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Dissertation Prepared for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

August 2012

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In “Sounds for Adventurous Listeners,” I argue that Conover’s role in the dissemination of jazz through the Music USA Jazz Hour was more influential on an educational level than what literature on Conover currently provides. Chapter 2 begins with an examination of current studies regarding the role of jazz in Cold War diplomacy, the sociopolitical implications of avant-garde jazz and race, the convergence of fandom and propaganda, the promoter as facilitator of musical trends, and the influence of international radio during the Cold War.

In chapter 3 I introduce the *Friends of Music USA Newsletter* and explain its function as a record of overseas jazz reception and a document that cohered a global network of fans. I then focus on avant-garde debates of the 1960s and discuss Conover’s role overseas and in the United States.

Chapter 4 engages social purpose and jazz criticism in the 1960s. I discuss Conover’s philosophy on social responsibility, and how his contributions intersected with other relevant discourses on race on the eve of the civil rights movement. I argue that Conover embodied two personas: one as jazz critic and promoter in the United States, and the other as an international intermediary.

In chapter 5 I discuss how Conover presented the avant-garde to his overseas audience. I argue that through his efforts to broadcast jazz impartially, he legitimized avant-garde and emphasized its qualities as art music.
In chapter 6 I explore fandom studies as they apply to the formation of Music USA as a global fan network. I discuss the early roots of Conover’s interest in science fiction fandom as a motivation for the implementation of the Friends of Music USA (FOMUSA) groups.

Chapter 7 concludes in a discussion of the deification of Conover though the medium of radio in the midst of the Cold War. I argue that, through manipulation of sound resources, Conover composed his broadcasts in a way that allowed him to improvise creatively. Finally, I discuss the effect of a radio personality on crowds and the impact of Conover’s music programming in light of studies concerning deejays as objects of devotion.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My efforts toward completion of this project would not have been possible without the help of many colleagues, friends, and mentors. Firstly, I am greatly indebted to Dr. John Murphy, my main advisor, for his patience, enthusiasm, clearly organized direction, and reliable guidance throughout each stage of this process.

I wish to thank the members of my committee for providing a distinctive viewpoint with which to evaluate and strengthen my dissertation. Thank you, Dr. Mark McKnight, for overseeing the editing process and for assisting in my first foray into archival research. Thank you, Dr. Ana Alonso-Minutti, for tirelessly providing valuable feedback and insight throughout the research and editing processes. Thank you Dr. Eileen Hayes for your insightful comments in this project.

I am also deeply indebted to Andrew Justice, Morris Martin, and the staff at the University of North Texas Music Library for providing assistance with the materials in the Willis Conover Collection and for cultivating a supportive research atmosphere.

I thank my supportive colleagues and friends at the University of North Texas College of Music for their comradeship and guidance. Your achievements on both a personal and professional level have motivated and inspired me.

I owe a sincere debt of gratitude to my parents, Gordon and Kaye Breckenridge for unwavering support of my aspirations and achievements throughout the years. Finally, I wish to thank my fiancée Stephanie Burgess for her continual inspiration, friendship, and encouragement.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</th>
<th>List of Figures</th>
<th>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>iii</td>
<td>vii</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 2 CONOVER, JAZZ DIPLOMACY AND THE FRIENDS OF MUSIC USA</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current Studies on Jazz, the Cold War, and Willis Conover</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis, Methodology, and Primary Sources</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 3 CONOVER’S INFLUENCE IN THE GLOBAL CANONIZATION OF JAZZ</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The <em>Friends of Music USA</em> Newsletter</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conover’s Two-Category Structure: Popular Music and Jazz</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trends and Changes in the <em>Music USA</em> Jazz Hour Recording Schedules</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Avant-Garde</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conover as a Non-Musician</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 4 CONOVER, SOCIAL PURPOSE, AND THE LEGITIMIZATION OF JAZZ</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Artists Bring Their Own Agendas Overseas</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Epiphany: Jazz Criticism and Social Responsibility</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conover and Race Debates</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jazz in the University</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism and the VOA</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conover’s Two Personas</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 5 THE EMERGENCE OF NEW THING ON CONOVER’S MUSIC USA</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The United States Information Agency and the Avant-Garde</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critics and the Avant-Garde</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avant-Garde Jazz as an Instructing Tool on <em>Music USA</em></td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The VOA Charter in 1960</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Thing, New Criticism, and Black Cultural Identity</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Continuing Dialogue from ‘Friends’ Regarding Avant-Garde Jazz ............................... 163
Conover and Jim Todd: A Debate about Framework ..................................................... 179
Opinions on Conover’s Musical Tastes from His Contemporaries .............................. 182
Conclusions ..................................................................................................................... 184

CHAPTER 6 CONOVER’S MUSIC USA, FANDOM, AND SOCIAL IDENTITY ........... 186

The Friends of Music USA Newsletter: An International Jazz Fanzine .................. 186
 “Unseen Friends”: Conover and the Science Fantasy Correspondent ..................... 188
 Music USA Jazz Hour Fans as Out-groups ................................................................. 191
 Conover as an Alienated Youth ...................................................................................... 192
 A Shared Reclusiveness ............................................................................................... 193
 Conover and Nictzin Dyalhis ....................................................................................... 194
 Conover and Howard Phillips Lovecraft ...................................................................... 195
 Conover and Duke Ellington ....................................................................................... 196
 Conover’s Finances: The Cosmos Club ....................................................................... 202
 Conover as Autonomous, Independent Contractor ..................................................... 204
 Sun Ra and The Arkestra in 1968 ................................................................................. 213
 “Sounds for Adventurous Listeners”: Sun Ra on the Music USA Jazz Hour .......... 217
 Conover’s “Guide to Broadcasting the Music of Sun Ra” ........................................... 226
 Conclusions ..................................................................................................................... 232

CHAPTER 7 FINDING ORDER IN CHAOS: CONOVER’S MUSICIANSHIP AND DEIFIED
VOICE ........................................................................................................................................ 236

Spirituality in the Avant-garde ...................................................................................... 237
Conover, the Deified Voice ............................................................................................ 241
Conover as Creator and Improviser .............................................................................. 249
Musicality in Conover’s Programming ......................................................................... 250
 Composition Through Editing ....................................................................................... 255
 Supplements to Recordings in Conover’s Collection ............................................... 264
 Delineating Popular Music and Jazz .......................................................................... 267
 The Radio Persona and the Crowd ............................................................................. 269
 The Impact of the Deejay ............................................................................................ 271
 Conclusions ..................................................................................................................... 278

APPENDIX A USIA EFFECTIVENESS REPORT, MARCH 1966, PAGE 2 ................... 281
APPENDIX B FRIENDS OF MUSIC USA NEWSLETTER, VOL. 1, NO. 1, P. 1 (1964) AND FRIENDS OF MUSIC USA NEWSLETTER, VOL. 3, NO. 1, P. 5 (1966). ................................. 283

APPENDIX C PHOTO BY ROMAN DYLAG ........................................................................ 286

APPENDIX D ROMAN DYLAG AND WILLIS CONOVER CA. 1962 IN NEW YORK .... 288

APPENDIX E USIA EFFECTIVENESS REPORT: “MUSIC EXAMPLES,” CA. 1965........ 290

APPENDIX F GUY WARREN: I HAVE A STORY TO TELL, ACCRA, GHANA, 1962 (PRIVATELY PUBLISHED) ..................................................................................................... 294

APPENDIX G CHART OF EXCERPTS PER COUNTRY IN FOMUSA NEWSLETTERS 1962-69 ..................................................................................................................... 296

APPENDIX H ARTICLE IN TEMPO (CA. 1960) ..................................................................... 298

APPENDIX I LETTER FROM GUY WARREN (GHANABA), MAY 11, 1982................. 302

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................................. 304
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Minutes per year of avant-garde jazz on <em>Music USA</em> 1962-69</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Major themes in mail published in the <em>FOMUSA Newsletter</em> 1962-1969</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td><em>Music USA</em> Audience Mail and Effectiveness Report, March 1966</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Time devoted to avant-garde jazz on the <em>Music USA Jazz Hour</em> and number of artists featured (1962-69)</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Conover's notation style ca. 1970</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Conover's songwriting sketches and notation ca. 1970</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Conover's draft of response to Frank Kofsky, 1965</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Conover’s draft of his response to Hollie West, 1971</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Conover’s letter to Cliff Groce (1973)</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>USIA-VOA Effectiveness Report - March 1966</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Transcription of broadcast week: September 19-24, 1966</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Number of letters published in the newsletter by country (excluding the bottom 25%).</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td><em>May Recessional</em> by Willis Conover (1974)</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Duke Ellington on the <em>Music USA Jazz Hour</em> from 1962-69 by minute</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Frequency of Gerry Mulligan on the <em>Jazz Hour</em> from 1962-69 by minute</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Total time dedicated to avant-gardists from 1962-1969</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Frequency and distribution of avant-gardists on <em>Music USA</em> 1966-1969</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>Conover’s broadcasting notes for Ra’s <em>Heliocentric Worlds</em> (1966)</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>Letter to <em>Bravo</em> on behalf of Sun Ra (March 27, 1968)</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>Promotional Flyer for Sun Ra’s Carnegie Hall Concert, March, 1968</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Broadcast week demonstrating instructional aspects</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Broadcast week demonstrating integration of avant-garde music</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Liner notes from <em>My Brother the Wind, Vol. 2</em> (1992)</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Liner notes from Artie Shaw and his Orchestra ‘1949’ <em>MusicMasters</em> (1990)</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>Liner notes from <em>Impulse! Story</em> (1995)</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>Excerpt: <em>Music USA Recording Schedule</em>, May 27, 1995, Show No. 14,758B</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>Conover’s selected order of tracks for broadcast on <em>Music USA</em></td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>Supplemental notes from <em>Heart Song</em>, Black Hawk Records, 1986</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>Conover's notes to Mingus: <em>Three or Four Shades of Blues</em> (1977)</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The mid to late 1960s was a period of social and political turbulence in the United States marked by catastrophic events such as the escalating of US military involvement in the war in Vietnam and the assassinations of John F. Kennedy (1963), Malcolm X (1965), Robert Kennedy (1968) and Martin Luther King, Jr. (1968). The period was also marked by events of social change including the anti-war movement, African-American civil rights, and the emergence in 1966 of the Black Power movement. The period also included several legislative victories, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Such events stimulated social instability, often in the form of protests and demonstrations, particularly by American youth. Consequentially, the role of popular music among youth began to change. While jazz briefly maintained popularity, rock music quickly eclipsed it as the dominant music among young audiences by the end of the decade. As a result, avant-gardists and modern jazz practitioners sought a new, smaller audience with music that challenged the expectations of the traditional jazz framework. Aspects of this new framework included the artists’ restructuring of the ensemble, employment of new sonic resources, and the use of an expanded harmonic language. Personified by John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Archie Shepp, Albert Ayler, and Sun Ra, the New Thing crested in the mid-late 1960s as a momentous phase in the ongoing development of jazz. Perception of this music in the United States was disproportionally influenced by critical discourse that often united the music with racial, political, or anarchic objectives. Meanwhile, in countries overseas, jazz was performing other kinds of political and cultural work.

On the eve of the Cold War the US State Department dispatched jazz ambassadors
overseas as a means of countering anti-American propaganda espoused by the former Soviet Union. Seen by the State Department as symbolic of racial accord, jazz took on a diplomatic responsibility overseas. The most ideal ensembles were groups consisting of black and white players, thus illustrating a racially mixed society. Concurrently, the Voice of America (VOA) provided overseas listeners consistent exposure to jazz by broadcasting a nightly jazz show, six days a week from 1955 to 1996. State Department-sponsored tours and *Music USA Jazz Hour* broadcasts provided jazz not only to communist-leaning countries, but also to developing nations and world powers outside the United States. While the tours brought jazz artists directly to audiences for short periods of time, the primary diet of jazz and continual access to the music was maintained through radio. By the late 1950s the *Music USA Jazz Hour* was the most popular program on the VOA, having gained a following of some 30 million listeners.¹ However, the changing face of jazz in the 1960s challenged its original propagandistic usefulness. The sentiment of interracial communality initially linked with jazz was contested in light of events surrounding the Civil Rights and the Black Nationalist movements. Avant-gardists were frequently bound to sociopolitical aims and movements by critics who sought to deem avant-garde experimental, subversive, or stylistically anarchic. Through *Music USA* Willis Conover (1920-96) introduced jazz to audiences geographically separated from such critical trends. With an objective to present jazz impartially, and by encouraging overseas listeners’ attention to the music itself, Conover assumed a teaching role and became a trusted resource for millions of jazz fans.

¹ John S. Wilson, “Who is Conover? Only We Ask,” in *The New York Times Magazine*, Sept. 13, 1959, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library. “His program…is said to have the largest listening audience of any international broadcast despite the fact that it is done entirely in English…It has been estimated that he is heard each day by thirty million people in eighty countries.”
My discussion focuses on the mid-late 1960s. It serves to not only delineate a period of intense change in jazz and sociopolitical history in the United States, but also a period in which *Music USA* was at an influential peak. By 1960 Conover had established himself as an institution for his listeners overseas. In 1970 *Music USA* began a slow decline. Budget reductions soon inhibited the distribution of materials, including the newsletter. To make matters worse, the VOA reduced the time allotted to *Music USA* from 45 minutes to 30 minutes in 1974.²

The 1960s was a period of lively critical debate, both in jazz magazines and in the non-jazz press regarding the legitimization of avant-garde jazz. Conover’s listeners were given an opportunity to engage in this debate by providing feedback to *Music USA* broadcasts and asking him questions. Conover included his responses in the newsletter, which ran from 1964-69. By selecting from the plentitude of listener mail from across the world, Conover conveyed the reactions and opinions of his worldwide audience. A majority of the excerpted letters addresses the topic of avant-garde jazz. Analysis of this information is significant given that most of Conover’s Friends of Music USA groups relied on his broadcasts as their only source of jazz and engagement with the music. Findings in this study illustrate that, internationally, avant-garde jazz was received with greater acceptance than in the United States and that Conover’s *Music USA* broadcasts and newsletter engendered a more accepting and stylistically unprejudiced audience.

² The administrators of the VOA threatened to cut the program length further throughout the 1970s, to allow for additional news programming. However, Conover consistently fought for more airtime.
CHAPTER 2
CONOVER, JAZZ DIPLOMACY AND THE FRIENDS OF MUSIC USA

The Friends of Music USA (FOMUSA) was Conover’s international jazz fan club, a government-funded social network comprised of fans in approximately 80 countries. Subscribing fan groups were issued a newsletter that supplemented his Music USA broadcasts. Having ultimately grown to more than three thousand chapters worldwide, FOMUSA enabled communication between friends of jazz across the world in a vast complex of shared knowledge and distribution of jazz materials. The newsletter was distributed in twenty-one issues between 1964 and 1969 as supplements to the broadcasts. It provided members with information on upcoming broadcasts, jazz events, and recordings broadcast on the Music USA Jazz Hour. Conover served not only as editor, but also as a regular columnist. In the newsletter he answered questions, offered opinions, and expressed a warm and inviting kinship with his listeners. Through his informal and convivial descriptions he expressed a deep admiration for the jazz experience in sentiments that often focused on eccentricities of performers, the sensations surrounding the atmosphere of an American jazz club, or the bustling streets of New York. With this publication Conover painted an inviting picture of jazz to fans in countries across the world.

Membership in FOMUSA served a variety of functions and produced significant consequences based on location, culture, socioeconomic status, and position of the recipients in the context of the Cold War. Given the timeframe of the newsletter (1964-69) a primary topic was avant-garde jazz, or, the New Thing. Analysis of Conover’s remarks and reactions to the excerpted mail illuminate the extent to which the newsletter functioned as a barometer of musical taste and appreciation overseas, and, subsequently, a teaching tool for learning musicians. I argue that, through striving for an unbiased and fair-minded learning environment, Conover presented...
jazz to overseas listeners in a manner that encouraged active listening. Moreover, overseas listeners were not exposed to the extent of criticism afforded to the avant-garde, and, thus, perceived the new music differently than those in the United States. Having absorbed avant-garde jazz with fewer predispositions to extra-musical associations, the listeners acknowledged avant-garde as a logical phase in the development of jazz.3

Conover intended his music selection process to be current, impartial, and comprehensive. To satisfy these criteria he implemented a ratio in which differing styles would be featured. Specifically, his three-part ratio of 20%, 60%, 20% corresponds, respectively, to “the roots and origins of traditional jazz . . . a mixture of music that has endured and of new music that sounds, or feels durable . . . [and] the free-form or avant-garde ways of making music.”4 By applying this ratio to each broadcast week, his shows served a didactic purpose of illustrating his concept of the jazz timeline. The ratio was also intended as an underlying foundation that would rationalize his musical selection process to his fans, critics, or administrators at the VOA. However, during the mid-late 1960s, considerable adjustments to the formula coincided with the rise of avant-garde music (see figure 2.1).

These results reveal a deviation from Conover’s predetermined formula and illuminate his partiality toward specific artists. Further analysis of materials including Music USA recording schedules, program notes, transcripts, and marginalia not only reveals Conover’s instructive intention in his programming process, but also evidence of his assertions of preference, individuality, and ideology.

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3 Common extra-musical associations linked with avant-gardists included expressions of Afrocentricity, which I will discuss further in chapter 5.
Figure 2.1. Minutes per year of avant-garde jazz on *Music USA* 1962-69.

The exponential increase in the amount of avant-garde styles emerging in 1965 demands consideration given that it challenges Conover’s original formula for choosing music. On one hand Conover aimed to be a stylistically impartial music programmer and faithful representative of jazz. On the other, his broadcasting choices reflect a personal expression of a deeply passionate ideology.

Conover’s implementation of a curricular method of programming separated him from other jazz programmers and deejays and supported his reputation as a trusted source of jazz information. Moreover, accounts by listeners attest to his god-like status and to the broadcasts as religious experiences. His methodical, deliberately resonant vocal persona intimated a level of authority and trust. Initially, this vocal style served to heighten intelligibility in light of the vagaries of short-wave radio. Slow diction, simplified syntax, and careful pronunciation served the additional purpose of appealing to those who sought to learn English. Recorded excerpts of his voice in differing capacities and venues illustrate characteristic variances in his many personas. In *House of Sounds*, a jazz radio broadcast for US listeners, Conover’s persona is
informal and witty. His use of colloquial references and casual manner befits a domestic, English-speaking audience. As emcee at the Newport Jazz Festival, Conover’s persona is similarly informal and jocular. His *Music USA Jazz Hour* persona is markedly different. His carefully pronounced descriptions and simplified syntax take on a comparatively serious, ritualistic quality. This persona, the impact of which is discussed further in Chapter 7, bolstered his credibility and gave weight to his spoken descriptions and broadcasting choices.

Analysis of the FOMUSA correspondence provides information attesting to differing reactions to avant-garde jazz across fifty-one countries. Initially, FOMUSA was propagandistic in its intention to project an image of the United States as one that fosters material exchange and generosity. In many cases it performed this task effectively. In terms of cultural exchange, the newsletter unified like-minded listeners by sharing information and opinions across the world, encouraging democracy through jazz. However, the main topic of conversation in the newsletter involved the reception of avant-garde jazz. Of the 307 excerpted letters in each newsletter from 1964 to 1969, fifty-eight letters addressed avant-garde directly. Consequently, far fewer letters addressed issues of cultural exchange, Cold War, or propaganda issues (see figure 2.2). Analysis of the excerpted letters shows that, of the letters addressing avant-garde jazz, the most positive reception came from listeners in developing nations. My discussion of the reception of avant-garde jazz among Conover’s listeners across the global, socio-economic spectrum adds to the standard jazz narrative in regards to the canonization of jazz overseas, and the assertion of jazz as a global music.

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5 While *Music USA* was broadcast to approximately eighty countries total, mail from listeners in fifty-one countries was reprinted in the newsletter.
Figure 2.2. Major themes in mail published in the *FOMUSA Newsletter* 1962-1969.

I argue that, in the late 1960s listeners were exposed to avant-garde jazz through the Voice of America (VOA) with fewer sociopolitical biases common to critical reviews in the United States. Among the artists of the emerging New Thing were Ornette Coleman and Sun Ra, who were central to critical debates in the jazz community in America. These artists, programmed with increasing frequency on the *Music USA Jazz Hour* from 1966 to 1969, were often aligned with political activism because their music challenged established jazz performance practices in ways that are comparable to the challenges mounted against oppressive political structures.

Current Studies on Jazz, the Cold War, and Willis Conover

Cold War studies in music have gained prominence in the past decade. The implementation of an American Musicological Society Cold War and Music Study Group is one
example of its recent emergence. Several scholars have explored jazz as propaganda during the Cold War, focusing mainly on the implementation of State Department sponsored jazz tours as Cold War initiatives of the US government. Most of these studies pertain to the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. Considerably less attention has been paid to the corollary effects of Conover’s FOMUSA groups. The present study positions FOMUSA as an additional contributing factor in the narrative of anti-Communist propaganda in the 1960s. The FOMUSA chapters, comprising approximately 10,000 members across eighty-one nations, represent a jazz fan base in which listeners trusted and often deified Conover. Given that Conover often sermonized about jazz as the voice of freedom and democracy in his broadcasts, newsletters, and interviews, questions remains as to the extent to which Conover was following governmental directives.

