, comprehensive solo-accompaniment scores (parts of which are interspersed with the shorter examples), three by Miles Davis ensembles and one by the John Coltrane quartet. The scores reveal the dynamics of group interplay, an essential quality of the jazz artform, and the transcriptions and accompanying narrative as a whole are a goldmine of information for both scholarly research and instrumental practice (as in woodshedding).
The book concludes with two appendices, one documenting a congres-
sional resolution on jazz, and the other a roster of artists interviewed, fol-
lowed by a list of sources for musical figures and transcriptions (the latter
called “music texts” by the author), endnotes, a discography, videography,
and bibliography, and an index.

Throughout this work Berliner writes in a straightforward and clear style,
thankfully avoiding an irrelevant academic tone, often using the words of
musicians to underline his points. Their voices and his give a human qual-
ity to the 504 pages of text and 251 pages of music transcriptions and analy-
sis, making the book hard to put down. We get a feel of the lives, the com-
unity, the people, the sounds, the intensity and heart of the jazz world.
We are presented with many personal, social, historic, and musical issues
surrounding this artform and its practice of improvisation, some not evi-
dent even to performers, and always from many individual points of view:
The complexities, differences of opinion, varying backgrounds, problems,
and human variables on a given topic are not laundered out of the pages to
present us with a shrink-wrapped account or methodology; rather, he gives
us all these things in showing the many sides of an issue, the reality of
the music and its practitioners. His organization, analysis, interpretation, and
presentation of voluminous research data—including over three thousand
pages from interviews alone—forms a coherent and disciplined path which
all readers can follow. Theoretical jumps to draw an analogy, make a point,
or relate an insight derive largely from the music or musicians themselves,
and are not imposed on the reader or the evidence presented. For those in-
terested in other research on the topics discussed, his endnotes, music and
artist source lists, discography, videography, and bibliography provide in
most cases good references. The endnotes often contain insightful commen-
tary or information which stimulate the reader to make new connections
or rethink issues, and a helpful index allows easy access to a topic, com-
position, person, or place in such a large book. One suggestion which would
greatly enhance jazz studies would be to make the interview and perfor-
ence tapes, as well as some of the videotapes, available for the public.
This may not be practical due to the volume of the research materials and
the amount of editing required.

There are so many exceptional qualities to this work that specific cita-
tions of each would literally entail another book. I will mention a few, fol-
lowed by areas where other perspectives than the author’s might be con-
sidered or constructive/differing points raised.

Berliner states his overall goal is to increase the abilities of readers in
understanding jazz in much the same way as its improvisors do (Introduct-
ion, 15). Given the size, depth, and qualities noted above he has succeeded
within the limitations he has defined his work by: thinking as an aspect of
improvisation in bebop and bebop-related styles.

The author contextualizes jazz as an African American music which
people of all backgrounds can share as players and listeners. He speaks of
the cultural milieu from which the music has been born and developed and
in which many of its adherents find a home: the black community, house-
hold, and (especially Holiness) churches (chapter 1, 25 and 29). Its Af-
rican identity and roots are explored regarding the vocalization of pitch, its
infection, and human expressiveness, whether through a tusk horn, bam-
bo flute, cornet, or saxophone (chapter 3, 68). The tonal, timbral, and
rhythmic complexity and sophistication of West African drum orchestras
are described in terms of the relation of multiple bell, rattle, and drum parts
to a whole, as well as the ever-changing flow of rhythmic nuance, beat per-
ception, and layers of time, accent, and function (chapter 6, 147–48). In
both cases the informed reader can clearly see the parallel and heritage of
instrumental and vocal spoken inflection, relation of tonality to language,
and ensemble intensity and interplay characteristic of both the West Afri-
can and African American traditions.

One of many perceptive analogies is found in the discussion on the
application of improvisation to form (chapter 7, pp. 179ff). Trumpeter Dick
WhitSELL relates an improvised solo to a journey, in this case a three-dimen-
sional dance around his living room, singing an improvisation and mov-
ing over various spaces, each representing a specific chord in a composi-
tion. Successive movements through the room repeat the precise order of
spaces and chords, with the sung improvisations relating to the harmonic
nature of each. Seeing harmonic form as a kinetic physical space mirrors
an African sense of a piece’s development through time and space, realiz-
ing song, dance, and instrumental repertoire in a spontaneous drama.