In the seminal study *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917-1980* (1983) Frederick Starr explores the development of jazz and pop culture formation from early ragtime to rock in the former Soviet Union. Concerning jazz in the 1960s, the author provides ample detail about Soviet jazz musicians and their inclination to emulate the masters brought to them through Conover’s jazz hour broadcasts. Starr credits Conover’s *Music USA Jazz Hour* for the dissemination of jazz in the Soviet Union. Supplementary activities and other aspects of jazz fandom, such as membership in FOMUSA are not discussed. Starr contributes to the dialogue on overseas jazz by discussing the Communist government’s mistrust in jazz as symbolic of individualism and westernization. Starr discusses the usefulness of jazz in Russia and the United States in the 1960s and illustrates that both governments used jazz for a political purpose. In both cases, the popularity of the music changed according to the appropriation of it as a propaganda tool. Starr concludes that in the Soviet Union jazz survived on the basis of its popularity as a

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6 The AMS Cold War and Music Study Group began in 2006 as a forum for scholarly research on the Cold War and music from a global perspective. See https://lists.uchicago.edu/web/info/ams_cold_war_music.
symbol of the West, despite the communist government’s initial efforts to suppress it. My study focuses on the usefulness of jazz as a political tool in the late-1960s with primary focus on out-group fandom as a phenomenon of the broadcasts. The VOA’s broadcasting of American jazz had, since its beginnings, been linked to inspiring a younger, more vulnerable demographic. Aimed specifically at young listeners (age 20-30), VOA programming began as a means to counter Communist propaganda during the Cold War. Starr notes that the qualities of individuality and personal expression in jazz resonated with Soviet youths who adopted the music as the anthem of their anti-establishment attitudes. The suppression of jazz only strengthened its attraction and turned it into a forbidden fruit that appealed to youth in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Similarly, the avant-garde wave in the United States was directed at and largely supported by disenfranchised youth—a phenomenon that would also sweep across other VOA-targeted countries thanks to Conover’s program.

In *Willis Conover: Broadcasting Jazz to the World* (2007), the only biography of Conover to date, Terence Ripmaster discusses Conover’s role in jazz in the context of the Cold War. Ripmaster focuses on Conover’s impact on musicians, includes transcribed interviews (among them Polish jazz pianist Adam Makowicz), and attributes their success to Conover’s influence. Little attention is afforded to data involving the FOMUSA correspondence and other

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8 Ibid.
9 Robert Adlington, *Sound Commitments: Avant-garde Music and the Sixties* (New York: Oxford University Press 2009), 4-5. Adlington writes of musicians’ involvement in the cultural and political developments of the 1960s having shared a “commitment to erasing the boundaries separating life and art—a commitment shared with the early twentieth-century avant-garde—who inspired new generations of musicians, for whom the values of immediacy and spontaneity offered a point of connection with youth counterculture, and who viewed performative freedoms, collaborative creative processes, and audience participation as consonant with the antiauthoritarian and democratizing movements of the era.
materials related to the newsletter. As with most Cold War and music studies, Ripmaster focuses mainly on musicians in the former Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc.

Lisa Davenport’s *Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting America in the Cold War Era* (2009) includes a discussion of jazz as an instrument of cultural diplomacy from 1955 to 1968. Of particular interest to my study is her discussion of Conover as an integral component as jazz programmer. Davenport’s is the first publication (to date) to include information pertaining to the *FOMUSA Newsletter*. It is commendable that Davenport introduces the newsletter as part of the scholarly conversation on jazz as cultural diplomacy. However, imprecise information regarding the two-part structure of *Music USA Jazz Hour* produces an inaccurate conclusion. Davenport cites a letter published in the newsletter in 1968 concerning a criticism of Conover’s music choices. She writes,

> On one occasion in 1968, Conover printed a letter from a West German jazz fan who contended that Conover’s show played a “narrow range of music.” This listener argued that such musicians as Glenn Miller did not represent the best in American jazz…. In a detailed reply, Conover expressed his controversial view of jazz, and like jazz policy makers, he adamantly defended the older generation of jazz musicians. He declared that he did not like to broadcast “immature” musicians, nor did he like what he saw as the teenage new-age hype music.

On the face of it, it would seem to the reader that Conover included Glenn Miller among the best in American jazz. What Davenport fails to indicate in this exchange is that the listener was referring, specifically, to Conover’s choices for the *Music USA Jazz Hour - Part A, Popular Music*—not *Music USA Jazz Hour - Part B, Jazz*. In fact, recordings by Glenn Miller were never broadcast on *Music USA Jazz Hour, Part B*. Two separate shows comprised the *Music USA Jazz Hour*, which broadcast particularly different music selections—for which Conover applied different criteria for selection. The distinction between the two shows is crucial in drawing

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conclusions about Conover’s role in jazz diplomacy. By incorrectly indicating the context in which this criticism is aimed, Davenport’s conclusion gives the impression that Conover espoused a traditionalist view of jazz. While it is certain that he cultivated a fondness for certain musical eras and styles, his programming procedure allowed for a specific proportion of new and avant-garde jazz. Davenport’s assertion of Conover defending (like jazz policy makers) the older generation of jazz musicians reflects an incomplete picture of his international role in jazz programming. In his letter the listener claims that Conover defends “specifically, Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Tony Bennett, and to some extent Glenn Miller.”12 These artists were programmed in *Music USA – Part A, Popular Music*—not *Music USA – Part B, The Jazz Hour*. In chapter 5 I discuss this separation between the two shows as a means to compartmentalize music, a method with which Conover defined jazz for an international audience. Conclusions in this study are based on recorded data involving the entire run of the newsletter, and other pertinent documents, for the purposes of arriving at an evidence-based understanding of Conover’s programming process.

Penny Von Eschen’s *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (2004) deals with State Department-sponsored jazz tours in the 1950s through the 1970s within which the US government’s view of jazz fluctuated according to the usefulness of the music and musicians as tools of political manipulation.13 Von Eschen illustrates racial and political tensions arising in the wake of these tours and explores the individual musicians’ experiences as they dealt with this tension differently. Her first example is Dizzy Gillespie’s State Department-sponsored tour to the Middle East in 1956. Paradoxically, this event prompted the government’s sudden decision to promote jazz as America’s egalitarian music against the reality of increasing

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12 Unidentified listener from West Germany, in *FOMUSA Newsletter* 4:3 (1968), 8. Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
racial tension in the United States. Von Eschen concludes with the assertion that the blackness of musicians as US ambassadors was paramount in the choices made in these government-sponsored tours. After Gillespie’s tour, the government facilitated “safer” tours, with musicians such as Benny Goodman and Dave Brubeck whose multi-racial groups were perceived as better examples of interracial harmony. Von Eschen’s primary focus is on the propagandistic value of the State Department-sponsored jazz tours. However, she discusses jazz tours as manipulative devices that were originally intended as propaganda but had more complex ramifications on their listeners. My study complements Von Eschen’s by focusing on the propagandistic intentions of FOMUSA and the ensuing complexity that arose from its implementation.

Following in the theme of State Department-sponsored tours, Graham Carr’s *American Musicians and Cold War Politics in the Near and Middle East 1954-60* (2004) examines the exploitation of jazz and classical music as a diplomatic device in the Near and Middle East from 1954–60 in the context of its changing geopolitical significance in the Cold War. Carr describes the strategic rationale for the programs and assesses their political value. He explores the duality of these propagandistic gestures as expressions of American national identity while extolling the ostensibly universal appeal of jazz for populations overseas. Carr effectively illustrates the role of jazz as propaganda in areas targeted by the US government in the Near and Middle East in the early years of the Cold War. I likewise discuss the influence of jazz in non-European countries affected by the Cold War, an area of research somewhat neglected in current scholarship.

Ingrid Monson, in *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (2007), explores the relationship between jazz and race in America’s sociological history from the 1940s.

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to the present. Monson discusses African-American jazz artists and their contribution to events surrounding civil rights events. Examples include Louis Armstrong’s controversial criticism of Eisenhower in light of the Little Rock, Arkansas incident in 1956 and Dave Brubeck’s successful State Department tour in 1958. Monson posits that throughout the civil rights movement black jazz artists sought redefinition of the self. She writes that blacks and whites created “a sphere in which radical redefinitions of the self could take place—redefinitions that helped many musicians and their devoted audiences to break out of the socially-imposed niche that US society had defined for black music.”

Monson also focuses on the act of improvisation as a relief from rigid social and political spheres in America. Similarly, my study addresses issues of social redefinition through an emerging musical identity within FOMUSA groups. Monson’s theoretical approaches guide my discussion on issues of race in this study, primarily in terms of interpersonal and structural racism. Conover was criticized for collaborating with institutional structures (State Department tours contrasted with the treatment of those artists in the United States) that permitted racial inequality, while being interpersonally anti-racist.

In *Cold War Civil Rights* (2002), Mary Dudziak explores the impact of Cold War foreign affairs on US civil rights reform. Dudziak merges the histories of the Cold War and US civil rights in a discussion linking federal government action with civil rights as an aspect of Cold War policymaking. Racism in America was a common theme in Soviet propaganda. One of Dudziak’s main arguments is that the Cold War provided a crucial impetus to many civil rights events in light of the US government’s attempt to counter such propaganda by projecting an image of equality. Her conclusions address the issue of civil rights as it was affected by the Cold

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Examples of jazz hybridization in Africa cited in my study include Ghanaba (formerly Guy Warren) from Ghana. The founder of Afro-jazz, Ghanaba is credited as pioneering the infusion of authentic African instrumentation and rhythm into mainstream jazz. He revered Willis Conover and the *Music USA Jazz Hour*. My study explores the relationship between his and other musicians’ contributions in an effort to add to scholarly conversations in which the domains of civil rights, jazz, and the Cold War intersect.

In the present study I consider Conover an influential figure in the shaping of the jazz canon. Through his role as music programmer, critic, ambassador, producer, and emcee, he facilitated musical change in the jazz community from the 1950s. A significant proportion of the present endeavor is dedicated to Conover’s influence on avant-garde jazz of the 1960s. One of my arguments is that, while intending to remain impartial in his programming persona, Conover supported avant-garde jazz, both directly (through personal association with Sun Ra) and indirectly (programming avant-garde jazz on *Music USA* with increased frequency). In this light, Conover’s reputation is one that aligns with other figures throughout music history that similarly served as influential mediators between artists and audiences. Among these are Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge and David Josef Bach, both significant figures in early twentieth-century cultural development and champions of avant-garde music. A comparison of the achievements of these figures with Conover’s is effective in terms of their contributions to music and, specifically, their accomplishments from a unique position in a politically charged environment. As facilitators they each used their influence and abilities to champion music. I argue that Conover should be positioned in musicological scholarship alongside these and other promoters of music as a peripheral, yet essential, influence on the formation of a musical canon.

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Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge (1864-1953), American patron, pianist, and composer, is known mainly for her promotion of chamber music in early twentieth-century America. Her financial contributions to American music include monetary gifts and benefaction in the acquisition of instruments and performance venues, including a music building at Yale University in 1925. In the same year Coolidge established the Coolidge Auditorium at the Library of Congress, along with a trust intended to promote the performance of original compositions. From 1932-1948, Coolidge founded the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge medal for services to chamber music.\textsuperscript{17}

The reputation of Coolidge differs from that of Conover in her achievements as performer and composer. These achievements, while extensive,\textsuperscript{18} garner less significance on a historical level than her contributions as facilitator and musical benefactor. The reason for this is that the Victorian ethic of early twentieth-century American life prevalent among upper class families impeded her recognition as a career musician. In light of this circumstance, Coolidge’s enthusiasm and musical aptitude manifested itself in the promotion of musical achievements other than her own. Her interest in music history, research, and publication led to her role as an advocate of both early music and the avant-garde.\textsuperscript{19} She promoted music in an egalitarian manner, rather than catering to the more privileged upper classes. In consideration of music as representative of the whole of America she endeavored to, as she wrote, “contribute more to musicology in general and to national progress in it by stimulating both composition and


\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. Barr states, “Elizabeth’s talents could find expression only through the activities of several of Chicago’s well-known clubs. Records of these organizations document her active participation not only as a pianist and composer, but . . . as lecturer offering paper of historical interest.”

performance of fine works, new and old, throughout the country, than by continuing to give invitational affairs to the Washington public.”  

Like Conover, her achievements on an international level were significant. Her contributions to the Corporazione delle Nuove Musiche in Italy in 1920 allowed for several concerts of significant contributions of new music as well as several music festivals. 

Through her generosity and perseverance Coolidge succeeded in elevating the status of new music, especially in the genre of chamber music.

Both Coolidge and Conover labored for the cause of music despite limitations imposed upon them. Coolidge achieved success through her own personal involvement as a performing musician, but was discouraged from performance by social constraints placed on women in the arts. While Conover dabbled in composition and performance (to a far lesser extent than those he promoted) his primary contributions lie outside the realm of music practice. Conover’s position enabled him to use his personal strengths as a broadcaster and emcee. Conover did not contribute funds or serve as financial benefactor. Rather, he dedicated his time, administrative ability, and personality in his many roles in the jazz community, notably in Washington, D.C.

David Josef Bach (1874-1947), journalist and music critic, was a loyal confidante and supporter of Arnold Schoenberg in the early twentieth century. His position in Vienna as a supporter of new music was contested in a politically charged climate by anti-socialist, right wing groups. Described as the most innovative concert organizer of his time, Bach enabled artists and creative works in an effort to reach a compromise in the midst of defiantly and racially opposed ideological groups. In 1938, during the Anschluss, the Nazi administration

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21 Barr writes, “The Corporazione delle Nuove Musiche became incorporated into the International Society for Contemporary Music as the active Italian arm of the organization, and was responsible for introducing to Italian audiences such works as Schoenberg’s Pierrot Lunaire and Stravinsky’s L’Histoire du Soldat,” 256.


began its systematic expropriation of some 200,000 Jews in Austria. Among these was Bach, a Social Democrat who championed the radical works of the Second Viennese School.24 Specifically, Bach’s efforts were centered on the goal of bringing music to the workers and lower social classes in Vienna. His profound impact on cultural life in Austria is evidenced in a collection of dedications he received in 1924 from eighty-seven significant cultural figures from around the world, covering an “astonishingly broad aesthetic spectrum.”25 Additionally remarkable is the ideological range represented among the dedications, ranging from young, radical left-wing writers to right-wing Catholic supporters. Admired by a diverse range of creative artists, Bach was an influential patron who succeeded in shaping the direction of music as a facilitator of the arts, rather than a creative artist. Timms concludes with the assertion that Bach, “through the medium of culture, [promoted] reconciliation between ideological factions, ethnic groups and antagonistic nations . . . [and] was far more tolerant than most of his fellow Social Democrats, who were on a collision course with the conservatives and the nationalists.”26

As music promoters who were, categorically, non-musicians, Bach and Conover share many commonalities. Both were keen organizers who considered the new music of their time to be a valuable, unpretentious representation of society that should be valued for its ability to perform cultural work. Both were proponents of outreach activities in their music communities and promoters of the idea of reconciliation through music. Of the effectiveness of music in achieving social harmony, Conover stated that,

24 Ibid., 63. “His pivotal roles as Director of the Social Democratic Kunststelle and Cultural Editor of the Arbeiter-Zeitung had brought him into contact with many of the leading artists, writers nad musicians of Central Europe.”
25 Ibid., 65. Timms writes, “In August 1924, when he celebrated his fiftieth birthday, he received this handsome presentation casket containing. . .artistic tributes from leading figures in cultural life [including] leading Austrian authors. . . .[A] wealth of musical tributes include handwritten extracts by Bela Bartok, Zoltan Kodaly, Josef Suk, Alban Berg and Richard Strauss, as well as a letter from Arnold Schoenberg.”
26 Ibid., 71.
When I hear jazz in almost any country other than the US, I am inescapably concerned with something more than the caliber of performance. Both professionally and personally, I am continually concerned and impressed with the effectiveness of jazz as a common ground for building international amity. No, jazz isn’t The Answer to the world’s problems…. But—where an interest in jazz is shared, there are smiles and friendliness between peoples of different cultures, just as, here in the US, jazz helped and continues to help bring about friendly relations between Negro and white. [Other forms of] media are not so easily disseminated nor so privately shared by the peoples of the world as music is: jazz, classical music, even—I hate to say it—rock and roll. And the fact is, people digging music together have neither inclination nor room for hate.27

Both Conover and Bach believed in the value of music as instrumental in easing adversarial relations between rival, ideological factions. And both, from different stations and under different circumstances, utilized taxpayer money to promote an indigenous, new music. Both, while revealing instances of sociopolitical and personal bias, prioritized music over ideological stance. In this sense they exercised political neutrality in their promotion of music.28

Documents from the Willis Conover Collection reveal similarities in ideological stance between the two cultural mediators. In an interview with Pauline Rivelli in 1965 Conover stated the following in a discussion of the role of jazz as a cultural ambassador:

I asked [Austrian pianist] Friedrich Gulda about this once. He said, “You are not going to convince anyone opposed to the US that he shouldn’t be opposed to the US. But the uncommitted people may very well indeed be attracted to the American position by your broadcasts of American music.” And meanwhile, our music helps maintain contact with people already inclined to sympathize with the US government, people, or culture.29

Aside from individuals, other comparable examples of the promotion of new music from a musically indirect position include the publishers of Universal Edition in Vienna of the early-mid twentieth century. Universal Edition was founded in 1901 for the purpose of publishing standard editions of “classics and significant instructive works [and] compositions by important modern

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28 Armstrong and Timms, “Souvenirs of Vienna 1924,” 71. “The fact that he was willing to use taxpayers’ money to support experimental modern music was denounced as part of the Jewish plot to destroy Germanic culture. But Bach attempted—despite the political schisms—to promote the interests of the community as a whole.”
masters” in an effort to compete with prominent German editions. The firm’s most influential period, in terms of establishing publishing policy dedicated to the promotion of new music, came in 1907 when Emil Hertzka, managing director, and Josef V. von Wöss, editor, changed the firm’s emphasis toward the publication of new music. From that time until the present day, UE maintains a position as the “pre-eminent European publisher of modern music.” Like Conover’s, Hertzka’s contributions took place behind-the-scenes and engendered a reputation largely unknown to the public, but greatly appreciated within circles of authority. Of the achievement of UE, Nigel Simeone quotes Franz Schrecker who, in 1926, stated: “It has not only encouraged and sponsored the modern music movement, it has founded it.” Other contributions to new music by UE include the issuing of periodicals, a book catalogue, and educational music. By virtue of his achievements, Conover deserves to be aligned with notable impresarios and other promoters of music in the field of musicological scholarship. Given their position as behind the scenes motivators and enablers of the arts, promoters such as Coolidge, Bach, Hertzka, and Conover rarely achieve sufficient acknowledgement and due scholarly consideration. In this study I endeavor to partially correct this by positioning Conover as an influential promoter of music on an international level.

Additionally, in discussing Conover’s association with Sun Ra in 1968, I align Conover’s engagement with out-group fandom with that of Sun Ra’s afrofuturist views. In *More Brilliant Than the Sun* (1998) Kodwo Eshun describes the post-human perspective and themes of

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31 Ibid.
32 Ibid. Simeone quotes Paul Stefan who states, “When the history of the music of our time is written, Hertzka’s name will stand above all others as the great originator.”
33 Ibid.
34 Of educational music published by UE, Simeone writes: “the *Rote Reihe*, started in the 1960s, is a comprehensive attempt to apply new educational methods to the teaching of avant-garde music.”
alienation in Ra’s music.\textsuperscript{35} His discussion centers on an afrofuturist view of the intersection between science fiction and music as an expression of the future. In the chapter titled “Synthesizing the Omniverse,” Eshun describes Ra as a despotic alien who attempted to secede from virtually every conceivable norm and denied racial heritage or distinction. Ra stated, “I ain’t part of America, I ain’t part of black people. They went another way. Black people are carefully supervised so they’ll stay in a low position. I left everything to me, ‘cause I knew I was not like them.”\textsuperscript{36} Quotations by Conover share similar feelings of being wary of careful supervision and subsequent relegation to a “low position.” In this respect he sided with Sun Ra. Despite his widespread influence, Conover’s broadcasting career was fraught with difficulty. Conover’s involvement as a manager and facilitator in the jazz and science fiction spheres failed to bring about financial success. He also shared an inclination toward fantasy and space related themes.\textsuperscript{37} Eshun’s study guides my discussion of Sun Ra as both a musician obsessed with interplanetary concepts and spiritual alienation. My study ultimately posits Sun Ra and Conover as individuals who share a common passion within an out-group domain, and consequently become marginalized.

In \textit{The Transmolecularization of [Black] Folk} (2004) Nabeel Zuberi analyzes Sun Ra’s 1974 film \textit{Space is the Place} and situates it within the discourse of afrofuturism. Afrofuturism most often refers to a literary movement that focuses on the reassertion of black identity through themes of alienation, subjugation, and displacement. Through his convergence of jazz and


\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 155.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 159.
science fiction, Sun Ra represents the patriarchal centerpiece of musical afrofuturism. The author discusses Ra’s advancement of avant-garde ideology in his emphasis on alienation, antagonism, and experimental techniques in his music. In his sonic experiments Ra aimed to achieve outness, a break from traditional forms and traditionalist (even earthly) society. Zuberi’s study illustrates, through analysis of the film, Ra’s vision of the redemptive nature of music as experimental “searching,” and reflective of a yearning for a utopian elsewhere.

Scholarship on Sun Ra has increased exponentially since his death in 1993. Recent works by John Corbett, Robert Campbell, and John Szwed offer greater breadth to Sun Ra’s biography and discography than ever before. In addition to Szwed’s seminal biography, Space is the Place (1997), Campbell’s discography The Earthly Recordings of Sun Ra (2000) is an exhaustive source including rare recordings. Other publications, such as Pathways to Unknown Worlds: Sun Ra, El Saturn and Chicago’s Afro-Futurist Underground 1954-1968 (2006), includes artwork, interviews, reminiscences, and other visual materials from Ra’s Chicago period. The Wisdom of Sun Ra: Sun Ra’s Polemical Broadsheets and Streetcorner Leaflets (2006) includes transcriptions and facsimiles of research and spiritual findings by Ra, including philosophies shared with the Nation of Islam of the mid-late 1960s. This collection includes many of the philosophical and political leaflets distributed by Sun Ra and provide a glimpse into underground black intellectualism and nationalism in the 1960s.