Berliner gives an excellent description of the drummer’s art (chapter 12,
327–28), creating phrases, orchestrating patterns throughout the multiple
drums and cymbals, and how

redistributing the elements of a conventional figure among drum components
in varied sequences can not only change its melodic shape but create the
acoustical impression of splitting the figure into different fragments, bring-
ing a variety of rhythmic configurations into relief. Drum or cymbal strokes
of like pitch, timbre, or dynamic intensity tend to migrate into new patterns,
emerging from the original figures with transformed identities.
Thinking in Jazz

His insight into the technical dynamics of drumset coordinated independence reveals a complexity of rhythmic and metric layering which is an essential aspect of jazz drumming, and reflects the manipulation of pitch, timbre, dynamics, and durations found in the West African drum ensemble.

While discussing swing as rhythmic substance (chapter 10, 244–45), the author points out the innumerable ways of feeling and playing time, expressing rhythmic subtlety through accent, phrasing, space, and relation to the beat. This is a welcome antidote to the singleminded mentality found among some mainstream players that swing is a fixed rhythmic formula expressing time in only one way. A West African drum ensemble, Juba pattin' and handclaps from the Georgia Sea Islands, tap dancers, a 1920s woodblock, for example, can all swing as much as a bebop ride cymbal.

Berliner gives a good account of the challenges to artists in different styles of jazz when confronted with new innovations or movements, such as New Orleans players with bebop during the 1940s, and beboppers with the experimental movements of the 1960s (chapter 10, 276ff.). This teaches us all that jazz, as any music culture, is not a fixed tradition with a single paramount school, but rather a dynamic heritage with many styles, each changing over time, and the introduction of new ones as well. The implication is that to be blind to the totality of the jazz tradition and its new possibilities is to lose the innovative core of its meaning as an open artform, diluting the music into an ever more replicable and perfectable concrete object.

He makes difficult, ambiguous, personal events or topics understandable through painstaking analysis and sensitive writing, as with chapter 15's treatment of the artistic growth and life span of ensembles (416ff.). Personal and musical differences and their resolution on and off the bandstand, power relations, and other issues dealing with human chaos and irrationality as much as conscious intent and reason are presented in a way which not only enlightens a general reader, but also assures musicians who have gone through similar personal ordeals during their path of artistic growth that such difficult events are shared by many others. In this respect Berliner has helped many musicians on the fragmented contemporary scene understand that they are not alone in the travails of survival, fears, and estrangement from mainstream society and its "culture." He has reconnected our experiences for both us and everyone to see in a positive way, knowing that we are not alone and that we are part of a great tradition, despite its lack of acceptance in the society at large, and that most of us choose this road at great material sacrifice. In this same chapter (431–434) the author gives us an accurate, detailed look at how the economic realities of a market capital economy threaten the vitality of the jazz artform and its players, causing artistic conflict, commercial pressures, the dearth of meaningful recording, touring, and live venues, all contributing to greatly lessened occasions and contexts for performance, the lifeblood of the music. This dynamic may be observed in most serious aspects of the arts—and life itself—in contemporary industrial societies, a result of the commodification of expression, devaluation of things done for their own sake, and the tendency at all levels of interaction to change human identity and behavior from rational, spiritual ways of being into materialist, economic ones.

Berliner contributes a moving description of the evolution of music on our planet and gives us a sense of jazz as part of this continuum (Epilogue, 488–9). Its reproduction here is the only commentary that needs to be given:

Artists' most expansive views and practices reflect an appreciation for the uniqueness of jazz within the broad sweep of the evolution of music. It is as if the world is seen rotating on its axis, holding an atmosphere close to its surface whose protective shield consists not simply of vapors but of the sounds of nature, which have nurtured the aesthetic side of humanity, offering since its earliest existence an inspiration for music making. Over the millennia, within the open arena of the world's soundscape, the cries of animals, the rhythm of thunder, the wind's play upon reeds, and the water's rippling over stone interact with the expressive human inventions they inspire. Language, song, and musical instruments, each with its own implications for composition, give rise to a diverse web of music systems and technological tools for their development.