In Blutopia: Visions of the Future and Revisions of the Past in the Works of Sun Ra, Duke Ellington, and Anthony Braxton (1999) Graham Lock examines the music of Sun Ra, Anthony

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Braxton, and Duke Ellington from a spiritual perspective and discusses their music in terms of its function to negotiate African American history. Lock posits African American cultural practices and mythologies in works by these artists in an illustration of how each draws upon similar spiritual themes to evoke a utopian vision of the future.\textsuperscript{40} My study incorporates this work in terms of its situating Sun Ra and Duke Ellington as artists who engaged with utopian impulses, imagined places and alternative universes (and, consequentially, defying categorization) to posit order and truth. In aligning these arguments with those of Conover, who similarly sought order in chaos through an ideological and reconciliatory framework, I position Conover as one whose broadcasts represent creative and musical contributions. His programming schedule of the late 1960s illustrates a manifestation of a creative urge and utopian impulse.

In his seminal and controversial study \textit{Blues People: Negro Music in White America} (1963) Amiri Baraka discusses the place of jazz in American cultural history.\textsuperscript{41} Baraka discusses African American music as a manifestation of an African worldview. Themes of survival and group identity are transmitted through music and sustained, regardless of cultural oppression. During the Cold War jazz took on an identity linked with Afro-American activism and cultural nationalism. Baraka, among other critics, situated the New Thing as central to an Afro-centric, separatist black aesthetic. My discussion complements Baraka’s through examining perceptions of race and avant-garde overseas.

Iain Anderson’s \textit{This is Our Music} (2007) addresses the changing status of jazz in the 1960s in terms of its changing cultural value and the relationship between avant-garde and the


\textsuperscript{41} Amiri Baraka is the Muslim-derived name Jones adopted in 1967. Henceforth in this study he will be referred to as Amiri Baraka.
realignment of American identity. The author discusses the evolving shape of the musical
canon of jazz through promotion, academics, government, and criticism. Of particular interest to
this study is the author’s discussion of the avant-garde as it pertains to free improvisation and
American culture. Moving from America’s art form in the 1950s to a more aesthetically
challenging perception brought about by free improvisation in the 1960s, jazz experienced
controversy in regard to the legitimacy of the music. Anderson discusses the paradoxical
situation of white custodianship of the avant-garde in relation to Conover’s sponsorship of Sun
Ra in 1968. The author cites Martin Williams, Dan Morgenstern, and Whitney Balliett as
supporters of jazz pioneers in the 1960s not considered cultural nationalists. My study aptly
places Conover among them. The author discusses the plight of experimental musicians in the
1960s and addresses the influence of jazz education, financial support, endorsement through
national endowments, and critical reactions to avant-garde jazz.

In Blowin’ Hot and Cool (2006) John Gennari discusses the role of the jazz critic and
addresses much of the contextual backdrop for arguments in this study. Gennari discusses the
jazz critics of the 1960s including Martin Williams, Whitney Balliett, Dan Morgenstern, Stanley
Crouch, Frank Kofsky, and Leonard Feather. He cites their roles not only as critics, but also as
active participants in the shaping of the jazz canon through promotion, broadcasting, and concert
production. Particularly, Gennari addresses key debates of the 1960s relating to the avant-garde,
addressing the dissonance created in the canonization of avant-garde jazz in this tumultuous
period.

42 Iain Anderson, This is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture (University of
The VOA was one of many sources of radio propaganda entering the battleground during the Cold War. In *Cold War Radio* (2009), Richard Cummings discusses the control of communication in the Eastern Bloc through international broadcasting from 1950-1989. He examines acts of terrorism, espionage, and other perils faced by the administrators of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty and their pivotal roles in the Cold War, illustrating the inherent dangers in the struggle to control communication during the Cold War. Cummings’s study provides a necessary backdrop for the discussion of Conover’s relationship with the VOA as an independent contractor whose choices were challenged in the United States. In light of critics’ (namely Frank Kofsky) accusations of Conover as an unqualified manipulator of information, this study undergirds my discussions relating to government control of the VOA and Cold War radio propaganda.

In *Broadcasting Propaganda* (1992), Philo C. Wasburn analyzes radio propaganda on a sociological level and investigates its use as a global and political tool. He discusses the Cold War as having shaped the interpretive framework of VOA initiatives and the presentation of content in VOA newscasts. While it does not include information on music broadcasting, *Broadcasting Propaganda* provides a context for this study in its examination of radio propaganda and cultural exchange. The author discusses the degree to which VOA broadcasts served objectives of the United States rather than the needs of the target areas, despite the lack of empirical research related to the process of media imperialism by the industrialized West in target areas in Africa. Notably, the author defines propaganda as “sets of messages that are

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43 Besides the VOA, another source of anti-communist radio was Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, established in 1949, funded by the US Congress.
deliberately intended by their sender to have some politically relevant effect or effects on a
defined audience or audiences. This definition is delineated further into sub-categories:
factual, bureaucratic, linguistic, and sociological propaganda—the fourth of which is most
relevant to this study. Sociological propaganda is described as a commitment to shared values or
beliefs. It deals with the formation of a collective self-image shaped through a shared experience
or ritual. The initiatives addressed by *Music USA* fall under this category in their emphasis on
non-political messages, and initiative to situate jazz as a symbol of American democracy.

In *Radio Diplomacy and Propaganda* (1996), Gary D. Rawnsley discusses the role of the
VOA in international politics and places his main arguments against specific events in the period
of 1956-1964. He discusses the phenomena of Cold War propaganda in which disaffected
nations are targeted. The author states the inherent difficulty in quantifying changes in value
systems, attitudes, and beliefs in targeted areas, but maintains a certainty that target areas must
be vulnerable to a given message. The author cites alienation as one commonality among groups
susceptible to radio propaganda. Rawnsley argues that, despite its problems (jamming,
expense, and control of propaganda) radio broadcasting remains the most powerful medium and
instrument of propaganda because of its immediacy and its ability to target a mass audience. He
delineates two types of international propaganda: media diplomacy, which is aimed at
governments or regimes directly, and public diplomacy, which refers to a populace. My study
falls within the latter category.

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46 Ibid., 82.
48 Ibid., 9. The author discusses the population of Cold War target areas as vulnerable and politically
alienated from a regime. This, Rawnsley states, “motivates them to seek out foreign propaganda which reinforces
their convictions.”
The process of managing and sustaining a large demographic of listeners was achieved in part through Conover’s predisposition to the concept of fandom. As a youth in the 1930s, Conover immersed himself in science fiction fandom by implementing the *Science Fantasy Correspondent* and other fanzines. His published correspondence with H.P. Lovecraft at this time illustrates his enduring enthusiasm for ongoing fan correspondence—which he cultivated later, with the *FOMUSA Newsletter*. In maintaining a cohesive fan group, and encouraging inter-group communication, Conover was mobilizing what we would consider today a social network. The fandom generated through FOMUSA at once fulfilled and opposed the objectives of the VOA. Implementation of the groups satisfied the objectives in that they encouraged overseas listeners to embrace American virtue through jazz. However, the continual narrowing of the audience for modern and avant-garde jazz throughout the 1960s, as well as the growing inclination to associate jazz with events and ideologies of the 1960s (civil rights and social discontent), opposed this objective. In this regard, jazz fandom of that decade became a niche market that was embraced by an increasingly small subset of fans. Social identity theorists identify this subset of fandom as an out-group. The out-group dynamic is discussed in recent social identity theory studies as embracing and thriving on the element of exclusivity and difference from the majority, or *in-group*.

I draw upon fandom studies to guide my discussion of FOMUSA in terms of international jazz fandom. Recent fandom scholarship focuses on *social networking* and its various online manifestations as a basis for fan communication. However, fandom emerged much earlier than the age of the Internet. Through fandom, groups of fans communicate and develop a kinship that endures over time. Willis Conover maintained an active interest in science fiction, horror, and

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49 Generally, fandom refers to a group who share a common passion for a subject, often with an unwavering interest in minor details of the object of their fandom.
fantasy literature as early as the 1930s. His attraction to science fiction fandom is characteristically similar to the fandom created through FOMUSA in that, most significantly, both are representative of out-groups.

In this study I present data involving the listening experiences of a culturally and geographically diverse audience. I discuss the extent to which music is valued across a wide sociopolitical spectrum, involving an immense and multifaceted fan group. Therefore, I draw upon similar studies to guide my discussion. One example of fandom studies in ethnomusicology includes Susan D. Crafts, Daniel Cavicchi, and Charles Keil’s *Music In Daily Life Project* (1993). The project consisted of a series of 150 interviews, with 41 selected for the book, intended to explore the meaning of music in the lives of ordinary individuals of varying ages. The authors present the interviews without imposing contextual information, observations, or application of methodological limitations, and show that each musical experience is unique and, as Keil states, “interconnected in . . . an ‘idioculture’ or idiosyncratic culture in sound.”

Similarly, my study includes analysis of listeners’ reactions and opinions on music across a large geographical and cultural spectrum. I examine the evaluative process undertaken by individuals, both listeners overseas and VOA administrators and critics in America, who analyze music, reflect upon its role in society, and evaluate it in terms of ownership and cultural and sociopolitical usefulness. Keil discusses one discovery in their project, which is that many listeners, particularly those adapted to mass mediation through radio, are increasingly preoccupied with “‘my music’ at the expense of a live and more spontaneous ‘our music.’”

In light of the VOA directive of countering Soviet propaganda by presenting jazz as a conduit for

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51 Ibid., 3.
democratic virtue, Conover’s role in the dissemination of jazz as ‘our music’ is particularly relevant.\textsuperscript{52}

I engage the scholarly discussion concerning the domains of science fiction fandom, media fandom, and jazz fandom as it applies to Conover’s overseas listeners as members of an out-group. The VOA dictated specific guidelines for all their broadcasts and maintained a definite agenda, which Conover’s shows both followed and diverged from. The broadcasts and newsletter were propagandistic in that Conover’s informal manner of expression and inclusive sentiment welcomed the listener and provided a means of belonging and inclusion. Further analysis of the newsletter and the broadcasts reveals a noteworthy deviation from the egalitarian archetype. The manner in which Conover described the jazz milieu, as composed of a small faction of privileged individuals, befits out-group fandom and, moreover, opposes the objectives of universalism and all-inclusiveness ascribed by the VOA.

Analysis of group communication theories aid the discussion of the FOMUSA groups, their formation, dynamics, behavior, and the mutual influence between Conover and the groups. The \textit{Encyclopedia of Communication Theory} (2009) contains a comprehensive overview of the subject and includes current discussions on group behavior. Theories of group communication pertaining to this study include cross-cultural decision-making, media effects and broadcasting, and entertainment-education.\textsuperscript{53} Analysis in light of these theories serve to substantiate arguments relating to group behavior, dynamics, interpretation of action, and, particularly, listening trends among the FOMUSA groups.

\textsuperscript{52} In the context of the \textit{Music USA Jazz Hour} and the VOA, ‘Our’ refers to American listeners and VOA listeners in a multi-cultural, universal fan base.

Social identity is described as an individual’s self-concept arrived at and influenced by one’s membership in a social group. It describes an individual’s perception of inclusion in a cohesive group, and its effect on their behavior. This theory also includes the acknowledgement of in-groups and out-groups as they constitute two opposing factors among group dynamics. I borrow from social identity theories first proposed by Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner as they relate to intergroup discrimination. In Social Identity and Intergroup Behavior (1974), Tajfel and Turner proposed that groups form unique identities that serve as a basis for further decisions and actions. The authors also postulated the dynamic of in- and out-groups in intergroup behavior.

Recent studies that have expanded on theories posited by Tajfel and Turner include James Cote’s and Charles G. Levine’s Identity Formation, Agency, and Culture: A Social Psychological Synthesis (2002). The authors’ discussion of the interaction and behavior of in-groups and out-groups guides my discussion on group reception of avant-garde jazz through the network of the FOMUSA groups. Conover’s formation and cultivation of an out-group had significant effects on the listeners’ evaluations of jazz.

In Fandom: Identities and Communities (2007) the editors address the recent emphasis on fan scholarship and recognize the impact of fan cultures on communities and the formation of social hierarchies. Jonathan Gray defines fandom studies as a discipline to “help us to understand and meet challenges far beyond the realm of popular culture because they tell us something about the way in which we relate to those around us, as well as the way we read the mediated texts that constitute an ever larger part of our horizon of experience.” In this regard, fan scholarship applies to the thesis of this study: the discussion of jazz as a global music.

56 Ibid., 10.
Situating *Music USA* as a source text, the *FOMUSA Newsletter* as a fanzine, and the FOMUSA groups as a fan-base, I align FOMUSA with fan groups discussed in current fandom studies.

In *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (1992), an ethnographic study of fan communities, Henry Jenkins posits fans as skilled manipulators who determine and shape cultural practices around their fan preferences. Jenkins’s study addresses the origin and function of science fiction fandom in the 1930s and how certain characteristics are shared in current fandom. The author posits that, in its earliest manifestations, fan literature (such as newsletters and fanzines) “provided a public forum by which fans could communicate with each other and with the writers their reactions to published stories.”57 He credits the interplay between writers, fans, and editors in such publications as the driving force behind the emergence of science fiction as a successful and popular genre. Similarly, fandom created through FOMUSA served in the widespread reception of jazz overseas. Also, Jenkins defines media fandom as comprising a collective subculture of fans whose critical and interpretive practices influence canon formation. Citing FOMUSA as an early form of media fandom, I argue that Conover’s relationship with his listeners was reciprocal. While Conover influenced overseas listeners, the listeners, in turn, influenced Conover’s views on jazz and guided his decisions. Members of FOMUSA served not only to determine the course of jazz broadcasting through *Music USA*, but also contributed, ultimately, through strength of their fandom, to the development of the jazz canon in the 1960s.

In *A Brief History of Media Fandom* (2006) Francesca Coppa identifies media fandom as having begun in the mid-1960s with the emergence of popular science fiction television shows

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and movies. Coppa discusses the abundance of media fandom online (discussion boards and fan forums for sharing information) that provide impetus to global fandom. My study involves global fandom, given that the FOMUSA Newsletter shares many structural characteristics. As with media fandom, fans of the Music USA Jazz Hour were encouraged to interact interpersonally across a vast network. Moreover, Conover anticipated the age of the Internet by enabling group communication on a global scale.

Studies on the effects of radio on a listening populace guide arguments relating to the credibility and effectiveness of Conover’s radio persona. The nature of radio engenders a situation in which an individual speaker holds significant sway in the minds of the audience. In a 1935 study on the psychology of radio, Hadley Cantril and Gordon W. Allport postulated that the human voice was far more cogent and convincing than the printed word, and that the individuals’ mental picture generated a far more persuasive scenario. Expanding on the ideas of Cantril and Allport, John Durham Peters and Peter Simonson, in Mass Communication and American Social Thought: Key Texts, 1919-1968 (2004) discuss mass communication and society in American media studies and the effect of radio as a precursor to the internet in terms of its manipulative effect on society. The authors focus on the revolutionary psychological and social changes brought about through radio, especially in terms of forming a crowd mind made up of individuals who are physically separated.

Thesis, Methodology, and Primary Sources

The present study fills a gap in the current literature on the globalization and dissemination of jazz in the mid-1960s by contributing to knowledge and understanding of

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Conover’s work. He not only directly affected specific performers instructively, but also influenced enormous groups of fans. Additionally, Conover’s broadcasts and his creation of the FOMUSA groups in the context of the Cold War caused unintended consequences in the US government’s geo-political agenda. While most studies focus on jazz as propaganda in a more directly causal sense (State Department sponsored jazz tours are the most prominent example), Conover’s Music USA and its fan group FOMUSA provided largely the same service for the US government. 59 However, given its decade-long existence and long-term fostering of interrelationships among its members, its results were more far-reaching and influential than the State Department tours. On a broader scale, the discussion further broadens the scholarship on jazz as a device for propaganda and jazz as a global music.

I define Conover’s achievements as more multifaceted than is currently reported. While his contemporaries would attest to his centrist musical tastes, and impartiality when broadcasting, notable exceptions emerge upon closer inspection of the data. By 1968 he programmed avant-garde jazz with increasing regularity, often to the exclusion of traditional staples. Also, his role with the VOA was not limited to programming. Rather, in his radio persona he was a conscientious educator who strove for objectivity but, in the case of mid-1960s avant-garde jazz, occasionally showed musical bias. While his descriptions of jazz were minimal, his broadcasting choices in from 1965-1969 suggest favoritism toward specific avant-garde jazz artists, notably Sun Ra. The relative abundance of Ra on the Music USA Jazz Hour coincides with his Carnegie Hall debut in March of 1968, of which Conover was an instrumental part. In light of Conover’s peers’ accounts of his aversion to avant-garde jazz, I examine the relationship between Sun Ra and Conover as one of ideological sympathy. Conover and Sun Ra

represent marginalized artists who have yet to be adequately acknowledged and appreciated for their achievements.

Primary source material comes mainly from the Willis Conover Collection housed in the University of North Texas Library Annex. Donated in 1997, the collection includes written correspondence, FOMUSA information and newsletters, budget information, governmental memos, USIA Monthly Digests of Listener Mail, Chapter Renewal Sheets, recordings of Music USA and House of Sounds shows, and USIA Progress Reports relating to Conover’s broadcasts and the *FOMUSA Newsletter*.\(^60\)

Given the scarcity of recordings in the collection at UNT, I have found the National Archives in College Park, Maryland a vital source in providing wider access to VOA recordings.\(^61\) Unfortunately, an undetermined number of broadcasts are lost to history as magnetic reel-to-reel tapes were often reused. The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) contains the largest collection of accessible, digitized recordings. For this study I analyze thirty-eight shows from the NARA media archives, ten of which were digitized by my request. These broadcasts serve to support the discussion of Conover’s voice as it relates to his profound influence and deification by fans, providing greater insight into Conover’s different voices and personas.

Among the Willis Conover Collection are examples of correspondence from fans spanning each decade across fifty-one countries targeted by the VOA from 1955 to 1996. Most of the correspondence consists of letters from members of FOMUSA. The newsletter, which

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\(^60\) Donated by the Willis Conover Jazz Preservation Foundation, Inc., the collection was overseen by Morris Martin and catalogued by UNT Music Library staff members Arturo Ortega, Cynthia Beard, Jonathan Thorn, and William Hicks from September 2001 to August 2002.

\(^61\) As of December 2, 2011, the Music Library Annex at UNT contains 39 Music USA Jazz Hour shows. The Music USA Collection at the National Archives contains nearly 3,000 recordings. The ongoing digitizing progress of the Conover tapes at NARA problematizes an exact count of existing recordings.
includes a vast selection of correspondence from fifty-one countries, provides evidence of a thriving rate of correspondence throughout the 1960s. However, much of the original correspondence no longer exists. For this reason I draw mainly upon letters excerpted in the newsletter as they pertain to arguments in this study. Selected for publication and arranged in the newsletter by Conover, the excerpted mail represents a lively discussion of avant-garde jazz. However, given that Conover was solely responsible for choosing the excerpts and their placement in each issue, a problem arises as to the extent to which the newsletter represents a manipulated or misaligned version of the discussion. Notwithstanding, the abundance of letters addressing avant-garde jazz serves to substantiate arguments pertaining to the newsletter as a jazz fanzine.

Comparison of excerpts from developing nations and those considered world powers provide contextual information about the diverse physical settings and sociopolitical circumstances in which listeners were receiving avant-garde jazz. Much of the correspondence is descriptive of the physical atmosphere of the listeners’ environment. Analysis of these descriptions enables a comparison of the various listening environments of groups across diverse cultures and socioeconomic positions. Attention to the listening experience across FOMUSA groups provides evidence concerning the activities of the participants and their musical and aesthetic preferences. Arguments in this study are not affected by the seemingly problematic circumstance that the main corpus of fan letters is not available. The arguments I advance pertain to the existing letters and those excerpted in the newsletter.

Materials such as VOA progress reports, mail analysis, and USIA memorandums suggest a careful level of scrutiny on the part of the government and their attention to monitor the success of FOMUSA as a satellite project of the VOA. Furthermore, these documents provide an
additional layer of evidence beneficial in crosschecking and comparing data. For example, the Chapter Renewal Information Sheets (325 in all) provide specific information about each Chapter identified by physical address, country, region or city. In addition to geographical data, the sheets feature weekly activities of each group, the number of active members, and requests (needs expressed by each group including resources such as instruments and recordings.).

Interviews with former FOMUSA members, musicians, and other associates of Conover serve as additional supporting material. These include Polish bassist Roman Dylag, Czech bassist Jan Arnet, Nigerian music programmer and musician Benson Idonije, and former Music USA staff member Marsha Steiner Fox. Additionally, jazz luminaries such as John Szwed, Chris Albertson, Ira Gitler, and Dan Morgenstern have contributed fruitful insight to my discussion by way of an online discussion board on jazz research. Their contributions bring an intimate perspective to the discussion, given their close acquaintance with Conover in the 1960s.

In the final chapter of this study I focus on Conover’s partnership with Sun Ra during the Carnegie Hall Concert in March 1968, and in the context of the Music USA broadcasts. Recordings by Sun Ra are featured in Conover’s broadcasts beginning in 1966 and continuing with some frequency through 1969. Conover took an active part in the Carnegie Hall performance in 1968 as narrator and producer. Dan Morgenstern speculates that, “As for Sun Ra, Willis most likely was fascinated by [Ra’s] overtones of science fiction.” I argue that the celestial mysticism in Sun Ra’s worldview and musical aesthetic relates to Conover’s lifelong fascination with science fiction and fantasy. This facet of Conover’s life, while it reached a successful peak with Lovecraft at Last in 1975, continually surfaced throughout his career but

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62 Initial contact was established in an online research group: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/jazz-research, first accessed on September 7, 2010. Subsequently, I have maintained correspondence through e-mail with the authors mentioned above.

63 Dan Morgenstern, e-mail message to author, April 24, 2012.
was never fully realized. Ultimately, Conover and Ra represent artists in continual conflict with the outside world. Both involved themselves in occupations situating them against the grain.
CHAPTER 3

CONOVER’S INFLUENCE IN THE GLOBAL CANONIZATION OF JAZZ

In the first decades of the twentieth century radio broadcasting in America served a variety of functions. Given the cultural diversity of immigrant populations, the dissemination of information via radio was a quick and effective way to organize ethnic and cultural perspectives. Arguments in this chapter are predicated on these phenomena as they pertain to the influence of the Voice of America (VOA), specifically Conover’s *Music USA Jazz Hour*, in the manipulation of a large and culturally diverse demographic of overseas listeners. A noteworthy consequence of this phenomenon is the reciprocal and mutually enriching relationship between Conover and his audience. This relationship eventually granted Conover a celebrity status, thus intensifying his influence and power in the minds of his fans. Scholars have recently discussed radio in terms of its significance in the formation of social norms and in the alignment of social classes.

Derek Vaillant posits that the phenomenon of local radio broadcasting in post-World War II Chicago was part of a process of altering public culture and urban identity. Through the “construction of radio families,”64 broadcasting stations accommodated different ethnic groups with programs that pertained to specific cultures. One example is WIBO, a station that catered to the Swedish-American population of Chicago. WIBO offered Swedish language programs and religious services broadcast from local churches to accommodate residents who could not attend. Listeners to these programs embraced the communal and familial aspects of these broadcasts, particularly because they provided a means to engage with members of their ethnic community and to partake in familiar rituals from a great distance. In this light, radio served as a conduit of intercultural communality for ethnic groups dispersed over a vast area. At the same time, radio

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served to dignify and empower groups represented in local broadcasts by temporarily bringing into view aspects of their culture and religion for the overall audience. Local broadcasts served to mediate the ethnically diverse population as a form of community building. Vaillant posits that, through this process, radio “helped restructure the meanings and possibilities of ethnic membership.”

However, most broadcasting categorically excluded contributions by African Americans, and carried out a white-centered agenda. While broadcasts often featured music of African Americans, they were not often acknowledged or given due credit for their musical achievements. The process of featuring their music while excluding them, Vaillant argues, created a situation in which listeners were exposed to the music while remaining disconnected from the African American community. He further discusses the premeditated and precisely controlled efforts on the part of local broadcast stations in conveying “balanced” representations of specified groups. This process of control ultimately created boundaries that defined areas of inclusion and exclusion among ethnic groups. This culminated in the establishment of an “unspoken agreement that a racialized white identity should continue to serve as the basis of American broadcasting.” Vaillant discusses the propagandistic power of radio not only to compartmentalize ethnic groups, but also to establish the role of radio as a means to carry out a white-centered agenda.

Similarly, Conover’s *Music USA Jazz Hour* along with its corresponding newsletter succeeded in performing the cultural work of its listening audience in shaping the jazz canon.

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65 Ibid., 45.
66 Vaillant explains that before the boom of swing music of the 1930s, African American contributions in radio programming were severely limited. Other ethnic groups were represented on-air, but their respective broadcasts were continually parsed and compartmentalized according to a white-centered agenda that defined, and often minimized their role in post-war Americanization.
67 Ibid., 30.
68 In this study, I refer to the phrase *cultural work* to describe causal effects brought about across a wide cultural spectrum as a result of the dissemination of jazz via the *Music USA Jazz Hour*. In particular, my study explores Conover’s impact on the listening audience as it pertains to jazz canon formation overseas in the late 1960s.
As a complementary component, the newsletter served to maintain and strengthen the network of overseas listeners. Having previous experience with such forms of fan texts, Conover was aware of the long lasting effectiveness the newsletter would provide in terms of maintaining a fan base.

In 1946, the VOA emerged as a means of Americanization via radio broadcasting. On the eve of the Cold War, the VOA’s main objective was to target communist-leaning nations to counter anti-American propaganda by the Soviet Union. By the 1950s, the Friends of Music USA (FOMUSA), consisting of jazz musicians and listeners across the world, performed the cultural work of entrenching a network system and fulfilled this task. Sharing a fanaticism for jazz, the friends groups were united under an American cause.

The Friends of Music USA Newsletter

From 1964 to 1969 the newsletter was distributed to fans of the Music USA Jazz Hour across the world, amounting to approximately 1,300 groups in eighty-six countries. In some countries, namely those behind the iron curtain, the newsletter was a clandestine effort. Marsha Steiner Fox, an assistant to Conover from 1967 to 1971, recalls the secretive nature of its distribution. Among her duties was to obtain plain, non-governmental paper for printing the newsletter. The eagle watermark, Fox states, would have proved dangerous, particularly in Russia, to those caught with a document printed on American government paper.

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70 While Conover’s Music USA Jazz Hour initially featured American jazz artists, it soon included international artists. The inclusion of non-US jazz artists further emphasized the FOMUSA network as an inclusive group, and jazz as a global music.
71 According to Conover in FOMUSA Newsletter 3.2 (1966), the number of FOMUSA groups was approximately 1,300. (Most issues cite the number of countries at approximately 80.) In the first newsletter Conover notes that each group, “as a condition of official recognition is a minimum of 12 members,” the total number of fans in 1966 was at least 15,600. Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
72 Marsha Steiner Fox, e-mail message to author, January 17, 2012.
reason that the newsletter is characteristically restrained in appearance, containing no photographs or other eye-catching features.\textsuperscript{73}

Assistants played key roles in the newsletter’s process of creation. The abundance of listener mail throughout the 1960s required the VOA to hire assistants to organize and answer them. Conover’s three assistants were tasked to peruse each letter and to occasionally respond personally to listeners’ questions. Fox recalls that objective questions such as information on recordings and jazz artists were often relegated to the assistants. To aid in this task, Conover equipped his assistants with materials such as music encyclopedias. Of her role in composing the newsletter and Conover’s insistence on educating his staff, Fox recalls: “Willis always dictated [the stories for the newsletter] in the studio while he was recording his program. . . .A large part of my job was answering letters, and he bought me Leonard Feather's \textit{Encyclopedia of Jazz} to further my jazz education.”\textsuperscript{74} Considerable time, effort, and funding was allocated to the newsletter throughout its six-year run. The figure below is a report to the International Broadcast System outlining the listener mail received in March of 1966, arranged by country. Page 2 of this document includes samples of letters attesting to the positive impact of the show (see Appendix A). Monthly reports such as this illustrate the level of attention and scrutiny provided to listener mail and the widespread popularity of the newsletter (see figure 3.1).

Composed and edited by Conover, the newsletter contained excerpts of listener mail, his own reflections, and previews of upcoming broadcasts. Additionally, it provided a means of keeping Conover’s overseas fans aware of the jazz community and of involving them in an ongoing discussion. The diversity in Conover’s musical choices would often baffle his assistants,

\textsuperscript{73} See Appendix B.  
\textsuperscript{74} Fox.
who were given the task of auditioning tapes prior to duplication. As part of the broadcasting process, the assistants would have first hand exposure to each recording.

Figure 3.1. Music USA Audience Mail and Effectiveness Report, March 1966

Conover would choose the recordings for each broadcast. Then the assistants would review the recordings prior to transferring them to analog tape. For Fox, this process proved to be instructive for the assistants as well as the audience. Fox writes that, “Just as Willis tried to educate me, he tried to educate his audience…. He was a traditionalist, but he played Sun Ra, Coltrane, Coleman, Davis, and even John Cage—I remember this vaguely because I would always wonder what the heck he was doing when I’d audition tapes before duplication and
While his assistants identified him as a traditionalist, Conover’s musical choices clearly diverted from conventional choices in the context of the show.

Conover’s many responsibilities in the jazz community in the 1960s brought his voice to the fore in critical debates. In appointments peripheral to his VOA duties, such as jazz spokesperson to the White House and chairperson of the Jazz Panel at the Kennedy Center, further amplified this influence. Conover’s duties in the United States affected his role overseas, and vice versa. I examine how his domestic status impacted his programming choices as VOA broadcaster. I focus on the decade of the 1960s, and on Conover’s involvement in avant-garde debates both in the United States and overseas. I argue that his newsletter provided a platform for critical thought, while the broadcasts served a more neutral role. While the avant-garde debate raged in the United States, in both the jazz and non-jazz press, Conover’s newsletter provided listeners overseas access to this debate. As sole arbiter and overseer of the newsletter, Conover was able to regulate the course of the debates by personally selecting the material for publication. The newsletter served, simultaneously, as a platform for debate and discussion, a textual source for burgeoning musicians, and a means to cohere its readers as a fan base.

However, his activities as a decision-maker were heavily scrutinized within the jazz community in the United States, particularly in accusations that he fostered a white-centered agenda. Hollie West and Frank Kofsky vehemently criticized Conover’s endorsement of and allotment of funding for specific artists. In spite of this criticism, his influential presence overseas was safely guarded. As a result, Conover’s presence as an authoritative voice overseas

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75 Ibid.
76 Conover’s choices for his broadcasts were not subject to criticism of such extent. A noteworthy exception to this is evidenced in an ongoing exchange between Conover and Jim Todd, a listener who staunchly took issue with Conover’s programming choices and his views on jazz (see p. 192).
77 Critics Frank Kofsky and Hollie West accused Conover of misusing his influence by endorsing personally favored artists in his appointments at the NEA and the Kennedy Center. More of this discussion in chapter 4.
was strongly influential and remained untouched by such criticism. Consequentially, this engendered a nearly universal level of acceptance by his fans, who trusted his decisions and sought his support.

In addition to conducting the *Music USA Jazz Hour* (1954-96) with the VOA, Conover’s responsibilities as a jazz authority were numerous, both overseas and in the United States.\(^78\) Beginning in 1959, he was employed by the USIA as lecturer on music and American life in Eastern and Western Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. He served as program advisor and master of ceremonies at the Newport Jazz Festival (1956-64), the New Orleans Jazz Festival in 1969, and at several intercollegiate jazz festivals beginning in 1959. Other duties as emcee included concerts at Philharmonic Hall, Carnegie Hall, Town Hall, Concertgebouw, and the American Theater at Brussels World’s Fair. Conover was appointed trustee at the Berklee School of Music in 1966. For the US government he was a member of the Jazz Subcommittee of the State Department cultural presentations from 1967-79. Through the National Endowment for the Arts, he founded the Advisory Music Panel for Jazz in 1968, on which he served until 1972. For the International Film Festival in Moscow he served as advisor (American delegation) in 1969 and as consultant and festival producer for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, 1969-72. He was unofficially appointed program consultant for music events at the White House in 1966, and, most notably, as producer of the birthday program for Duke Ellington on April 29, 1969. He was also appointed the jazz authority to the White House by Pat Nixon in 1969, which granted him the responsibility of selecting the jazz recordings for the White House Record Library.

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Conover’s appointment at the National Endowment for the Arts enabled him to recruit further members. He was Chairman of the first Jazz Panel of the NEA in 1968, a sub-committee of the Advisory Music Panel of the National Endowment for the Arts. Awards and fellowships disbursed by the Jazz Panel of the NEA in 1970 included 30 grants totaling $20,050 from a music budget of $2.5 million, of which jazz composers received the largest number of awards. On the board of the NEA Conover asserted an unbiased stance similar to that of his role with Music USA and of preserving a level of integrity among the NEA board. However, he was not without partiality in this position. In a letter to NEA chairman Walter F. Anderson of June 28, 1972, he warned of the threat that the wrong members might pose to the committee. He writes, “I’m deeply concerned with the possibility that the Endowment’s jazz program will be damaged as the Kennedy Center’s jazz program was.” Conover discusses the inherent risks associated with appointing members who seek personal gain, the recruitment of record company executives, or the installation of window-dressing: the appointment of jazz celebrities who may provide little contribution beyond their celebrity status. Regarding the possibility of appointing Leonard Feather, Conover approved, rating him “exceptionally knowledgeable, at the same time, exceptionally industrious in business projects related to jazz. . . [Moreover.] I think Feather might better be considered as recipient, rather than disburser, of grants.” Conover had great ability to influence the selection of panel members—a significant fact considering that many avant-gardists and groups relied on these committees to prosper. Iain Anderson writes that, “despite the fate of free improvisation in the trade press, the recipients included many

80 Ibid.
81 Willis Conover, letter to Walter F. Anderson, re: NEA membership, 3, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
82 Ibid.
experimental musicians [including] Muhal Richard Abrams, Carla Bley, Marion Brown, Henry Threadgill, and over 20 other free players.” 83 Conover’s authority as chairman of the Jazz Panel was influential in terms of providing opportunities for such musicians into the 1970s—considering the endowment’s role in the formation of the jazz canon and, generally, initiating what Anderson dubbed “a fundamental transformation of the jazz business.” 84

To understand Conover’s influence on an international level, we must take into account his many roles in the United States and the authority he exercised. His contributions to jazz journalism were extensive, and significantly affected his role as facilitator of jazz overseas. The scrutiny that resulted from his choices as a jazz panelist informs the impact of his international reputation. His programming decisions, while designed intentionally to be impartial, nevertheless reflected his personal choices and ideologies, given his strong domestic influence.

Conover’s Two-Category Structure: Popular Music and Jazz

Conover addressed the issue of classifying musical selections in his second newsletter in 1964. He proposed a format comprising two sections: Music USA - Part A, Popular Music and Music USA - Part B, Jazz. This format imposed a two-category framework when determining musical selections. In part, it presented a means in which listeners could discuss the music in correspondence. In compartmentalizing within these categories Conover imposed his own aesthetic judgments, and justified his own subjective and personal biases. These decisions became particularly problematic when dealing with artists whose music encompassed both domains. Conover addressed criticism of his classification in an article titled “Willis Conover On

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83 Iain Anderson, This is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2007), 170. Abrams, Bley, Brown, and Threadgill received fellowships of up to $2,000 in the first five years of the NEA Jazz Panel.
84 Ibid., 172.
Classifications,” in the *FOMUSA Newsletter*. He prefaces the criticism by stating, “This week, two listeners (in two countries 10,000 miles apart) wrote letters criticizing my choice of records for two *Music USA* Programs.”\(^8^5\) The first listener writes, “Why did you broadcast Ray Charles in Part One of *Music USA*? Ray Charles is jazz [and] not popular music.”\(^8^6\) And from a listener in another country: “I cannot understand why you play Duke Ellington’s music in the first part of your program, when Ellington’s music belongs in the jazz hour.”\(^8^7\) Conover responds to these concerns in the following paragraphs, where he clarifies his process for classifying popular music and jazz:

The expression ‘popular music’ literally means any music that people like. I choose to broaden the definition to include any music that resembles music people like, and music that people might eventually like. Hence, it need not be a top popular favorite to be broadcast as popular music. At the same time, I limit my definition to music that sounds good because it is in tune, it has an attractive melody, its harmonies are pleasing, its rhythms are steady, its emotional contents seem reasonably displayed, or its lyrics carry a message I am prepared to receive. (Sometimes I will play a record that fails all these criteria but sounds good to me anyway, possibly for reasons of nostalgia.)\(^8^8\)

His definition is vague and subjective, and does not fully explain his categorization process. But this ambiguity precipitates a learning objective. Conover’s evaluation of popular music includes his proposal of an aesthetic framework. These include basic elements such as intonation, melody, harmony, and rhythm, as well as more ambiguous and emotional qualities. I argue that his explanation provides a scaffolding of musical criteria that he endorses, though he invites the listener freedom to interpret. Along with presenting his criteria for classifying selections, Conover encourages individual interpretation and welcomes listeners to form their own criteria.

\(^8^6\) Unidentified listener #1, *FOMUSA Newsletter* 1:2 (1964), 4.
\(^8^7\) Unidentified listener #2, *FOMUSA Newsletter* 1:2 (1964), 4.
In so doing, Conover is advancing the idea of jazz appreciation as a democratic process. His definition of jazz is even more illusory. Conover writes,

> For me, ‘jazz’ is whatever music I listen to whenever I want to hear some jazz, including every record I play on Part Two of *Music USA* and also some records I do not broadcast. . . . Jazz is a way of playing music, rather than a kind of music. ‘Jazz’ is what the performer does with the music; ‘popular’ is what the listener does with it.89

Again Conover’s definition is incomplete and illusory, and only serves to vaguely outline his individual position. He leaves interpretation to the listener. His definition of jazz, as linked with an artist’s process, aligns with Mark Gridley’s discussion of the genre. In his seminal text, *Jazz Styles: History and Analysis*, Gridley introduces a definition of jazz, as Conover does, as aesthetically separate from popular music and evaluated on different contexts. Also, Gridley’s definition is, similarly, loose and intentionally incomplete. He defines jazz as fulfilling one of four categories: music associated with the jazz tradition, having swing feeling, improvised solo(s), and music comprising performances that combine improvisation with swing feeling.90 Gridley admits that, “for most people, jazz is a cultivated taste and not easily accessible. This makes it art music rather than popular music.”91 Essentially, Gridley emphasizes that, initially, the jazz learner must confront the music on multiple occasions, stating, “the more we hear, the more skilled we will become as listeners.”92 The separation posited by both Gridley and Conover is that jazz is art music, and, therefore, requires more from the listener than popular music.

Conover often discussed jazz in terms of art music versus popular music, and emphasized the evaluation of the music in accordance with specific artists. Of Ray Charles and Duke Ellington Conover writes,

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89 Ibid., 4.
91 Ibid., 10.
92 Ibid., 3.
Both of them try sometimes to please their listeners, sometimes to please themselves. Sometimes, therefore, they are satisfying; other times, they are challenging – that is, when they play music that requires active listening in order to be appreciated – they are broadcast on Music USA Part Two, the jazz hour. When they are satisfying – that is, when their music is familiar enough or simple enough or polished enough to be enjoyed by a casual listener, even a listener who usually does not enjoy jazz – then they are broadcast on Music USA, Part One, the ‘popular music’ part. (Emphasis added) 93

Here Conover clearly establishes that, while popular music is simple, familiar, and designated for the casual listener, jazz is a music that challenges the listener in that it requires active listening and may not be immediately “satisfying” to them. His explanation is complicated in that it suggests an elitist separation between the two categories. His statement that popular music pleases listeners implies that art music may not. While problematic, this distinction is meant as a challenge to the listeners to actively listen and gauge aesthetic merit for themselves on an individual level. His intention is to motivate his listeners to confront the music, to encourage them to consider melody, harmony, rhythm, and intonation, to form individual opinions, and to empower them as active rather than casual listeners. Conover concludes with a final statement that contradicts with his classification process of jazz and popular. He writes, “The important point, I think, is this: No classification is permanent. If the definition does not fit the music, why should we refuse to listen to the music? Build a better definition instead.” 94 By negating the idea of classification into further categories, Conover is illustrating the seemingly boundless quality of jazz, as a music that defies simple categorization. He challenges his listeners to consider the complexity of the music and to stimulate active listening. This served as a subject for further discussion, and to encourage listeners to participate, criticize, interpret, analyze, and to “build their own definitions.”

93 Willis Conover, FOMUSA Newsletter 1:2 (1964), 5.
94 Ibid., 5.
In a report addressed to Kenneth Giddens, then director of the VOA, Conover indicates shows in a given month that would be “likely to be less easily accessible than usual to the average Music USA listener, because the music is either avant-garde or electronic (or both).”

Giddens asked Conover to indicate programs that may fall outside the average listener’s spectrum of tolerance. Conover listed four shows in November, 1973 (October 29 – December 1) in the report, according to date:

Monday, November 5, jazz: a suite by a Polish group whose leader sent it to me from Warsaw.

Tuesday, November 20, jazz: the award-winning Gil Evans Orchestra at the Newport Jazz Festival (all festival tapes are less well balanced and more subject to distortion.)

Monday, November 26, jazz: a new recording by the Gil Evans orchestra, his first in several years, eagerly awaited. It’s only coincidental that the record should follow so closely the festival tape. The two programs, however, are almost wholly different.

Saturday, December 1, jazz: a Newport Jazz Festival tape by a highly regarded modern group, which uses electronics and is not noted for melodic or rhythmic simplicity. Many other records and tapes I auditioned seemed to exceed tolerances and were not programmed.

This document attests to the fact that, at least by 1973, Conover addressed issues of accessibility and was obligated to address limitations according to VOA administrators. It is advantageous to analyze these examples in terms of their ‘accessibility’ to determine what was considered ‘acceptable’ to VOA standards. Also, it serves in determining what criteria Conover used to evaluate accessibility. The first example, “a suite by a Polish group” refers to Winobranie, a 1973 recording by the Zbigniew Namysłowski Quintet. The reason for its inclusion is not listed. However, the selections on the recording feature a stylistic fusion of bop, free jazz, jazz-

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96 Ibid.
97 Music USA Recording Schedule, 1973, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
rock, and Polish and Hindu folk elements, organized as a continuous suite of six pieces. Most tracks exhibit a discernible influence of free jazz. Conover’s approval to afford airtime for this recording, in its entirety, indicates an inclination to illustrate jazz as a hybridizing genre that incorporates world music elements and mixed styles.

The second selection, the Gil Evans Orchestra at Newport, refers to a festival tape, recorded live, under less-than-ideal conditions. Here Conover refers to the quality of the recording, rather than the music itself. In the third and fourth examples Conover refers to Svengali, a fusion album that features a blend of acoustic and electronic instruments, recorded live, and Larry Coryell’s fusion group, Foreplay, also recorded live at the Newport Festival in 1973. Given that recordings by both Gil Evans and Larry Coryell feature somewhat prominently throughout the Music USA Recording Schedule during the 1970s, their inclusion in the ‘spectrum of tolerance’ list illustrates that Conover considered factors related to sound quality rather than musical accessibility. Given the unpredictable medium of short-wave radio, in which transmission could be problematic, Conover considered accessibility as it related to how effectively the music would fare in an overseas broadcast. This evidence shows that Conover was obliged to maintain communication with VOA administrators, but was mostly independent in his decisions.

In programming music, Conover considered the structure of a narrative arc for individual shows and programs contained in a week. In terms of musical selections, Conover maintained a philosophy in which styles, eras, genres, and artists were proportioned according to a preset ratio.98 He stated that it was his responsibility to present each broadcast, and, by extension, each broadcast week, as an expressive arrangement. Another goal was to accurately reflect the

98 See chapter 3.
“critical and popular consensus,” which, in his opinion, would benefit overseas listeners without access to other sources. He writes,

I try to have each program have a definite beginning, development and definite ending, [to] begin somewhere, develop somewhere, and end somewhere…. I feel there is a responsibility to select and program music for people in many countries who would not be able to hear that music except for these broadcasts. And that, therefore, everyone who has contributed [to jazz] should be heard at one time or another; but that those people who have contributed the most, in the critical and popular consensus, should be programmed more often…. A radio station should present [a] balanced picture of America.99

In constructing shows as an intentionally expressive progression, Conover sought to convey an accurate proportion of music based on critical and popular trends. Moreover, he considered these trends to reflect a balanced picture of America. His proposed equivalency between his musical selection procedure and the condition of America presents a potentially problematic oversimplification.