From one part of the world to the next, such systems are rarely isolated or static. Like other elements of the earth's atmosphere, those comprising its soundscape have changed over time, sometimes subtly, at other times drastically. In every country, village, and household, individuals historically performed music inherited from their ancestors. Preserving many of its features and altering others, artists of each generation create new performance practices and repertory, eventually placing their cumulative tradition into the hands of the next generation. It is as if, within each society, its selected ancestral voices assume lives of their own, maintaining featured positions within the society's musical tradition as generations of singers, instrumentalists, and composers carry the ancient voices forward, even as they themselves join them.

Within the global network of music systems, contact among different societies stimulates change in the evolution of their respective traditions. In some instances, varied music systems born on two disparate continents join on yet a third continent, where they cross-fertilize one another, producing new stylistic fusions that eventually assert their independence from their parent traditions. The stage was set for such dramatic events in the birth of a new constellation of musical languages a few hundred years ago, when European
expansionism and an African diaspora removed many European and African ancestral voices from their homelands. In the wake of patterns of trade, colonial domination, religious proselytism, and slavery, these voices dispersed to many parts of the world. In America, where European, African, and Native American ancestral voices mixed in the soundscape, African composers and their descendants created a unique family of musical traditions drawing from their heritage and the diverse elements of the international music culture around them. Jazz came forth from this family with its own affiliated conventions to develop through generations of creators, preserving and expanding upon contributions of the tradition’s most significant composers and performers.

The importance of communicating with others through improvisation, connecting players with each other and with listeners, is discussed in terms of telling a story imbued with emotion (chapter 10, 255–59). In this aspect jazz mirrors the West African dance drama, where all present are connected as part of the performance. A description of the exhilaration of improvisation as a dancing “on the edge of certainty and surprise” (chapter 8, 220) gives the reader an intimate sense of the magic of jazz performance. Berliner deepens this sense in an account of the essence and goal of jazz interaction, its emotional-spiritual transcendence, in a section on ascending to the music’s heights (chapter 14, 388–95). The rapport, intensity, openness, extra- or meta-physical feelings experienced and expressed by performers in these pages reminds us why we play and listen to jazz, and of its nature as beyond the everyday reality we all accept too easily. This can teach us that we should not accept the workaday world as real, and that art can raise us to a higher consciousness and reality, one which need not be the exception, but the rule. It is likely that jazz musicians and listeners have known this all along.

A significant truth is brought into focus when jazz improvisation is seen as not just a technical practice for producing records or concerts, but as an “artistic way of going through life” (Epilogue, 486), implying a sensibility which extends to social, political, philosophic, and personal behavior; ultimately to a way of being.

While these are but a few of the book’s strong points, there are some areas, unavoidable in a work of this magnitude, where different assumptions, approaches, or conclusions may be raised. These are offered in the spirit of constructive criticism.

The first is a minor correction, regarding Berliner’s discussion of the drumset (chapter 12, 324). He states that the snare drum sits to the player’s left and the toms to the right. The actual positioning finds the snare immedi-

The author’s use of the term “free jazz” to describe nonmainstream music of the 1960s is a misnomer commonly used by scholars of this artform. Many experimental or nontraditional styles have flourished during and since that decade, only a few of which approached a free, unrestricted performance practice. Most employed different structural perspectives than the song forms, harmonic progressions, solo language, or typical swing grooves of bebop, yet they nonetheless used structural references such as timbral and textural contrast and similarity, rhythm and density patterns, order of prearranged events, and melodic development, to name a few. Ornette Coleman’s “free jazz” was structured along these nontraditional lines, and the rhythmic style underlying much of his innovative work was quite conservative. Edward Blackwell’s masterful drumming in a variety of New Orleans-rooted straight ahead grooves served as a “lighthouse”; as Ed described it to me, “no matter where the music went, it came back to the groove” (p.c., 1991).

Berliner’s Epilogue discusses the ability of jazz as an open artform to assimilate diverse influences while retaining its identity, noting specific adaptations of world traditions into the African American jazz context (490–1). While his insight is accurate, it is unfortunate many leading artists and scholars of jazz and world music connections were not mentioned. The Asian American jazz movement has been a strong force throughout the United States and internationally with recordings on major labels, significant airplay, and live concerts in most major American cities such as New York, Washington, Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. This genre has flourished since its founding and leadership by Fred W. Han Ho and Russell Baba in the early 1980s. Ho has given lectures, workshops, and collaborative multidisciplinary presentations and concerts internationally, and has contributed articles and edited landmark books, such as his most recent Sounding Off! Music as Subversion/Resistance/Revolution (Autonomedia Books, 1995).