Interview situations provided ideal conditions for the advancement of instructive concepts. Conover’s questions would often concern viewing jazz from an instructive standpoint. From an amateur perspective, Conover could ask questions that invited guests to elaborate on their learning process. Aside from the ubiquitous, pro-democracy message, Conover often called upon his guests to describe, for example, aspects of jazz in a historical context, their process of composition, ways they approach a performance, their practice methods, or the particular function of rhythm section players. In a conversation with Dave Brubeck in 1955, Conover discusses the growing reputation of jazz in America by illustrating the continuous dissolving of societal barriers as a harbinger of the increasing legitimacy of jazz as a genre. They discuss the emerging change of venue from the nightclub to the concert stage in regard to jazz performances,

99 Willis Conover, quoted in: Oral History: Interview with Willis Conover by Gene Robinson at the Voice of America, March 27, 1974 for The University of Maryland and The National Association of Broadcasters / Broadcast Pioneers Library, Box 4, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
and the significant effects of this change. Brubeck discusses upcoming performances of the Dave Brubeck Quartet on the concert stage and in upscale Washington D.C. hotels and compares them to lesser venues of the nightclub, from which jazz had received a negative connotation.

The conversation concludes with a discussion of cultural borrowing in jazz, with reference to Brubeck’s latest recording, *Red Hot and Cool*. Brubeck explains the use of polyrhythmic patterns and the complex cultural origins of polyrhythm in music. Regarding African musical culture Brubeck states, “just as ours is harmonically advanced, theirs is rhythmically advanced.” He then addresses the then common misrepresentation of African music as primitive. Rather, he describes the concept of African rhythm as advanced and conceptually challenging to non-Africans—and, specifically, that Americans do not yet possess the background to comprehend African rhythms completely. Finally he concludes with the metaphor that, “jazz is like a sponge – when we go to one part of the world we pick up certain things, bring it back home and incorporate it into jazz.” This discussion advances the definition of jazz as a global music in that it integrates music from other cultures. In this interview Conover conveys the message that jazz is democratic and a universally-shared art. Additionally, he addresses precepts of the jazz idiom for the benefit of learning musicians.

Another example attesting to the educational influence of Conover’s broadcasts is from an interview with Czech bassist Jan Arnet in 1994. Arnet considers the instructional qualities of the broadcasts and their impact on his development as a musician. Having met at the Prague Jazz Festival in 1965, Arnet and Conover had since maintained a lasting friendship. Of the years prior to 1965 Arnet recalls,

100 Dave Brubeck, interview with Willis Conover, from *Music USA Jazz Hour* 357-B, 1955, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
101 Ibid.
Ninety-five percent of what I learned about jazz was from you. I...knew the changes to *Whisper Not* because...I listened to it as you played it by Benny Golson...So, most of my jazz education was through VOA and your programs. And that was prior to the time of good tape recorders—on short wave—and I’m not sure if I understood all the names, but I understood the music.102

While Arnet cites Benny Golson as the composer of *Whisper Not*, Arnet credits Conover as the catalyst of the music. Arnet’s quote, “*I listened to it as you played it,*” suggests that Conover was instrumental in the formation of Arnet’s musical ability. The manner in which music was broadcast was especially significant in that it allowed for repeated listening. Listeners could anticipate music selections or replays because of Conover’s newsletter (that would often include information about upcoming shows). Equipped with these resources, listeners such as Arnet could benefit from it as a learning situation. Arnet discusses how he transcribed solos and reinforced concepts through repeated listening. The newsletter provided information on future programs, acting as a *syllabus* that was beneficial for those seeking to use the broadcasts as materials for learning. Arnet credits Conover as facilitator of his music education. These recollections attest to the grassroots propagation of Conover’s influence as educator—a jazz prosthelytism shared (and interconnected) worldwide that involved the translation and dissemination of jazz information.

As discussed above, bassist Roman Dylag cites Conover as a major contributor to his musical training. In addition to gaining technical skill from transcribing and active listening, Dylag recalls Conover’s spoken descriptions as effective as the basis for grassroots information.

Listening to Conover’s Jazz Hour was my (only) jazz school and almost everything he played or commented in his program was of great importance to me. Still, I followed more the music than the spoken words simply because my English was not very good at that time. But the *friends* musicians, just to name the bandleader of “Wreckers” Andrzej

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102 Jan Arnet, interview with Willis Conover *Music USA Jazz Hour*, show information missing (1994), Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
Trzaskowski, were spreading all the news they could sort out of Conover’s announcements.\textsuperscript{103}

Dylag’s recollection reflects Conover’s intention to place the music, rather than his words, in the foreground. However, Conover’s announcements were also considered of value, and were disseminated within friends groups as learning materials.

Trends and Changes in the Music USA Jazz Hour Recording Schedules

Consideration of broadcasting trends, with attention to avant-garde artists and groups, motivates a reassessment of Conover’s originally proposed programming principles. Analysis of data from the years 1962-70, collected from recording schedules reveals measurable changes in this regard. Conover frequently reported having relied on a fixed outline to ensure balanced programming—to fairly represent the jazz repertoire. In 1980 he described his method as one that includes a balanced proportion of musical styles. Conover described this proportion as his “personal improvisation on a theme”:

\begin{quote}
First: Aim for balance; proportion. Roughly one-tenth, the roots and origins of traditional jazz; roughly one-tenth, the free-form or “avant-garde” ways of making music, some of which may indicate ways that more music will be played in the future; and eight-tenths, a mixture of music that has endured and of new music that sounds, or feels durable.\textsuperscript{104}
\end{quote}

(Emphasis added)

He largely maintained this ratio in terms of proportioning avant-garde music. Of the grand total of 1,664 broadcast hours for the years spanning 1962 to 1969, 84 hours consisted of avant-garde jazz—yielding a percentage of 19.8 dedicated to this category. While this calculation would seem to fulfill his projected proportioning of avant-garde jazz, detailed analysis of each year’s programming trends reveals dramatic fluctuation (see figure 3.2).

\textsuperscript{103} Roman Dylag, e-mail message to author, October 30, 2011.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>No. of Artists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>3.8 hours</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>7 hours</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>16.7 hours</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>15.3 hours</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>14.5 hours</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>19.8 hours</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>4.2 hours</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.2. Time devoted to avant-garde jazz on the *Music USA Jazz Hour* and number of artists featured (1962-69).

The most dramatic increase in avant-garde programming takes place in 1964, with seven hours devoted to avant-garde jazz, an increase of 88%. In 1969, the decline of 19.8 hours to 4.2 hours, a 78% decrease, represents the most dramatic decrease in amount of avant-garde music per year programmed during the course of the *Music USA Jazz Hour*. In the following chapters I explore the circumstances and motivations behind these trends in light of Conover’s fixed outline.

Conover’s global influence is made explicit in several examples of documentary evidence from the United States Information Agency, the governing body of the VOA. Conover frequently recorded his widespread influence in several United States Information Agency (USIA) Effectiveness Reports. The 1962 report shows the influence of VOA’s *Music USA* broadcasts on other cultures. This document lists artists who have personally given their recordings to
Conover.\textsuperscript{105} Forty-one examples represent artists from Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Spain, Italy, Holland, Switzerland, West Germany, Turkey, the Philippines, Japan, France, North Africa, Ghana, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, East Germany, Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, and Poland.

Conover’s involvement in jazz in the United States brought increased levels of scrutiny by his fellow critics. Letters from fans, however, provide testament to his deification.\textsuperscript{106} Perceptions were more grounded in the United States, where Conover did not garner such lavish praise. He contributed regularly to jazz publications and engaged in canonical debates with Dan Morgenstern, LeRoi Jones, Ira Gitler, John Szwed, and Martin Williams. While he maintained cordial relationships with many, Conover weathered critical attacks from many of his colleagues. While evidence of his participation in such debates in the United States is documented in the jazz press, including \textit{Down Beat}, \textit{Jazz Forum}, and \textit{Jazz}, critical debate involving his overseas listeners exists only in correspondence and in the \textit{FOMUSA Newsletter}. Therefore, his involvement in the development of overseas jazz is little known or misunderstood. One reason for this is that, while under the auspices of the VOA, his influence on overseas listeners was virtually unknown in America as the broadcasts were banned from domestic purview. The Smith-Mundt Act of 1948, banning reception of VOA transmissions in the United States, protected Conover from such scrutiny on the domestic front.

\textsuperscript{105} Willis Conover, document titled: \textit{Music Examples}, “This is the briefest possible sampling to show the influence of VOA’s \textit{Music USA} broadcasts on other cultures... All but three recordings were given to Willis Conover by the performers themselves.” See Appendix E, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.

Conover’s reputation was affected greatly by his appointment as jazz representative to the White House. The White House Record library was initiated in 1969 when the Recording Industry Association of America presented First Lady Pat Nixon with a representative collection of American recordings. The following year Mrs. Nixon appointed a commission of five representatives to decide on the contents of the collection to be housed in a separate room located in the family quarters of the White House. It consisted of approximately two-thousand recordings that were intended to represent a cultural record of American history. The foreward to the Record Library catalog of 1970 reads: “The Commission’s objective was to develop a representative collection of the finest recordings, reflecting American cultural tastes over the years.” Conover was appointed chairman of this commission as well as overseer of the jazz category. Each member of the commission was asked to choose representative recordings and provide a preface describing the selection process used.

In his preface Conover discusses his definition of jazz, his philosophy on compartmentalizing jazz styles and artists, and his approach to jazz as one that takes into consideration several viewpoints and definitions across the critical spectrum. By 1970 Conover had accrued a wealth of exposure to jazz and experience among critical circles and was well aware of the likelihood of debate concerning any attempt to define jazz. Conover cautiously begins the preface with a warning, as if anticipating critical reactions and imminent judgment by his colleagues. He writes, “Largely a subjective experience for both artist and audience, jazz is rooted in, and vulnerable to, acutely personal passions. The lack of a definition that always satisfies all its critics – and every observer of jazz is a critic – has led to a great variety of rigidly

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asserted and contradictorily exclusive definitions.”\textsuperscript{108} Conover begins his definition as comprising an egalitarian approach, that jazz must reflect a diversity of viewpoints. Evoking his broadcasting persona, Conover emphasizes impartiality in the selection process. His preface shows a careful consideration, to the point of being defensive, toward his fellow critics. As a centerpiece to this preface, he provides several theories on the various perceptions of jazz:

\textit{Grass Roots theory}: jazz is the natural expression of untutored musicians, and its opposite: \textit{Ivory Tower theory}: jazz is so demanding an art that only schooled musicians can play it well. \textit{Historic Origins theory}: only that which is old is good, and its opposite: \textit{Progress Theory}: only that which is new is good; ‘\textit{The masses are always right}’ theory: whatever is liked by the greatest number of people is good; ‘\textit{The masses are always wrong}’ theory: whatever is liked by the greatest number of people is bad (only appreciated by a few discriminating people); ‘\textit{Only blacks can play jazz}’ theory; ‘\textit{Anybody can play jazz}’ theory.\textsuperscript{109}

The concepts evoked in this segment of the document, including grass roots, origins, history, the masses, and progress, suggest jazz and its relation to shared cultures in society. The central idea is that the basis for understanding jazz is arrived at through participation in a shared culture, regardless of how it was arrived at. He emphasizes that the degree to which the shared culture was appropriated, stolen, or shared should remain separate from one’s appraisal of art. This document illustrates Conover’s expression of philosophy. Other examples from the end of the decade reveal an increasingly defined philosophy on jazz, a loyalty and commitment to the genre, as well as a comprehensive knowledge of jazz and its practitioners. In selecting music for the White House Record Library, Conover was, by extension, defining jazz for America.

Selected by Pat Nixon, the committee members included Johnny Mercer, popular music; Paul Ackerman, country and folk music; Helen Roach, spoken word; and Irving Kolodin, classical music.


\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 79.
Conover and the Avant-garde Debate Overseas

Given the years in which the newsletter was distributed, 1964-69, the prominent topic in jazz was the avant-garde, or the New Thing in jazz (or, simply, the New Thing). In the newsletter Conover enlightened his listeners by discussing the alignment of avant-garde styles in the jazz timeline. Made available through subscription, the newsletter provided a forum for debate and discussion from listeners in every country in which the VOA was received. The newsletter was not distributed in the United States (as a condition of the Smith-Mundt Act), but among overseas listeners as an information-sharing platform.

The FOMUSA Newsletter of February 1965 included an International Popularity Poll, in which Conover allowed subscribing group members to vote for their favorite jazz artists of the year, in several categories divided by instrument. Modeled after popularity polls in American jazz magazines such as Down Beat and others, Conover’s poll welcomed participation by FOMUSA club members only. The results of the vote would culminate in a week of Music USA programming featuring the winners of the poll. In addition to encouraging the democratic act of voting, this popularity poll encouraged participation within a cohesive group whose collective voice could determine a future course.\(^{110}\) It accomplished the additional task of alleviating the notion that all music choices derive from one source.

In terms of fostering a dedicated fan-base, the poll was a means of emphasized the significance of the jazz community of FOMUSA. Other group-oriented events included contests and quizzes, which encouraged participation among groups, and fostered a learning environment exclusive to his friends overseas. The anonymity of these activities allowed Conover a great amount of freedom in which to facilitate them. These events were unknown in the United States,\(^{110}\)

\(^{110}\) I further discuss concepts of participation/inclusion, fandom, and the FOMUSA Newsletter in chapter 7.
hence separated from its critical circle and largely neglected in the scholarly conversation on Conover.

The information provided by Conover in the newsletter served a variety of purposes. Often his own descriptions would clarify key concepts or answer specific questions posed by listeners. Sometimes the newsletters were informational, and provided dates for upcoming shows or jazz events. Conover included a section consisting of excerpts of fan letters from several countries. This section represented a cross section of the listening base. The letters from around the world illustrated the expansiveness of the group. In addition to discussions on the topic of jazz, the listeners often addressed political and social situations. Moreover, the newsletter was instructive in keeping listeners informed about the effect of jazz on a global level. A listener in Havana, Cuba writes:

> We found [the latest] issue of Down Beat very interesting, especially the article about jazz activities in the Soviet Union. It has many things we didn’t know. . . .For example, we didn’t know modern jazz could be played in Russia. I thought this was almost forbidden, as abstract painting is, because of their Marxist viewpoint. This has as its cause that, a few years before, 1961-3, people here called jazz an imperialistic music, which is not true, because every music is the product of a specific people’s culture or civilization.111

This excerpt illustrates not only the degree to which Conover’s newsletter informed and enlightened, but also its effectiveness in disseminating awareness of Cold War culture and politics in other countries—further strengthening itself as a fan network.

Of the 21 newsletters distributed between June 1964 and August 1969, 15 contain excerpts of letters from fans addressing one of four most commonly discussed themes: avant-garde jazz, cultural exchange, Cold War issues, and jazz education. In this study I have isolated and charted 116 excerpted letters that address one of four themes (see figure 1.2). Of the 116 excerpts of letters from fans addressing one of four most commonly discussed themes: avant-garde jazz, cultural exchange, Cold War issues, and jazz education. In this study I have isolated and charted 116 excerpted letters that address one of four themes (see figure 1.2). Of the 116

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111 Willis Conover, FOMUSA Newsletter 2:2 (1965), 2, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
letters, 58 pertain to the subject of avant-garde jazz, either in a discussion of Conover’s musical choices, exhibiting preference or dislike for avant-garde jazz or artists, or, generally, discussing the role of avant-garde in the jazz timeline. Thirty-one letters pertain to education, specifically in terms of the act of learning jazz through the broadcasts. These include explanations of listeners transcribing solos, or engaging in a discussion of jazz history or theory. Far fewer letters address issues of cultural exchange, amounting to 23 of the 116 excerpts. The topic of cultural exchange would seem a fitting category in terms of fulfilling the goals of the VOA. Examples of this theme included listeners engaging with other countries, cultures, or music, and referring, specifically, to the other culture in their letter. The following letter applies to both categories of education and cultural exchange,

The West Coast Jazz Club, Chapter 112, of Bombay, India, was addressed...by American jazz critic Barry Ulanov... and because of his intellectual background he was able to approach the subject of jazz on many levels... Mr. Ulanov was quite impressed with the standard of jazz playing in Bombay and has suggest that we should develop a cultural exchange programme whereby jazz musicians and students of music be exchanged between our two countries. I am sure that the exchange would be beneficial to both.112

Comprising four of the 116 letters, the issue of Cold War-related issues represents the least discussed topic. Given that the newsletter was distributed in Communist-leaning countries, the likelihood of containing issues related to the Cold War was severely diminished.113 These statistics illustrate the need to broaden scholarly discussions on the dissemination of avant-garde music overseas, and the effect of the FOMUSA groups and the newsletter in terms of their impact as an educational, fan network.

112 Listener in Bombay, India, in FOMUSA Newsletter 2:2 (1965), 1, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
113 Marsha Steiner Fox, e-mail message to author, January 21, 2011. Fox recalls, “I remember having to buy special paper for printing [the newsletter] because Willis would not use the government paper with the eagle watermark – it was too dangerous to send to members in Communist-bloc countries.”
The newsletter was not the only source of information, however. The distribution of *Down Beat* to FOMUSA groups was an initiative suggested by Conover at the start of the newsletter’s run. Allocation of both sources would supply current information and keep fans abreast of the course of jazz in America. The *FOMUSA Newsletter* would contain fan letters from the friends groups, providing them personal attachment. Also, the newsletter provided a forum for which Conover could share his changing philosophy on jazz throughout the 1960s. The prevailing message Conover sought to convey was the degree to which jazz is an expression of the individual and capable of reflecting individual cultures. This expression is symbolic of sociopolitical change during the Cold War period. Given this, there is little doubt as to the propagandistic value of the newsletter. However, for Conover the function and value of the newsletter was twofold. It not only served to establish a fan community, but it also served to convey the message that jazz is effective in persevering, even under a Marxist regime. It is for this reason that many popular articles focused on Conover’s role in fighting the Cold War.\(^{114}\)

Many listeners depended on Conover’s definition of jazz. While he wrote personal letters to some listeners, many of his correspondences occurred through the newsletter. His responses were often instructive. In response to a question “What is avant-garde?” from a Ghanaian listener in 1965, he replied,

> [Avant-garde] is translated as *advance guard*. . .as of an advancing army, or the leaders, as of a social movement. In jazz commentary, *avant-garde* is a synonym for the colloquial ‘far-out’ – that is, jazz played by musicians seeking to explore beyond conventional jazz harmonies, rhythms, melodies, and tonalities.\(^{115}\)

In this description Conover does not shy away from implying political and sociological insinuations in the term avant-garde. One noteworthy allusion is Conover’s comparison of an

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\(^{114}\) See Appendix H.

\(^{115}\) Unknown listener in Bombay, India, *FOMUSA Newsletter* 2:2 (1965), 1, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
advance guard to leaders of a social movement—a prescient comparison considering Ghana’s political climate at that time. In the early 1960s, political oppression in Ghana was an urgent concern. Considered a pivotal region in the Cold War, Ghana’s political alliance oscillated between the two superpowers. Throughout the 1960s, the Ghanaian Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah “forged alliances that increasingly placed him in the camp of the Eastern Bloc.”

During this time his party exiled or jailed leading members of the opposition. Conover’s listeners in Ghana were likely predisposed to the concept of revolution and rebellion. In his description he defines avant-garde as a music that seeks to explore, and expand beyond the conventional. As previously discussed, originators of the avant-garde were not, intrinsically, motivated by politics. Nevertheless, they served as models for protest music in America, as stigmatized by many critics. Conover treats his explanation with subtlety and tactfulness. He is careful to qualify his use of the term “far-out” as “seeking,” rather than as a pejorative term. He discusses avant-garde in terms of its direct translation as advance guard, but defines it as musically exploratory, and does not imply a connection with sociopolitical connotations. Instead, he largely avoids extra-musical associations in his descriptions, and allows listeners the freedom to interpret on an individual basis.

Defining Avant-Garde

Scholars and critics discuss avant-garde jazz in a variety of ways, often in terms of style characteristics as they either deviate from or adhere to the traditional jazz framework. Some define avant-garde in terms of its chronological position in the jazz timeline, or in reference to specific avant-garde practitioners. John Szwed proposes 1959, the year of Miles Davis’s Kind of

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Blue, John Coltrane’s Giant Steps, and Ornette Coleman’s The Shape of Jazz to Come, as the year in which the avant-garde officially begins. According to Szwed, these recordings illustrated defining moments in which major developments in jazz began to illustrate the boldest new styles. Szwed writes that the turning point in avant-garde music of this time was that it “ceased to follow an evolutionary handbook.” Szwed proposes that the new music signifies an evolution in jazz—inspired by and including these artists and representative works. Mark Gridley, in explaining the avant-garde movement, aligns avant-garde with the ubiquitous nature of jazz as a reflection of “a fundamental tradition. . .continuously seeking new methods and materials.” Given that each stage of the development of jazz is innovative in some respect, Gridley argues that the term avant-garde could be applied any number of turning points in the jazz timeline. In terms of initiating a turning point in the development of jazz, avant-garde should also be applied to the bop era of the early 1940s, and to artists Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, and Thelonious Monk.

Designation of avant-garde jazz often, but not always, depends on the following criteria: 1.) freedom from preexistent chord progressions, 2.) preference for unaccompanied melodic statements (polyphony unsupported by chordal instruments), and 3.) substantial use of extended techniques, such as the manipulation of pitch and tone quality. Innovations of this era included

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117 John Szwed, So What: The Life of Miles Davis (New York: Simon and Schuster 2002), 170. In describing Coleman’s 1959 album Szwed stated that: “He liberated his musicians from improvising on the chordal patterns that had traditionally determined what could be played, and was edging toward eliminating the cycles of repeats, returns to the beginning, and even the endings.”


added emphasis on chromatic harmony, greater rhythmic complexity (cross-rhythms), and increased attention to virtuosic instrumental technique.\textsuperscript{120}

The term avant-garde, as discussed in critical debates throughout the 1960s, refers to a group of jazz artists whose music illustrates definable style characteristics that expand upon or manipulate a preconceived framework. Harmony, melody, rhythm, and musical form are often discussed as components comprising a musical framework. In describing avant-garde jazz, musicians, critics, and others discussed such musical elements as guideposts in evaluating jazz works. The framework of jazz was a particularly useful parallel to democracy when evaluating the effectiveness of jazz as a diplomatic tool. Politicians recognized the framework of jazz as crucial in establishing its credibility and effectiveness as a counter to anti-American propaganda. New Jersey congressman Frank Thompson, Jr. equated jazz with American democracy, writing,

\begin{quote}
The way jazz works is exactly the way a democracy works. In democracy, we have complete freedom within a previously and mutually agreed upon framework of laws; in jazz, there is complete freedom within a previously and mutually agreed upon framework of tempo, key, and harmonic progression.\textsuperscript{121}
\end{quote}

In an interview in 1955, Conover and Dave Brubeck discussed similarities between jazz and religion, as two disciplines with an inherent framework from which to improvise, and in which artists are granted individual expression and flexibility of interpretation. When asked about a recent series of broadcasts featuring discussions about jazz with religious leaders, Brubeck responded by illustrating similar parallels. Brubeck likens religious interpretation with jazz, as two domains that invite personal choice based on a predetermined framework. He stated, “the framework of the Ten Commandments compares to the framework of a jazz progression in that


\textsuperscript{121} Frank Thompson, Jr., program notes for the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival, quoted in Scott Saul, \textit{Freedom Is, Freedom Ain’t: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2003), 15.
the practitioner is free within the boundaries of each to improvise—as two previously-agreed-upon disciplines.”¹²² Conover then broadens the comparison to include democracy. Conover states, “This is why jazz represents the truest expression of America, because it’s true of American life.”¹²³ Comparisons such as this justify Conover’s motivation for including avant-garde jazz in his broadcasts in that they advance an egalitarian concept that jazz is accessible to all and open to diverse interpretations. Jazz, according to Conover and Brubeck, is not only “true of American life,” but also, like religion, ubiquitous, and open to free interpretation within designated boundaries of the discipline. However, the boundaries of the jazz framework are difficult to determine upon consideration of the many sub-categories of avant-garde.

Other labels under the avant-garde category include out, New Thing, free jazz, or fire jazz.¹²⁴ These labels, often used interchangeably, are problematic as they are each often applied in as broad a sense as the term avant-garde itself. Sun Ra and Charles Mingus are, depending on musical selection, considered free jazz artists. However, much of their music is not technically free, in the sense of departing from a preconceived harmonic, melodic, or formal framework.¹²⁵ Each demonstrate adherence to traditional practices, even in their most exploratory works. Sun Ra, with his Solar Arkestra of the 1960s, integrated blues and other preset and recognizable forms. Works from 1967, Rocket #9 and The Sunman Speaks both feature bop-inspired melodies, preset form, and adherence to chord progressions.¹²⁶

¹²² Dave Brubeck, interview with Willis Conover, from Music USA Jazz Hour, Show No. 357-B, 1955, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
¹²³ Ibid.
¹²⁵ Ibid., 140-41. Gridley cites Charles Mingus as an avant-gardist who “protested via music without abandoning chord progressions. . .for instance, Original Fables of Faubus, with lyrics about Orville Faubus, the segregationist governor of Arkansas, and Haitian Fight Song.”
¹²⁶ Moreover, Ra adopted the traditional, Ellingtonian role of bandleader, which made his performances familiar to audiences. Apart from evaluation of the music itself, the Ellingtonian element provided a visual means of providing accessibility.
Conover’s definition of the avant-garde involves a ubiquitous, cyclical progression in jazz, in which musical contributions initially “challenge” the listener, but gradually come to “satisfy” their expectations. Also, he often avoided discussion of the components of music or technical terms. Rather, his views on musical progress were often directed by merits of individual musicians. In his descriptions of new jazz music, he emphasized the characteristic of individualism and non-conformism as qualities inherent in his reformist view of jazz. This quality, according to Conover, was a recurring aspect of jazz style and history. He cites Gene Krupa and George Shearing as examples of artists who began as progressive artists, and who struggle to maintain their status. He writes,

In terms of jazz, a Gene Krupa drum solo break (4 bars, only) was applauded wildly in Benny Goodman’s 1938 Carnegie Hall concert (it’s on the record), because it was DIFFERENT from what MOST of the audience had HEARD-before. (What Whitney Balliet was later to call “The Sound of Surprise.”) Krupa has to work solo longer-and-harder now, to get the same kind of applause. . . .In the middle 1940s, George Shearing was reviewed as a very “progressive” jazz musician. He was good, and he’s good now; but now, he’s no longer new & different. So he’s regarded as a pleasant and musicianly pop-performer. OR . . . he’s reviled, for not being different ENOUGH.127

Conover describes the plight of these individual artists as particularly vulnerable to criticism. He often voiced his support for individual artists whom he considered set apart from the crowd and expressed the individual’s need for forming allegiances. He writes,

Any one person who struggles to make it as an individual, to make it on his own terms, and SUCCEEDS, becomes a target for everyone-else-in-the-group who DIDN’T make-it-as-an-individual. . . .We seem to set-’em-up so we can knock-’em-down. We can hit ‘em easier, if they’re individuals, not part of a crowd. . . .And yet: an INDIVIDUAL is what EVERY ONE of us IS. And EVERY ONE of us MUST STRUGGLE to REMAIN an individual. NOT an individual standing ALONE. . . .An individual WITH ALLIES.128

In particular, he advocated for black artists, and addressed the inherent difficulties for African Americans in maintaining their individuality as artists, stating,

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128 Ibid., 3.
It isn’t easy for a White to disengage-himself from any of today’s GROUP movements. . .without wondering: “Am I callous? Selfish? Cowardly? Or (worst of all) only a ‘phony white liberal’?” It’s easier to go-along-with-the-movement. . .to join the group in masochism. . .to sign a resolution that you’ve says, “I quit.” It’s a LOT HARDER for a BLACK American to disengage himself. . .to be the INDIVIDUAL HUMAN BEING HE IS. . .when he is being PRESSURED by GROUPS.129

These quotations illustrate the extent to which Conover maintained consideration of artists whom he deemed progressive and the difficulties inherent in their maintaining their individuality. Far from the mindset of a musical centrist, Conover advocated for musical progress and individualism in music. Conover sharpens his point further by specifying jazz artists whom he determined to have succeeded in spite of their individualism, stating,

I’m NOT naming them as ETHICAL PROOF of my own beliefs. . .I name them ONLY as people who, CONTRARY to the GROUP-LINE, made it, or are making it, out of INDIVIDUAL INITIATIVE: Duke Ellington, Coleman Hawkins, Dave Brubeck, Ornette Coleman, Friedrich Gulda, John Coltrane, Toshiko [Akiyoshi], Jerome Richardson, John Gensel, Quincy Jones, Neal Hefti, Ralph Burns, Gil Evans, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Frank Sinatra, 4-individuals-who-work-as-allies: The Beatles, Don Ellis, Nat Hentoff, Erroll Garner, Louis Armstrong, John Lewis, Oscar Peterson, Billy Taylor, John Hammond, Norman Granz, and (God forgive me) --- George Wein.130

The following avant-gardists appear in Conover’s recording schedule for Music USA from 1962-69: Roland Kirk, Sun Ra, Ornette Coleman, Michael Mantler, Charles Mingus, Archie Shepp, Gary Bartz, Albert Mangelsdorff, Marion Brown, Charles Lloyd, Denny Zeitlin, Paul Bley, John Coltrane, John Gilmore, Robin Kenyatta, Steve Kuhn, Cecil Taylor, Albert Ayler, Wolfgang Dauner, Bill Dixon, Jimmy Giuffre, Pharaoh Sanders, and Luna (Space Swell). These artists represent practitioners of avant-garde jazz. The general increase in avant-garde music illustrates a deviation in his original formula of 20/60/20131, particularly in regards to the latter category: comprising a “twentieth. . .for exploratory music that. . .is trying to hack a new direction for

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129 Ibid., 3.
130 Ibid., 4-5.
131 On two separate occasions, Conover described his programming ‘ratio’ as 20/60/20 and 10/80/10.
itself.\textsuperscript{132} The notable increase in the frequency of this music shows that Conover began recognizing avant-garde jazz less in terms of artists “hacking a new direction,” and more as artists following in the jazz tradition. This fluctuation in programming in the mid-1960s illustrates a paradigm shift. Conover’s perception of avant-garde evolved to include avant-garde jazz in the middle, larger category of music that “has endured or feels durable”\textsuperscript{133} Furthermore, this shift aligns well with his responsibility to fulfill VOA directives. By citing avant-garde jazz as integral to the development of the genre, Conover is justifying its presence on the \textit{Music USA Jazz Hour}.

Ornette Coleman’s \textit{Free Jazz} was a defining moment in the history of the 1960s avant-garde.\textsuperscript{134} In addition to presenting the major players in the free jazz movement in the United States, it provided a model for the new style for subsequent followers. This included improvisations consisting of longer, more extended solos than in previous sub-genres. The piano, traditionally assigned the function of providing harmony, is absent. Unbound from their earlier role of maintaining pulse and harmonic underpinning, the drummer and bass player are considered equal players in the ensemble, on the same hierarchical stratum as the other instruments. Alyn Shipton describes Coleman’s style of improvisation as retaining the traditional characteristics of rhythmic consistency, formal logic, and melody. He writes,

\begin{quote}
Coleman retained [a] sense of beat, and . . . his own improvisations were intensely melodic. Many were atonal—not conforming to conventional ideas of pitch and harmony—but they were both logical and memorable and would still be built over structures that had a recognizable connection with popular song form, even if the number of measures fluctuated and the space for soloing was extremely variable.\textsuperscript{135}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{132} Willis Conover, Interview transcript: \textit{Oral History: Interview with Willis Conover} by Gene Robinson at the Voice of America, March 27, 1974 for The University of Maryland and The National Association of Broadcasters / Broadcast Pioneers Library, Box 4, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.

\textsuperscript{133} Willis Conover, “Jazz in the Media: A Personal View,” \textit{Jazz Forschung} 12 (1980), 38.

\textsuperscript{134} Coleman’s double quartet included Don Cherry, Freddie Hubbard, Eric Dolphy, Scott LaFaro, Charlie Haden, Billy Higgins, and Ed Blackwell.

\textsuperscript{135} Alyn Shipton, \textit{The New History of Jazz} (New York: Continuum 2007), 577.
Despite the eventual perception of Coleman’s music as grounded in traditional practices and concepts, critics considered him experimental. His music was frequently associated with politically charged artistic circles such as the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (Chicago), the Art Ensemble of Chicago, and the Black Artists Group (St. Louis).\textsuperscript{136} The 1960s also saw the rise of avant-garde collectives such as the Jazz Composers Guild, which was also subject to critical scrutiny and labeled as anti-establishment.\textsuperscript{137} By the 1970s many of these artists incorporated current stylistic trends into their music, such as urban rock and soul. Sun Ra’s foray into funk and disco styles in the late 1970s is another example. Unconventional characteristics continued through the evolution of the music, including recordings featuring Coleman on violin and trumpet. His minimal training on these instruments illustrates a relinquishing of the principle of instrumental mastery. Coleman’s innovations, often referred to as \textit{harmolodics}, influenced a number of players, both in the United States and overseas. In Eastern Europe, Tomasz Stanko, Adam Makowikz, Krzysztof Komeda, Zbigniew Seifert, and Michal Urbaniak based much of their musical contribution on Coleman’s style.\textsuperscript{138}

Free jazz is generally defined as employing an approach to improvisation that transcends previously held practices of closely following a preset chord progression. While often associated with the 1960s, free jazz improvisation occurred in recordings decades prior. Gridley specifies

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\textsuperscript{136} Ron Sakolsky, “Hangin’ Out on the Corner of Music and Resistance,” in \textit{Rebel Musics: Human Rights, Resistant Sounds, and the Politics of Music Making}, Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble, eds. (Tonowanda, NY: Black Rose Books, 2003): 44-67; see p. 52. Sakolsky states, “Further exploring the ideas of Ornette Coleman and Albert Ayler in a Black Bohemian context, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, as Robin D.G. Kelley has pointed out, ‘reinvented modernism through meditations and reflections on the meanings of freedom. In addition, they have moved Africa and its sprawling Diaspora from being the ‘counter’ modern (the primitive/the folk) to the very center of modernity.’”
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\textsuperscript{137} The cover of \textit{Down Beat}, May 6, 1965 reads: “JAZZ COMPOSERS GUILD: A Determined Alliance Against the Establishment.”
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recordings and artists of the 1940s and 1950s as predecessors to major practitioners of the 1960s, such as Ornette Coleman. However, the free jazz label, even in consideration of Coleman’s works, can be misleading and not accurately descriptive of the music. Gridley cautions that “very little of the music on the *Free Jazz* album is entirely free of tempo, key, or traditional distinctions between soloists and accompanists.” In free jazz, Gridley notes, freedom from a framework does not necessarily imply musicians’ complete non-conformity and deviation from traditional, stylistic jazz practices. Additionally, he notes the tendency of authors and critics to use the terms avant-garde and free jazz interchangeably, and states that only a limited number of avant-garde works were categorically free. Avant-garde is used more frequently to denote jazz styles originating in the 1960s that exhibit new musical directions, while free jazz refers specifically to the style of improvisation which encourages freedom from preset chord progressions, most exemplified in specific works from this decade.

Critics of the 1960s often aligned avant-garde jazz with political, subversive, or otherwise dissident opinion—an oversimplification that persists to the present day in critical accounts, jazz education, and academic scholarship. Indeed, some avant-gardists, such as Archie Shepp, intended to convey sentiments of dissatisfaction in their music. The label of avant-garde has since stigmatized and misrepresented jazz artists, such as Ornette Coleman, whose musical contributions were not intended to be politically evocative. While a non-conformist, dissident ideology may have resonated with Conover’s international audience, they were not encouraged...

141 Ibid.
to adopt the stigmatized view of avant-garde jazz as emblematic of counter-culture. Rather, as Conover conveyed it, listeners were encouraged to evaluate the music on its own terms.

The 1960s counter-culture in America included artistic assertions of Afro-identity and afrocentrism, ideological perspectives that sought to reclaim African identity and independence in the face of white hegemony. This movement coincided with Black Power, a political movement most commonly associated with the revolutionary ideas voiced by Malcolm X, who advanced the effort of reclaiming African American identity by encouraging resistance to integration and promoting non-conformism to a status determined by a white-dominated culture. While the core tenets of X’s Black Nationalist aims included culturally and ideologically positive goals, some proponents of the movement, namely those who advocated for militant rejection of the status quo, prompted a negative view.142

Some critics sought to superimpose Black Nationalist aims on avant-garde jazz to verify a particular agenda. Frank Kofsky maintained a connection between Black Nationalist ideologies and the music of John Coltrane. Kofsky, as Thomas J. Porter states, sought “to freeze the music at a point in time, and politically and culturally manipulate it for his own counter-revolutionary objectives.”143 Kofsky’s interview with Coltrane illustrates his goal-driven and self-interested approach in the inclusion of leading questions.

\*Kofsky:* Some musicians have said that there’s a relationship between some of Malcolm [X]’s ideas and the music, especially the new music. Do you think there’s anything in that?

\*Coltrane:* Well, I think that music, being an expression of the human heart, or of the human being itself, does express just what is happening. I feel it expresses the whole

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142 Dean E. Robinson, *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1. “Self-determination. Reclaiming one’s roots and identity. Manhood and esteem. These are the ideas that have been manifested in black nationalist movements past and present.”

thing—the whole of human experience at the particular time that it is being expressed…. Myself I recognize the artist. I recognize an individual when I see his contribution; and when I know a man’s sound, well, to me that’s him, that’s this man. That’s the way I look at it. Labels, I don’t bother with.

Kofsky: Have you ever noticed. . . that the reaction of an audience varies or changes if it’s a Black audience or a white audience or a mixed audience? Have you ever noticed that the racial composition of the audience seems to determine how the people respond?

Coltrane: Well, sometimes, yes, and sometimes, no.

Kofsky: Any examples?

Coltrane: Sometimes it might appear to be one. . . it’s hard to say, man. Sometimes people like or don’t like it, no matter what color they are.144

Kofsky’s repeatedly addresses ‘the new music’ rather than specifying individual works, implicating that all avant-garde jazz is aligned with ‘some of Malcolm X’s ideas.’ However, Coltrane concisely negates Kofsky’s aim of confirming the connection he seeks. Instead of verifying Kofsky’s correlations between race, Malcolm X, audiences, and music, Coltrane explains that music should express the whole of human experience. He describes music as holistic rather than reductive, expressive rather than reactive, and aesthetic rather than political. Coltrane’s responses correlate well with Conover’s viewpoint, that the recognition of music and the artist is central to the creative process. Additionally, Conover’s view that “jazz is true of American life,”145 matches Coltrane’s holistic approach to avant-garde jazz.

In an interview conducted in 1973 by America Illustrated columnist Robert Stearns, Conover discusses the immensity of the jazz spectrum and the necessity for authenticity in the creative process. Conover stated, “The jazz idiom is as varied as the number of people playing it because it really is an honest form of expression. . . .I think it would be difficult to find a connection between, let’s say, the traditional jazz of Preservation Hall and the music of an avant-

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145 Dave Brubeck, interview with Willis Conover, from Music USA Jazz Hour, Show No. 357-B (1955). Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
garde jazz soloist. . . .You can’t lie in playing jazz; you play yourself.”146 Here Conover conveys his belief in the artist, regardless of genre or era, as one whose individuality is paramount in the creative process, and that the creative process of the individual is what motivates a performance. In the FOMUSA Newsletter, Conover summarized his opinion on jazz with characteristic brevity: “When broadcasting, I use as few words as possible. The music speaks for itself; and the less time I take for talk, the more time there is for music.”147

One artist that Conover advocated for, and whose music he valued as expression on an individual level was Sun Ra. Conover afforded much airtime for Sun Ra’s music throughout the late 1960s, in addition to conducting interviews on the Music USA Jazz Hour and sponsoring him in a Carnegie Hall concert in 1968. Cited by Amiri Baraka as the “resident philosopher”148 of the Black Arts group, Sun Ra would accompany many events in collaboration with Baraka and the others in the BARTS group.149 John Szwed notes that the underpinnings to Ra’s music consist of a distillation of Black Nationalism, Egyptian mysticism, and interplanetary travel.150 The goals of the VOA, paramount to which was to emphasize American multiculturalism to listeners in communist-leaning nations, were in many ways at odds with the tenets of Black Nationalism, which sought to redefine indigenous national identity and promote independence from a Eurocentric worldview. These concepts deviated from the VOA’s goal of asserting intercultural alliance through jazz as a bringer of democracy. Despite this, the VOA did not question

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146 Willis Conover, Robert Stearns Interviews (1973), Box 5, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
147 Willis Conover, Friends of Music USA Newsletter 1:1 (1964), 1.
149 Baraka founded The Black Arts Repertory Theater (BARTS) in Harlem as part of the Black Arts Movement, an artistic branch of the Black Power movement. Through BARTS, he sought to establish a distinct voice for black writers and artists. He partnered with Sun Ra in his play, Black Mass, written in 1965 and performed in 1968.
150 John Szwed, Space is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra (New York: Pantheon, 1997).
Conover’s sponsorship of Ra’s music. While much of the music was intentionally linked to Black Nationalist ideologies, it was given airtime on the VOA due to Conover’s objective broadcasting style. By presenting avant-garde jazz to overseas listeners without value-laden descriptions, Conover dealt with avant-garde music simply by providing airtime for the music. As opposed to his colleagues in the jazz community in the United States, he presented avant-garde jazz as a component of the jazz narrative, and not in accordance with political sentiments. In his newsletter, Conover emphasized the groundbreaking, innovative, and exploratory aspects of the new music and not the political or racial associations commonly linked with it. In seeking to remain objective in his broadcasts, Conover did not ignore race problems in America. In his defense, many of the musical choices he advocated for contained direct messages of anti-prejudice. In cases in which political implications exist in the music, the act of ‘letting the music speak’ is itself a gesture of individual motivation on Conover’s part. In this sense, Conover endeavored to come across to his audience as neutral and non-biased. However, his musical choices sometimes revealed strong biases and political motivations. In maintaining a separation between his own motivations and the musical choices, Conover was advancing the directive of the VOA of maintaining a “balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions,”151 while also expressing individual, altruistic goals.

In one description he situates artists of earlier generations as examples of avant-gardists, explaining avant-garde as a category that persists as a ubiquitous aspect throughout the jazz timeline. Conover explains that, within a certain period, artists may be regarded as avant-gardists prior to achieving ‘giant’ status. In his answer to the Ghanaian listener in 1965, Conover continues:

It is often used to describe the playing of Ornette Coleman, Eric Dolphy, and Cecil Taylor, among others. While most jazz giants—Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Charlie Parker, for example—were once regarded as avant-garde, it does not necessarily follow that all of today’s avant-garde musicians will be regarded as jazz giants. Recent advance-guardsmen who seem to have earned giant status are Charles Mingus, John Coltrane, and Thelonious Monk.152

Here Conover takes care in drawing a clear distinction between the two ranks, emphasizing that innovation does not always lead to success and recognition in the jazz community. Nevertheless, his description includes the aspect of innovation as characteristic of ‘most jazz giants’, emphasizing further that avant-garde is primarily innovative in nature. Conover approaches his answer didactically by elucidating the origin of the term itself and emphasizing the innovative aspect of the music, citing innovative ‘jazz giants’ as explorers of new music, regardless of generation in the jazz timeline. Noteworthy here is the degree to which Conover conscientiously avoids the negative connotations common in many critics’ descriptions of the avant-garde of the 1960s. Common among these is the automatic, knee-jerk reaction of linking avant-garde and sociopolitical issues, common among critics of the 1960s.