The idea, term, and practice of African Jazz is traceable to Ghanaba (formerly Guy Warren) of Ghana, who resided and performed in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s with his group the African Zoundz.
This work, with its focus on rational thinking, does not consider much that provisation whose dynamics regarding these issues are different, and thus is human and mysterious in improvisation. In jazz, it is what is done with its elements, including logic, not the logic itself, that is important. As a scholarly work, perhaps these considerations are outside its scope; if this is so, it is our loss.

Second, while thinking, feeling, analysis, skill development, intuition, spontaneity, logic, and illogic are many factors involved in jazz improvisation, it is important to distinguish between these factors as activities of preparation—private practice and study, lessons, workshops, rehearsals, and so on—and as those of performance, which is radically different and has its own set of demands and behaviors. It is also necessary to distinguish between analytical, logical thinking and intuitive, spontaneous thinking. Unlike earlier eras when apprentice musicians would learn primarily by observation and in sessions, today's climate does not encourage informal sessions and apprenticeships. Methods books, tapes, videos, high school and college courses, and formal lessons are the main paths of growth. Transcription, analytical thinking, and theory are elements used in learning, while feeling, intuitive thinking, spontaneity, and the freedom to create by countering the logical and theoretical with precisely the opposite, are tools of performance: an intuitive sensory system or, to quote Abraham Kobena Adzenyah, a "hearing system," takes over and sound is a direct extension of inner being. To reduce jazz and improvisation to a single logical system from one style era has engendered the reproduction of past improvisational innovations as stylized commodities used as academic models and for car commercials, ignoring the spiritual essence of the music and the organic, creative whole, of which rational thinking is only one part.

Third, the prevalence of such a popular conception is questionable. Where is it articulated? On the contrary, I have found in teaching and discussions with thousands of lay people over twenty-five years that, upon hearing jazz, most assume it is a result of considerable preperformance preparation and thought, both individually and in ensemble. In fact, it occasionally takes some convincing to persuade new listeners (those even with considerable artistry in other traditions) that the miraculous interplay in the jazz artform is not fully rehearsed or noted.

Fourth, with the presence of the current method books, tapes, videos, high school and college courses on jazz improvisation mentioned above, the opposite argument could be made, that it has been reduced to a diluted technical training, devoid of those emotional sensibilities and cultural background which are its lifeblood as an African American music. It would be harmful to replace an intuitive stereotype of improvisation, if one existed, with an overly technical-rationalist one, an occurrence which has regretnsicans of Persian and Middle Eastern tuning, melody, rhythms, and form into jazz has been researched, recorded, published, presented, and played live on the New York scene and nationally since 1987 by Hafez Modirzadeh of San Francisco State University (California). His work in reconstructing saxophone tuning through alternate fingerings to match Persian temperament and using this new sound as an essential aspect of improvised solos as well as compositions—as opposed to an incidental, short term effect—constitutes a significant breakthrough in concepts of Western tuning.

These omissions obscure the long standing and committed work of artists who are the leading innovators regarding indigenous Asian, Middle Eastern, and West African traditions and jazz.

In the Introduction and Epilogue, Berliner speaks of an imbalance in the popular conception of jazz improvisation as "spontaneous" and "intuitive" (492) or "without previous preparation" (17), which he hopes to redress by documenting the cognitive aspects of this art. While there is a great amount of rational and intuitive thinking, as well as feeling, extramusical and personal elements, and other human activities which make up the preparation and performance of this music, this seems a curious stance for four reasons.

First, there are myriad styles of personal, idiomatic, and era-related improvisation whose dynamics regarding these issues are different, and thus there is not one, but many kinds of improvisation, each with its own balance of behavioral elements. This work tends to see jazz improvisation as a unified and singular practice, which it is not. Since different eras, styles, and players approach improvisation differently, with various combinations of rational and intuitive thought, feeling, and so on, there is no one definable logic of improvisation, but many. In this regard it mirrors life, a dynamic mix of many human qualities, some knowable, some unknowable. This work, with its focus on rational thinking, does not consider much that between analytical, logical thinking and intuitive, spontaneous thinking. Unlike earlier eras when apprentice musicians would learn primarily by observation and in sessions, today's climate does not encourage informal sessions and apprenticeships. Methods books, tapes, videos, high school and college courses, and formal lessons are the main paths of growth. Transcription, analytical thinking, and theory are elements used in learning, while feeling, intuitive thinking, spontaneity, and the freedom to create by countering the logical and theoretical with precisely the opposite, are tools of performance: an intuitive sensory system or, to quote Abraham Kobena Adzenyah, a "hearing system," takes over and sound is a direct extension of inner being. To reduce jazz and improvisation to a single logical system from one style era has engendered the reproduction of past improvisational innovations as stylized commodities used as academic models and for car commercials, ignoring the spiritual essence of the music and the organic, creative whole, of which rational thinking is only one part.