What Conover left out of his definition of avant-garde is the genuine interconnectedness between certain avant-gardists and political messages that they intended to convey in their music. While most avant-garde music did not intend to convey political meaning, some did in earnest. In his study Mark Gridley warns against the erroneous cause-and-effect links between avant-garde music as programmatic and expressive of opposition, and avant-garde music as musically innovative. Gridley cites Archie Shepp as an example of an avant-gardist whose politically-motivated works included “Malcolm, Malcolm-Semper Malcolm, a eulogy to civil rights leader Malcolm X, and Rufus [Swung His Face at Last to the Wind, Then His Neck Snapped], a piece

about lynching.”153 Gridley also notes that such artists were “angry by their temperaments,” and for this reason featured prominently by journalists Amiri Baraka and Frank Kofsky.154 However since these works did not necessarily follow avant-garde procedures of free improvisation, Gridley adds, the “link between avant-garde jazz sounds during the 1960s and the civil rights movement of that era did not necessarily reflect the motives of the originators of free jazz.”155 Conover’s description closely matches Gridley’s description of it as “a fundamental tradition . . . continuously seeking new methods and materials.”156 Rather than address the relatively few instances in which artists sought to convey political messages in certain works, Conover chose to confine his definition of avant-garde to the innovative and exploratory qualities of the music itself, and to the artists themselves as custodians of a tradition in which new and original musical ideas are created.

Broadening the conversation, John Wiggin, VOA program manager and originator of Music USA, offers further explanation of the avant-garde on the next page of the newsletter. In a contribution requested by Conover, Wiggin’s explanation brings in genres outside jazz to illustrate the point. Wiggin encourages listeners to evaluate the new music critically and emphasizes the importance of open-minded listening when evaluating avant-garde music. He also points to the historical position occupied by similar revolutionaries in music history, like Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker, or, aside from jazz, Igor Stravinsky and Richard Wagner, whose musical contributions were initially misunderstood. Evoking a succession of musical revolutionaries, Wiggin theorizes “we could not have Schoenberg without the rebellious impulses of Debussy, without the soaring dissonances of Wagner, without Beethoven’s

154 Ibid., 141.
155 Ibid.
156 Ibid.
breakaway from the Classical tradition.” Ultimately, he emphasizes that, considering avant-garde music, each listener must make a concerted effort to comprehend the music and to evaluate its quality. Wiggin writes:

Each new generation produces musicians who try to say something that has not been said before. Their music may sound to many people like noise, like non-music. But to other more patient or more open-minded listeners, their music may be something new in music. . . . Each of them moved music along, adding rhythmic or harmonic richness in his own way. But each of them had to be listened to, and the listeners had to organize their ears to understand the innovations. After all, music and noise are both sounds. The difference between noisy sounds and musical sounds is the listener.158

Both descriptions encourage active and critical evaluation of the music. Conover and Wiggin note the importance of innovation, unity of will in the creative process, and individual evaluation. Additionally, it is fruitful to note the extent to which these sentiments reflect the VOA initiative of disseminating anti-Communist propaganda. The spirit of individualism in the phrase “trying to say something that has not been said before” evokes an anti-Communist agenda, in so much as communism was then perceived as an ideology that suppresses individualism. In a public service announcement on behalf of the VOA and the State Department, Duke Ellington espoused his beliefs about the importance of the individual nature of jazz and democracy. He notes that “jazz leaves lots of room for individual expression, and in the communist-dominated countries, jazz and individual expression are two things that are not wanted.”159 Many programs of the VOA, especially during the 1960s, emphasized such pro-American sentiment to counter communist propaganda against the United States. John Albert describes the tendency of the VOA on the eve of the Cold War as one that changed course from purely informational to a more confrontational method. Of the VOA’s intention during the Cold War:

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158 Ibid., 4.
War Albert writes “our hard-hitting negative approach corresponded to the feelings of the people of Eastern Europe who still had the hope of liberation.”\(^{160}\) Holly Schulman describes the early efforts of the VOA as one that “described an idealized United States, a land of mobility and freedom, where unity of will existed alongside diversity of background. America’s post-war goals were European liberation from Axis tyranny and achievement of the Four Freedoms enumerated by Roosevelt early in 1941: freedom of speech and worship, and freedom from want and fear.”\(^{161}\) The advocating of patient and open-minded listening, and the position advocating for the individual’s right to evaluate music individually are variations on the theme of individualism. During the 1960s, the VOA contended with Soviet propaganda by emphasizing American virtues. Conover’s and Wiggins’s descriptions advocate for an awareness of such democracy in emphasizing the role of the individual in music.

In a description of the avant-garde in *Down Beat* during the same year, value-laden implications are brought into focus in an article about Ornette Coleman. The opening statement reads: “When Ornette Coleman came to New York City in fall, 1959, his decidedly unorthodox approach to music immediately became the center of stormy controversy . . . some dismissed him as a musical charlatan or an unformed primitive.”\(^{162}\) Author Dan Morgenstern discusses with Coleman the role of the composer in jazz, the respect granted toward African American artists, and the misappropriation of power in the machine age. In the body of the article Morgenstern afforded no direct attention to the controversial connotations evoked in the article’s beginning. Rather it reveals Coleman as an uncompromisingly dedicated artist with tireless conviction whose music, aside from the degree to which it has been accepted, has impacted the jazz scene.

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since 1959. The evocative opening statement more accurately spoke to the perception of avant-garde in the United States. Given that Conover’s friends were provided access to Down Beat through the VOA, they were privy to this dialogue and most likely benefitted from it as providing an additional layer of understanding to their perception of avant-gardists and their music. By endeavoring to spare his readers controversy in his discussions of the avant-garde, Conover encouraged them to actively listen and evaluate the music on its own terms. Ultimately, Conover’s newsletter served as a more objective alternative to Down Beat, in which explanations of avant-garde skewed toward the factional and controversial.

Down Beat’s many contributors encouraged a debate-oriented atmosphere that affected the reception of avant-garde jazz in America. Alternately, Conover’s newsletter, while it encouraged debate, offered a simpler platform for discussion that was limited to Conover’s preferences. It did not include the array of critical opinion offered through Down Beat and other fanzines. Critical evaluation of jazz in the United States existed in the following general areas: the jazz press, the non-jazz press, writers advocating black nationalism and the Black Arts Movement, and musicians themselves. The avant-garde was not only depicted as a manifestation of politically motivated groups, but also deemed musically anarchic. Perhaps the most severe criticism took place in 1961 as critic and associate editor of Down Beat John Tynan labeled John Coltrane’s new musical directions as “anti-jazz.”

Of a performance by Coltrane and Eric Dolphy, Tynan writes, “At Hollywood's Renaissance Club recently, I listened to a horrifying demonstration of what appears to be a growing anti-jazz trend exemplified by those foremost

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proponents of what is termed avant-garde music. . . They seem bent on pursuing an anarchistic
course in their music that can but be termed anti-jazz.”164

Conover largely avoided this tendency and encouraged unbiased evaluation of the music
by programming avant-garde works without verbal reference to socio-political bias—and
allowing the music “speak for itself.”165 His verbal commentary was decidedly sparse. In terms
of explaining avant-garde in the newsletter and other textual sources, Conover evoked themes
such as innovation, individualism, and open-minded listening. He maintained this practice even
outside of broadcasting. Prior to a concert at Carnegie Hall in March of 1968, Conover provided
a description of Sun Ra without connotations which indicated Ra’s non-Earthly philosophies. He
writes,

Who is Sun Ra? Who is he, really? Where does he come from, really? What is his name,
really? Even Leonard Feather’s ‘Encyclopedia of Jazz’ throws up its hands. Ra never
clarifies his origins. Sun Ra’s answer is less than exact, but more real. He answers
without facts, but with truth. He answers without words, but with sound. Who is Sun Ra?
The answer is in his music.166

Conover’s suggestion of finding the true identity of Ra “in his music” is problematic. In
redirecting focus away from speculation on Ra’s intentionally nebulous origins, Conover
encourages active listening. However, it avoids consideration of a vital aspect of Ra’s musical
identity. The directive of letting the music speak for itself, in this case, fails to bring attention to
the sincerity and legitimacy of Ra’s philosophies, despite their seemingly dubious derivation.
Reviewers of Ra and the Arkestra in the American jazz press were distracted by his proposed,
celestial mysticism, and commonly presented an overtly factional stance against him from the
outset. Following a concert in 1962 in New York, critic John S. Wilson began his review with

164 Ibid.
165 Evidence from the following recordings of Music USA Jazz Hour: MUSA 4590B, MUSA 4822B, and
MUSA 4894B. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.
166 Willis Conover, letter to Bravo Magazine, 1968, Box MB1. Willis Conover Collection, University of
North Texas Music Library.
the headline, “Space Age Jazz Lacks Boosters: Cosmic Group Fails to Orbit with Rhythmic Propulsion.” In a review of a 1964 concert, A. B. Spellman wrote, “[Sun Ra’s philosophy] leads him to some really wild and original effects in his music, though it sometimes gets in the way, as when the musicians start talking in the middle of the piece about getting off at Jupiter and about Martian water lilies." In 1968, Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser published a review shortly after Ra’s Carnegie Hall concert titled, “Sun Ra: Genius or Charlatan?” These reviewers assessed Ra as a dubious and unconvincing artist. Conover’s explanation, by contrast, bypasses such negative associations and emphasizes the significance of the music.

In contrast to his broadcasts, in which Conover’s personality rarely emerged, his contributions in the newsletter often brought his personality to the fore. In response to a critique in 1964 by Peter Smids of the Dutch jazz magazine True Note, Conover dedicated two pages to a response. In a previous issue, Smids took issue with Conover’s control over the selection process, referring to his “Desert Island Selections.” Smids writes, “A hyper-personal character was noticeable in the three broadcasts on March 30th, 31st and April 1st: Conover’s desert island selection [in which] Conover completely ignored the real ‘New Thing’ work.” To which Conover replied, “I disagree. Freddie Hubbard’s Breaking Point album is New Thing jazz, and so is Mangelsdorff’s Now Jazz Ramwong. But they also meet my other standards for personal

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168 A.B. Spellman, “Jazz at the Judson,” The Nation, February 8, 1965: 149-51. Quoted in John Szwed, Space is the Place, 206.

169 Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser, “Sun Ra: Genius or Charlatan?” Jazz Podium, June 1968, in John Szwed, Space is the Place, xvii. Szwed adds, “[Kaiser] might well have added ‘madman’ to his question, because these are the roles in which this legendary and semi-reclusive American jazz musician was cast, and part of the mystery of one of the strangest artists that America has ever produced.”

170 Peter Smids, FOMUSA Newsletter 2:5 (1965), 7. Smids ultimately comes to an amicable agreement with Conover by stating: “But after all it was a question of what Conover liked best in 1964 and apparently he does not think it necessary to present himself as a super-modernist for the benefit of the ‘New Thing’ zealots, but as what he really is: a man who likes a musicianly piece of jazz,” Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
favor, including drive, swing, musicianship, humor, or lyricism – in short, humanity.”

This statement emphasizes his opinion that avant-garde, in the case of these recordings, meets standards common to the genre as a whole. While characteristically avoiding musical terminology, Conover’s description nevertheless suggests adherence to a framework consisting of distinctive features that indicate quality. Again, Conover refuses to set avant-garde apart from the rest of jazz. He concludes by discussing the difference between criticism and polemicism and the inherent risks in each: “I find the fashionable opinions of any year so misleading, since they are offered, not as opinions, but as facts.”

This statement serves as a cautionary reminder to readers that critical opinion can be too quickly accepted and mistakenly established as truth. It seems ironic that Conover would place this warning immediately following his critical (perhaps fashionable) assessment of jazz. However, it serves to emphasize Conover’s steadfast opinion that music should be evaluated independently of commentary, even when the commentary comes from him. Conover concludes his discussion with Smids with a provocative reflection: “How much enjoyment of the New Thing is appreciation of its musical accomplishments and potential, and how much is the joy of witnessing violence?”

Conover presents two ways of interpreting New Thing, as either accepting or rejecting it as music. Listeners, according to Conover, can either recognize musical potential in a New Thing work, as he does, or interpret it as calamity and rejoice in its musical nihilism. Conover engages new listeners of the avant-garde instructively and offers a Socratic question. Even in the context of the newsletter, where his opinions manifest themselves more often than in the broadcasts, he tasks the listeners to choose

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171 Willis Conover, *FOMUSA Newsletter* 2:5 (1965), Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
172 Ibid.
173 Ibid.
for themselves. As if concluding a lesson, Conover leaves them with a question, leaving the task of interpretation to the individual listener.

Conover as a Non-Musician

Having begun his broadcasting career with very little knowledge of jazz, Conover gradually developed a functional understanding exclusively through his exposure to the music and musicians during his tenure with the VOA. Throughout the VOA years he maintained close contact with the jazz community through social interaction and correspondence. In addition to his shows *House of Sounds* (in the United States: WCBS and WCBS-FM, NY) and *Music USA* (under the VOA), Conover interviewed musicians, contributed liner notes, and wrote press materials and articles in journals and newspapers.¹⁷⁴ By the 1960s, he had established himself as a regular contributor to several jazz magazines, newspapers, and emcee at various jazz festivals. While his social involvement in jazz circles was considerable, he was not without his limitations in comprehending the jazz language. Conover’s non-musical perspective, instances of which I have discussed, allowed for an uncommon perspective. The degree to which he used his influence in the jazz community is particularly remarkable in light of his dearth of musical training. Despite this lack, he gradually formed a remarkable working knowledge over the years he served in the jazz community.

In 1963 Amiri Baraka stated, “Most jazz critics have been white Americans, but most important jazz musicians have not been.”¹⁷⁵ Baraka perceived several flaws in the state of jazz criticism, and described the most common critic as a white, nonintellectual amateur. He writes:

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¹⁷⁴ see Appendix I.
“Most jazz critics began as hobbyists or boyishly brash members of the American petit bourgeoisie . . . [and] were (and are) not only white middle-class Americans, but middle-brows as well.”\footnote{176} Baraka is concerned with critics’ inability to understand and take into account the fundamental element in criticism, the emotional philosophy of the artists. Such discrepancy, according to Baraka, delegitimizes both critics and artists, and has only served to “obfuscate what has actually been happening with the music itself.”\footnote{177} Baraka argues for a non-Euro-centric consideration and new standards of judgment that include “native knowledge and understanding of the underlying philosophies and local cultural references.”\footnote{178} Fitting Baraka’s description of the typical jazz critic, Conover wrote about jazz from the perspective not only as a white, bourgeois, non-intellectual, but also as a non-musician.

It is debatable whether Conover possessed what Baraka described as “native knowledge of underlying philosophies” in jazz. Whether Conover, or critics in general, need to possess a technical understanding of music is a question central to the discussion of critics in the canonization of jazz. Conover’s immense impact on jazz outside the United States has appeared not only in the form of criticism, but in descriptions in liner notes, spoken introductions (as emcee), and in broadcasting and newsletter comments. His musical aptitude included rudimentary music making, including recordings and performances of original songs, and the composition of lyrics and melodies. Conover possessed a limited knowledge of the principles of music. In the late 1960s he was encouraged to compose by longtime friends and colleagues, Gene Lees and Bill Evans, who provided him instruction. Alongside many literary efforts during this time (including a prolific amount of limericks and short poems) Conover composed lyrics to two songs and recorded them during this period.

\footnote{176}{Ibid., 20.}
\footnote{177}{Ibid., 22.}
\footnote{178}{Ibid., 26.}
Figure 3.3. Conover's notation style ca. 1970
After a cursory attempt, he failed to grasp the technical elements of notation and, instead, cultivated his own style: a systematic code limited to rudimentary symbols that avoided
regarding the difficulties of the songwriting process, he writes,

Eventually I got a shaky but fairly serviceable understanding of what the notes were on a sheet of music; I could even play the notes on a piano. My understanding wasn’t firm enough, however, so I could get those melodies in my head into musical notes at the right places on staff-paper. It was hard enough finding the right line for C to go into; distinguishing between the positions of E and F slowed me down intolerably. I said [to] hell with notes. I simply wrote the letter symbols on ordinary paper, with a slight raising or lowering of the letters to indicate which way the note went in the octave, up or down. The letter C, for example, was a quarter note. A C in parenthesis was an eighth note, in double parentheses a sixteenth. Two C’s tied together were a half note. A C tied to a C in parentheses was a dotted note, or the C could be dotted.\textsuperscript{179}

Conover’s description indicates a failed attempt at gaining a working knowledge of music notation. Yet his descriptions indicate a general understanding of note values, duration, division of beats, and pitch direction—which he practiced, despite his deviation from traditional notation techniques.

Conover was largely unknown for his composing, yet he cultivated a notation style that enabled him to achieve a degree of success, having produced three hundred songs. His singing style did not involve traditional pitch-based singing, however. Instead it consisted of spoken narration to music, in a dramatic, interpretive style. In a biographical document, Conover cites among his credits: “Composer, lyricist, and performer for Columbia Records.”\textsuperscript{180}

In a recent debate in the jazz blogosphere, several critics weighed in on the question: “Do jazz critics need to know how to play jazz?”\textsuperscript{181} With few exceptions, most agree that critics need to possess a working knowledge of the fundamentals of music, but are not required to possess

\textsuperscript{179} Willis Conover, document titled ‘The Record’ 19 Jan 72, Box 102. Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.

\textsuperscript{180} Willis Conover, “Biography,” July 1968. “In New York, his musical activities have expanded to include the writing of some three-hundred popular songs. Two of these, “The Empty Streets” and “Far Off, Close By”, have been recorded by Columbia Records with Conover as narrator, accompanied by guitarist Charlie Byrd and strings. The record was released nationally in January, 1968.” Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.

technical aptitude on a musical instrument. Essential qualities for critics include “good ears and an open mind,” according to Randy Sandke.\textsuperscript{182} He writes that a critic must be aware of technique, without necessarily having to be able to exercise technique. Sandke equates the role of jazz critic to those in other fields, such as visual arts and theater, as one in which the critic needn’t practice at the technical level in order to “describe what the musician is doing as accurately as possible.” He further emphasizes his statement by delineating the role of the jazz critic as one whose writing inspires readers and generates enthusiasm for the music, and not extraneous, self-motivated sentiment. According to Sandke, while the cultivation of musical skill would benefit, critics must, regardless of their musical ability, “promote a fuller understanding of the music, rather than promoting themselves by belittling others.” Additionally, he emphasizes the importance of cultivating an objective and unbiased opinion, to “keep their opinions on merit in check as much as possible.”

In an interview with Pauline Rivelli, Conover expresses the need to cultivate respect for jazz in America. According to Conover, avant-garde jazz illustrates the cyclical nature of jazz. He writes,

> So far as jazz-as-music is concerned, a lot of the avant-garde jazz of the past is taken for granted today. The public always picks up on things afterwards. If the public ever caught up with any contemporary art while it was happening, that art would be dead. Jazz, or any art, \textit{has} to grow, to be alive, to be ahead of the public.\textsuperscript{183}

Conover’s view incorporates his understanding of avant-garde as a recurring stage in the jazz timeline and, as Sandke would assert, “promotes a fuller understanding of the music” by positing avant-garde jazz as a cyclical phase, ubiquitous, and paramount to the development of jazz.

\textsuperscript{182} Randy Sandke, quoted in Forman.
Conover promotes the music by describing it in terms understandable to most readers and by leaving music terminology out of the description.

However, for some, knowledge of music fundamentals is essential. Bill Kirchner calls for a critic’s “basic knowledge of music theory”\(^{184}\) to minimize mistakes in the writing process. Larry Appelbaum states that the most important qualities of a critic are “insight, an informed opinion, analytic skills, and the ability to communicate ideas in clear, coherent manner.”\(^{185}\) Appropriate technical proficiency for “any critic worth their salt,” according to Appelbaum, includes qualities that serve to provide context and meaning in writing, such as “a grasp of music history and literature (not just jazz), as well as knowledge of form, rhythm, harmony and the ability to recognize originality vs. patterns or clichés.” Conover’s (non-recording) library contained many reference works and periodicals. Aside from *Down Beat*, he cited the following works as continual reference sources that aided his programming process: *Stereo Review, High Fidelity, Jazz Forum* (Poland), *Coda* (Canada), *The Encyclopedia of Jazz*, Alec Wilder’s *American Popular Song*, the *ASCAP Biographical Dictionary*, the *New Hot Discography*, *Jazz Records* (Jorgen Grunnett Jepsen’s multi-volume discography) (Denmark); “several histories of jazz,” *The Making of Jazz* by James Lincoln Collier; *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music;* critical reviews by John S. Wilson in *The New York Times*, Whitney Balliett, Dan Morgenstern, and “any and all biographies and autobiographies of jazz artists.”\(^{186}\) These diverse sources constitute an abundance of materials that enhanced Conover’s writing and decision making. Furthermore, his use of sources from outside the United States illustrates his perception of jazz as more than a purely American music.

\(^{184}\) Bill Kirchner, quoted in Forman.
\(^{185}\) Larry Applebaum, quoted in Forman.
\(^{186}\) Willis Conover, document titled “Willis Conover: On Programming Music,“ (1982), Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library
Todd Jenkins’s view contrasts with the others, citing that, “to write authoritatively about a subject, the writer must have a significant measure of experience and knowledge.”\textsuperscript{187} Jenkins’s view of the critic whose “intelligent analysis depends upon a solid understanding of its history, its practice and its spirit,” is one that does not require professional musical skill, but an awareness of the mechanics of music. Likewise, Ronan Guilfoyle cites musical understanding as a benefit for critics, stating “they should know something about form and structure and have at least dabbled in the music at some point.”\textsuperscript{188} Guilfoyle equates this skill with that of a literary critic, most of whom do not publish novels, but whose working knowledge includes awareness of the necessary rules of punctuation and grammar. Conover’s foray into music theory may fall short of Jenkins’ requirements, but satisfy those of Guilfoyle. Nevertheless, Conover’s songwriting efforts represent an interest in gaining an understanding of the practice of music writing. Additionally, his vocal performances and recording of them have provided some bearing on his writing and analysis.