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Andrew Cyrille, are as important and central to jazz drumming as they are to the artistry of the West African master drummer. Unfortunately, jazz scholarship has relied too heavily on recordings and not enough on the oral tradition which integrate with thought. "Jazz is feeling" (Melba Liston, note 17, 792), not "computer music" (Gary Bartz, loc. cit.), and "while the music's still here . . . the voices are gone" (George Duvivier, loc. cit.). Since philosopher René Descartes's dictum (and, ultimately traceable to the Greek philosophers Aristotle or Thales of Miletus) "cogito, ergo sum," the Western academy has adopted a similar "we think, therefore we analyze" credo. The resulting artificial separation of thought from other aspects of human consciousness flies in the face of the realities of world cultures and their artistic expression, including the African American tradition known as jazz. This separation of the rational from the intuitive whole is regrettably evident in music schools and universities—as well as contemporary Western society itself—producing, as Berliner notes, legions of technically proficient players locked into one style era and with little or no exposure to the social, cultural, and spiritual realities which are the goal and essence of jazz. Two notable exceptions to this trend are the work of trumpeter/composer/educator William Dixon at Bennington College from 1968 to 1996 and trombonist/composer/educator William Lowe at Wesleyan and Northeastern Universities from 1978 to the present.

Berliner gives an excellent history of changes in the drummer's art in chapter 12, yet his statement "Because of the early commercial position of jazz as accompaniment for dancing, the drummer's central function has been to maintain a strong regular beat within the framework of conventional tempos and meters" (324-45) needs expansion. This role is only one of many historically filled by jazz percussionists. Others include providing a timbral background for musical events, soloing, dialogue among players, anticipating solo, section, or ensemble phrases, marking formal elements such as different sections in a piece's development, and creating intensity and drama in the context of a performance. These functions, evident from the work of Buddy Gilmore in James Reese Europe's ensemble and Baby Dodds, through Chick Webb, Jo Jones, Max Roach, and Elvin Jones, to Anthony Williams, Edward Blackwell, Jack DeJohnette, and Andrew Cyrille, are as important and central to jazz drumming as they are to the artistry of the West African master drummer. Unfortunately, jazz scholarship has relied too heavily on recordings and not enough on the oral tradition of which these artists are a part. Especially in the early years recordings created an artificial product, although Gilmore's drumming on the 1914 issue of Europe's "Castle House Rag" provides good evidence of his multiple functions. To include dancing as one element in the performance experience does not of itself relegate the music or drumming to a commercial status, especially if one has experienced the dynamic dance styles of West Africa or the Savoy Ballroom: here dance is part of the transcendent, with physical motion a carrier of intensity for both players and dancers. Commercialization from forces external to the art will dilute both dance and music which, on their own, can reach infinity.

One notion of the history of jazz music and drumming held by some scholars and musicians, is that of a grand evolution from simple beginnings in the early decades of this century to more complex structures culminating in bebop and bebop-derived idioms since the 1940s. While there have been new approaches to technique, style, harminic language, rhythmic practice, instrumentation, and other elements, to posit from these changes an upward progression—as a science in a scientific age—is to miss the meaning of this music tradition. The timbral combinations, formal structures, and possibilities of rhythmic orchestration may have been far more complex in the 1920s than the 1940s or 1950s, while the reverse is true for other elements; complexity does not beget evolution, and the music reaches its transcendent expression from a 1928 Louis Armstrong "West End Blues" or a 1980s Sun Ra "Space Is The Place" as genuinely as it does from Charlie Parker's 1945 "Koko." Or, for that matter, from a lonely Johnnie Lee Moore levee holler.

Berliner's view that the artists interviewed for his work provide a representative sample of the "core of the jazz community" is questionable, since, by his own admission, most "devoted their careers to bebop or related hard bop styles" (Introduction, 7). The 1920s, 1930s, and 1960s to the present represent areas of innovation and empowerment (though never economic), yet their adherents, especially post-1960s non-bebop players, have not been significantly represented here. An examination of early performance practice and the many experimental styles since the 1960s would have shed a different and expansive perspective on the nature of jazz improvisation and contributed greatly to this work.

Improvisation is one means of achieving transcendent in jazz. To limit such a study to one style-era (bebop) as a core, focusing on one cognitive aspect (rational thinking) of one element (improvisation) is both an act of dedicated scholarship—given the depth and size of his research—and a restriction of a topic to a narrow scope, converting a technical means into
Berliner's view as well, eurocentric commentators deaf to the music's essence regularly publish critiques and books affecting musicians' careers (note 6 to page 6, 769). Coltrane being used in television commercials to sell products. Where the trol, as, for example, the innovative music of Charlie Parker and John the artform as a strategy for economic purposes, an entertainment, for con- The authors shows how this phenomenon has plagued jazz during its his- tory, from Billie Holiday (474) to Max Roach and other contemporary art- ists (481-482). These outside forces contribute to the dilution and commodification of the artform as a strategy for economic purposes, an entertainment, for control, as, for example, the innovative music of Charlie Parker and John Coltrane being used in television commercials to sell products. Where the fixed and knowable is given primacy, kings of jazz are appointed and, in Berliner's view as well, eurocentric commentators deaf to the music's essence regularly publish critiques and books affecting musicians' careers (note 6 to page 6, 769).

Berliner sees the lack of understanding of jazz and improvisation as a problem for its wider acceptance, and one motive for his book (Introduction, 5). While true, this is only a symptom of the larger dilemmas facing the tradition: the music is, and has historically been, controlled at every level by business interests ignorant of, and unsympathetic to, its meaning; the music is used as a product for economic purposes in capitalist societies diametrically opposed to the nature of its formulation as a communal, shared endeavor; except for a few small FM radio stations, the music is denied the access and exposure which would expand its audience, understanding, and acceptance; the music is conceived, transmitted, and played in many quarters as a fully knowable, quantifiable, logical commodity without addressing its deeper social, historical, political, personal, and spiritual dimensions. These obstacles all spring from one underlying cause which has attended its entire history and prehistory, the denial of, or prejudice against, the artform as an African American music culture. The lack of real appreciation and knowledge, expressed in funny hats and forced comic tap dance routines to pseudo-imaged three-piece power suits, is a function of larger cultural and racial issues ranging from animosity and fear to ignorance of a Black aesthetic.

As an ethnomusicologist and activist for African and African American music and culture, Paul Berliner has demonstrated a level of insight and commitment over the years which have given him a visibility. Although his book has a specific focus which may be seen as technical, in such a large and influential work which deals to some extent with the nature, history, and meaning of jazz, it would have been appropriate and beneficial for him to address these issues and the African American cultural center of the tradition, in order to help readers understand its history, performance practice, improvisation, social organization, and the problems it encounters from disrespect and ignorance, external control, commodification, and lack of access.

Despite these areas where I suggest a different perspective, his work is a masterpiece of preparation, thought, feeling, comprehensive analysis, sensitivity to the artform and its practitioners, and clear, well organized writing. This work, its depth and length, makes obvious that it was an effort of love for jazz music, its heritage as an African American artform, and the people who are its players and listeners.

He has given us a sense of the inner feeling of the music through his own ideas and the words of those who act in it as a way of life. It is a work which musicians and listeners of all levels of experience can grasp and should read. A basic understanding of the music can be derived by the new listener, while
highly complex techniques and issues are brought to light and enriched for the experienced musician and scholar. Its reading will last a lifetime, since its scope and multiple facets—transcriptions, historical documentation, salient and ever surfacing personal, social, and artistic issues, general topics on jazz and improvisation, personal anecdotes of the players, and his own analysis—enable us to use it for many purposes, any one of which would justify its acquisition. I have found a rereading or reexamination of its text and musical materials only enhances the experience and insight gained. In this sense Paul Berliner’s book is like a great solo or composition, showing us an aspect of jazz music making from the inside, which only gets better with time.

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It is better to music about music than to talk about music, so in the words of Roland Wiggins, back to the woodshed.