Conover’s experiences in the jazz industry included directorship of THE Band in Washington D.C. from 1951 to 1956, with drummer Joe Timer, the chief arranger and leader. Saxophonist Jack Nimitz (1930-2009), a member of THE Band from 1952-53, recalls, “Willis used to introduce the band, because he was well known from his ‘Voice of America’ broadcasts and his name carried more clout.”\textsuperscript{189} Conover’s affiliation with the group was more administrative than artistic, and included advertising, acquisition of funds, and soliciting guest soloists. Conover’s substantial value to the group’s success is illustrated in arrangement by Bill

\textsuperscript{187} Todd Jenkins, quoted in Forman.
\textsuperscript{188} Ronan Guilfoyle, quoted in Forman.
Potts, titled “Willis.” The arrangement, which uses the chord structure of “Pennies from Heaven,” presents a musical thanks to Conover and his efforts in funding the project. Given Conover’s position with THE Band as largely an administrative front man, it would be inaccurate to claim that Conover cultivated knowledge of technical proficiency, i.e., music theory (what Bill Kirchner cites as “basic knowledge” for a jazz critic.) However, the experience provided Conover with what Todd Jenkins dubs “a solid understanding of [jazz] history, its practice and its spirit,” in that it placed him in a position as the stimulus for the band’s success in an era of decline for big band jazz. Ultimately, Conover’s involvement in fronting THE Band illustrates his selfless promotion of the music, fulfilling the qualities of one whose actions inspire and generate enthusiasm without self-promotion. It serves Sandke’s ideal of a jazz critic who benefits jazz by “promot[ing] a fuller understanding of the music, rather than promoting themselves by belittling others.” In an executive role, Conover was provided insight from a unique perspective from which to form his own style of criticism.

Conover formed his own perspectives through his many experiences in radio prior to his assignment with the VOA. In an interview (transcript) by Gene Robinson in 1974, Conover responds to a question about his learning process while working at a radio station in Cumberland, Maryland in the early 1940s. Having little experience with jazz, Conover claims to have learned about the jazz community through Down Beat magazine. “[I had] allowed [Down Beat] to educate me as to the proper attitudes of the time, until such time as I felt secure enough in my own attitudes to disregard what Down Beat or any other publications said and go on the basis of

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191 Ibid.
192 Randy Sandke, quoted Forman.
my own tastes and convictions.”193 Here Conover describes becoming acquainted with jazz, criticism, and jazz writing through *Down Beat* as part of his development. He describes his learning process of forming opinions through other philosophies, or using other opinions as a basis for learning, yet he abandoned this scaffolding in favor of his independently formed opinions. His description is reflective of the manner of learning Conover encouraged in others during this period. In a keynote speech, Conover warned of the dangers of following the attitudes of others. He writes,

> Unfortunately, too often, actions follow attitudes rather than convictions. . . . Attitudes can be directed by other people . . . [such as] people espousing ‘the new thing’, the jazz avant-garde, BECAUSE they think other people will think them un-hip, if they don’t…. Now, the CLAIMS for QUALITY . . . MAY BE ABSOLUTELY RIGHT; they’re just SAYING it’s right, because they’re AFRAID NOT TO. WHATEVER HAPPENED TO YOUR OWN TASTE? . . . your OWN STANDARDS? . . . your own SELF-DIRECTION and SELF-CONFIDENCE?194

In this keynote speech Conover passionately encourages independent thought. Citing the New Thing as an example, Conover encourages the audience to judge for themselves and not succumb to group influences.

According to Conover, jazz critic Nat Hentoff embodied a high standard that Conover sought to emulate in his duties in the jazz community. Despite disagreements on critical positions, Conover credited Hentoff for legitimizing jazz in his critical writing. Hentoff, Conover states, “became a sort of ‘conscience’ for me; even when I disagreed with specific positions he

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193 Willis Conover, in an interview transcript: *Oral History: Interview with Willis Conover* by Gene Robinson at the Voice of America, March 27, 1974 for The University of Maryland and The National Association of Broadcasters / Broadcast Pioneers Library, Box 4. Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.

194 Willis Conover, “Keynote,” Conover prefaces this document with the following: “This was written at top speed for a speech I had to make as soon [as] I finished writing. The punctuation, etc., was for my own guidance while speaking. The delivery wasn’t as exaggerated as the typography suggests, though it was emotional enough. The piece stands up, for me, as a statement of where I stand today, four or five years afterwards.” Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
took, I trusted his motivations.” Conover credits Hentoff for treating jazz, in his capacity as editor of *Down Beat* in the 1950s, with the seriousness it deserved. The legitimacy assigned to jazz by Hentoff proved instrumental in legitimizing Conover’s occupation as programmer, and served to substantiate his “own yearnings for respectability in a fairly disreputable medium, commercial radio.” Due to Hentoff’s influence, Conover fostered an appreciation of jazz as art music. Of the legitimization of jazz, Conover writes, “If I couldn’t do what was needed to make much of the money a radio job could bring, I could comfort myself with a feeling of being ‘superior’ and ‘different.’ Jazz was laughed at by most of the people at the station; Hentoff’s imprimatur on jazz helped me fend off the ridicule directed at me for featuring jazz.”

Conover would often serve in positions that proved influential in the realm of jazz funding in the United States. In a document on the selection of NEA jazz panel members, Conover states his selection criteria to the director of music programs for the NEA, Walter F. Anderson. On the question of integrating young panelists, Conover writes:

> I don’t feel this is, of itself, a major improvement. An older jazz aficionado has as much youthful spirit as a younger one does, or he would be unable to sustain his interest in jazz…. He is also less likely to respond with automatic favor to contemporary movements in pop music which attract youngsters as much by elements of social crusading as by musical elements. . . *musical content should come first in music,* and social needs should be met by funding those musicians. . . who best merit and most need funding. (Emphasis added.)

This quotation illustrates Conover’s criteria for panelists, and his prioritizing of musical elements and content. Additionally, it shows the level of importance placed on the NEA’s responsibility of fulfilling social needs by funding musicians. However, statements such as these provided fodder

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195 Willis Conover, Unfinished Autobiography, Box 134, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
196 Ibid., 2.
197 Ibid.
for critics to take aim at Conover with accusations of misuse of power, and, specifically, expressing a bias. Conover voices a clear distrust of youth, whose choices based on social crusading, may, in his opinion, outweigh those based on musical quality. Nevertheless, Conover qualifies himself suited to judge musical content and merit among current artists, a task too important for youths. Overall, Conover’s stance of emphasizing the superiority of musical content provides further evidence of his promotion of music as separate from political connotation. The responsibility of the NEA, according to Conover, is to address social needs by supporting the artists on merits of their music, and not by supporting artists on the basis of their association with social change, politics, or, generally, artists who are selected based on the likelihood of their presence in enabling social transformation.

*Music USA* began as a means to counter communist propaganda, predicated on the idea that its young listeners would be the most receptive to change. Conover’s design of *Music USA* involved the simultaneous emphasis of democratic virtues and the redefinition of jazz as a global music. However, the New Thing and modern jazz trends emerging in the 1960s had, in America, engendered politically and culturally driven subtexts that challenged the VOA initiatives. Overseas, these connotations were deemphasized given Conover’s prioritization of the music in his broadcasts.

Conover cites several artists and groups as having emerged as a result of his endorsement. In a document illustrating the “influence of VOA’s *Music USA* broadcasts on other cultures,” Conover lists forty-one artists/groups. While specific names are not included, the list includes nineteen from “outside the Soviet orbit,” and twenty-two from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The document’s preface reads: “With few exceptions...all the performers credited
Conover’s broadcasts with the birth and growth of their own music.”\(^{199}\) In the latter group, Conover lists among the groups: “Poland: a composer-saxophonist with combo, using traditional Polish rhythm.” In an email correspondence, Roman Dylag verifies the likelihood that Conover is referring to The Wreckers, a Polish jazz quartet led by Zbigniew Namysłowski, composer-saxophonist. Dylag verifies that in the early-mid 1960s Namysłowski “was using Polish folklore frequently, and when I worked with him, about 1968, we used to play his tune called “Krakowiak.”\(^{200}\) Based on a traditional, Polish dance-style, “Krakowiak” represents the group’s merging of jazz, classical elements, and Polish folk music.

In his newsletter and through his broadcasts, Conover facilitated a non-biased concept of jazz in which music was paramount. For overseas listeners becoming musicians, this was an ideal atmosphere for learning. In these conditions, artists could create as individuals, and could become practitioners of music that fused elements of their culture with jazz. For many, their music became a synthesis of their culture’s music and musical elements heard on Music USA. Conover’s conversation on the avant-garde presented listeners with the idea that jazz is flexible, malleable, and can be modified to suit a diversity of contexts. I contend that, regardless of his original intent, Conover set the stage for new music developments and provided impetus for emerging jazz artists seeking to mine a new aesthetic.

The Wreckers were not an avant-garde group, but were heavily influenced by modern jazz players.\(^{201}\) Their music was occasionally circulated on the Music USA Jazz Hour from 1962 onward. Formed in 1959, The Wreckers included Zbigniew Namysłowski, alto saxophone; Michel Urbaniak, tenor saxophone; Andrzej Trzaskowski, piano; Roman Dylag, bass; and Adam

\(^{199}\) Willis Conover, “Music Examples,” Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.

\(^{200}\) Roman Dylag, e-mail message to author, February 9, 2012.

\(^{201}\) Ibid.
Jedrzejowski, drums. They were the first jazz ensemble from behind the Iron Curtain to tour in America in 1962. Dylag’s recollections illustrate the group’s deep admiration for and indebtedness to Conover, whose influence impacted significantly upon their international success. In their tour of America The Wreckers enjoyed playing at several venues in New York and Washington D.C. and at the Newport Jazz Festival, for which Conover served as host. The musicians recall the experience with fondness. Urbaniak states, “In the summer of 1962, as a teenage boy, I found myself in New York with the Wreckers. I had never been abroad, not even Bulgaria or across the Czech border, so seeing the flaming rooftops of Manhattan I though I was in a dream.” As their host for a nine-day period, Conover accompanied them and introduced them to the jazz community of New York. Of this time Dylag recalls, “We were invited a couple of times to his apartment and have been listening to some music from his large collection of LPs. . .I think Willis had respect for all kinds of jazz styles and he presented all of it in his jazz hour. Being a great host for us he certainly followed our preferences.” Dylag cites Conover and his Jazz Hour show as instrumental in shaping their concept of jazz. He writes,

We [The Wreckers] were concentrated more on ‘hard bop’ with preference by Horace Silver Quintet or Art Blakey’s Jazz Messengers. That was already after the years of appreciation for West Coast musicians or Dave Brubeck, Stan Getz and others. But without Willis Conover and his Jazz Hour it would be impossible for us to follow the development in jazz and try to assume it on our level.

Conover’s role in their support extended far beyond serving as host in the United States. He also featured their music on Music USA broadcasts in subsequent years. He formed long lasting friendships with them and was tireless in his support for their success. Dylag recalls the profound changes in his concept of jazz that took place during their time with Conover. He writes, “Since I

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202 Ibid.
204 See Appendix C and Appendix D.
205 Roman Dylag, e-mail message to author, February 9, 2012.
left Poland in March 1963 I became more and more convinced that jazz music is international and it has first of all to do with the deepest human feelings and this what we call soul.”

The Wreckers serve as an example of an overseas jazz group who were able fulfill a creative and independent musical process. This independence manifests itself, in part, from Conover’s influence. In perceiving jazz as international, the Wreckers participated in the jazz experience not as outsiders, but as jazz musicians following their own course. Dylag’s concept of jazz as international originates from the lessons taught by Conover, that jazz is a global music. Dylag’s admiration for Conover is illustrated musically in a 1995 recording by The Milcho Leviev Trio, in which the group performs a “spontaneous free-form improvisation” titled *For Willis.* This work illustrates, on a musical level, an independence of form and encapsulates an image of jazz perceived by Dylag and other Polish jazz artists as influenced by Conover’s broadcasts.

In a USIA memorandum from 1970, Conover notes that Ghana ranked third in order of total number of FOMUSA club members per country, with the largest being England, followed by India. Correspondence to Conover from African countries during the 1960s is not as abundant as that from Poland and other Eastern Bloc countries. Nevertheless, other forms of evidence have proven beneficial in verifying a connection between a few African jazz artists and Conover’s shows, and his influence on Africans’ views on jazz in general. Nigerian musician and broadcaster Benson Idonije remembers Conover fondly, stating that his death in 1998 caused a “significant blow on the propagation of jazz as an art form.” Of Conover’s impact on Nigerian

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206 Ibid.
207 Ibid.
208 *For Willis,* from the recording “E.B. Blues” by the Milcho Leviev Trio (BMU-ILIEFF Productions, Switzerland 1995), compact disc.
209 The phenomenon of jazz artists composing works honoring jazz deejays is not unique to Conover. Others include *An Oscar for Treadwell* (1956) by Charlie Parker, written for jazz deejay Oscar Treadwell (1926-2006); and *Jumpin’ With Symphony Sid* (1950) by Lester Young, written for Sid “Symphony Sid” Torin (1909-1984).
musicians and the world in general, Idonije describes “the negative effect the stoppage of the programme as a result of his absence has had on the evolution and development of jazz all over the world.” Of the lasting inspiration that Conover bestowed on listeners, Idonije writes,

> Even the jazz programmes that some of us, including Lindsay Barret and O.J. Nanna presented in the form of Stereo Jazz Club and NBC Jazz Club from the 60s to the 90s inspired a good number of Nigerian musicians across Nigeria and Ghana—who have continued to be grateful to us and the programmes for their professional development, especially the way these programmes exposed them to various instruments and eventually moulded their careers.

As a FOMUSA chapter member, Idonije represents a hitherto unheard sector of Conover’s listenership. He remembers Conover as not only a presenter of jazz, but also as a respected educator who used his interactive experiences with musicians in his broadcasts. Idonije recalls Conover’s teachings on Ellington (following his death in 1974), writing,

> [Conover] travelled with almost all the top jazz musician and was present at most of the recordings. As a result, when he spoke, he did so from residual experience, a wealth of first-hand knowledge that was authoritative. When Duke Ellington died in 1974, Conover ran programmes on the Duke. . . .Not only did he trace the stories of “Caravan,” “Mood Indigo,” “Take the A-Train” and others from their compositional stages to rehearsals, he also discussed the mood and attitude that characterized their recordings.

Musicians from Nigeria and Ghana have, like The Wreckers in Poland, credited Conover with the success of their musical achievements. Among the 41 artists influenced by Conover is “Ghana: a high-life group with jazz musicians.” Evidence from correspondence to Conover from Ghanaba, sometimes referred to as Guy Warren of Ghana, strengthens the likelihood that Conover is referring to him. In his autobiography, Warren cites Conover as “one of the

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211 Benson Idonije, “Willis Conover: The Voice of America,” *Guardian Life Magazine*, May 18, 2009. Of Conover’s educational virtue to African musicians, Idonije adds “When Coltrane died in 1967, Conover demystified avant-garde by developing the story of Coltrane’s saxophone from the conventional level that Charlie Parker created through to the modal experience Coltrane garnered from the Miles Davis Sextet of 1959 in *Kind of Blue*. Conover was a teacher.”

212 Ibid.

213 Ibid.

personalities to whom I am dedicating this book.” Specifically, Guy Warren credits Conover for representing jazz’s African roots in his broadcasts. The acknowledgement of the historical context of jazz and Africa legitimized jazz for artists like Guy Warren.

In 1955, after playing with The Tempos with E.T. Mensah, Warren moved from Ghana to Chicago to pursue his musical goals. There he recorded several albums as bandleader, percussionist, and composer that incorporated a fusion of African music with jazz, which would later be popularized by Fela Kuti and others. In the United States he met with several noteworthy jazz artists, including Charlie Parker and Duke Ellington, whom he dubbed “God’s gift to musicians.” He left for Ghana in 1974, changing his name to Ghanaba (meaning “son of Ghana”) and has stayed there ever since. Throughout the 1960s Ghanaba endeavored to be “the African musician who reintroduced African music to America to get Americans to be aware of this cultural heritage of black people.” With his playing style consisting of “African music with a little bit of jazz thrown in, not jazz with a little African thrown in,” Ghanaba was illustrating that his concept of jazz as having predominant origins in music of Africa.

Paradoxically, however, Conover disputes the attribution of jazz’s African roots. When outlining his views on jazz broadcasting for television for the USIA, Conover refutes the idea that jazz is rooted in African music, and asserts a more ubiquitous and comprehensive origin, stating,

The long-held belief that American jazz is mainly rooted in African music is now generally discredited. There are similarities between jazz and the music of many cultures: Indian classical music, Andalusian folk music, Welsh hymns, popular and dance music of the West Indies, gypsy songs, Scots bagpiping, bluegrass hoedowns, etc.

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215 Guy Warren (Ghanaba), letter to Willis Conover, May 11, 1982, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library, see Appendix I.
217 Ibid.
It is unclear whether Conover had ever justified the connections he posited between jazz and world cultures. Indeed, the extent of Conover’s exposure to and knowledge of Andalusian folk music remains to be seen. Nevertheless, his intent was to convey a perception of jazz that was comprehensive, with shared characteristics across a global spectrum. The closest connection Conover draws between Africa and jazz is the call-and-response interactions between instrumentalists and singers, and also instrumental sections (“brasses against reeds”). In making this connection Conover shows his awareness of a call-and-response as a common aspect of musical form included in what he terms “the basics of jazz.” Conover continues, citing the differences between African drumming and jazz drumming:

Jazz drummers...achieve a swinging pulse (another of the basics of jazz) that African drummers neither find nor need. (Ghana’s Guy Warren may be an exception). Even the two functions are different: whereas jazz drums give accompaniment to the other instruments, African drums are given accompaniment by the other instruments.

Conover disputes the direct relationship between African and jazz drumming. He denies the connections between Africa and jazz in terms of aesthetics and procedure, and confirms the creation of jazz by Afro-Americans as an effect of societal change over a long period. He states,

The true African roots of jazz are the people who created jazz. Jazz was created in America, not by Africans, not by Euro-Americans, but by Afro-Americans, in response to a multitude of pressures and attractions in American society that were unrelated to the life of their African cousins, either socially, economically, politically, culturally, or musically.

Ultimately, Conover connects Africa to jazz in terms of its inclusion among many other points of origin. This evidence enhances the argument that Conover assumed a manner of politicizing jazz that resisted a direct origin. Instead, he advanced an idea that jazz is found everywhere and is

\[219\] Ibid., 2.
\[220\] Ibid.
\[221\] Ibid.
music of the present. In so doing, Conover contested the concept that marks the original source of jazz as Africa, advancing the notion that jazz is universal and open to overseas participation.

Conclusions

Analysis of correspondence between Conover and his fans overseas reveals an evolution (both conceptual and aesthetic) in Conover’s outlook on jazz throughout the 1960s. Since the inception of Music USA, Conover underwent marked stages of development. Conover’s careful attendance to the matter of correspondence was instrumental in forming his own perception of jazz, which, in turn, affected his development as a jazz critic. Ultimately, the didactic relationship between Conover and his listeners was reciprocal. In the process of disseminating jazz overseas, he attained a deeper understanding of the music and formed opinions based on this interaction. Subsequently, his listeners also learned, through a process that included a dialogue regarding its ongoing development through a fan-based, network system.

Conover intended to convey a minimum of political bias in his comments. However, his musical choices often spoke volumes. Avant-garde jazz, as it surged in the late 1960s, stands as an example of a genre with which Conover resisted common non-musical associations in his descriptions and introductions. Listeners exposed to Conover’s Music USA broadcasts saw the New Thing through Conover’s approach, a circumstance that facilitated a complex variety of new musical streams in these countries during the 1960s.

However, overseas listeners were not entirely unaware of such political interpretations. Conover maintained a commentary in his FOMUSA Newsletter from which listeners could arrive at such associations (and also from occasional issues of Down Beat). As such, the perception of
jazz as symbolic of egalitarianism was becoming increasingly dubious. However, this did not succeed in negating its usefulness to the VOA as an instrument for democracy.

Conover initially postulated a ratio in order to provide a balanced means of conveying jazz internationally. This plan allowed him to dedicate portions of the program to specific music types or eras, which enabled him to incorporate emerging artists and styles into the show. While it allowed for the showcasing of the stylistic diversity in jazz, it also granted Conover ultimate authority to decide, solely, on what music constitutes which category. Just as local broadcasters in Chicago in the 1930s controlled radio programming to counter assimilating forces like commercial advertising, *Music USA* presented a form of control in which a hierarchical structure served to justify broadcasting choices and advance an agenda.

*Music USA* imbued Conover with the power to represent jazz to an international audience. I posit that his method of proportioning music into a ratio was the most effective way to faithfully convey jazz, despite the inherent consequence that his decisions were, in some degree, subjective. His decisions, coming from a perspective of a non-musician, constituted the most reasonable way of conveying jazz internationally in that his perspective most closely matched that of his audience. I posit that, as a non-musician Conover was an appropriate choice to provide the most truly egalitarian perspective in fulfilling the role as jazz ambassador for an international radio audience. His *Music USA Jazz Hour*, in conjunction with the *FOMUSA Newsletter*, succeeded in influencing a large, culturally diverse fan base. Intensified by his celebrity status, Conover cultivated a familial and communal spirit in his broadcasts and newsletters that connected diverse ethnic groups through focusing on the human characteristics and individualism in jazz.
Conover’s position in jazz broadcasting and criticism in the United States imbued him with significant responsibility. While he endeavored to cultivate an unbiased approach to programming music, he nevertheless expressed favoritism and a personal predisposition. He directed his broadcasts to reflect his vision of where jazz was going, and, as a result, shaped the attitudes of his fans worldwide.

Conover used his familiarity with reputable methods of disseminating jazz (and also in creating a fan base) and transposed them to suit overseas jazz fans and musicians. In many cases he replicated established strategies already deemed successful in America. For instance, Conover’s International Jazz Listeners’ Poll mirrors *Down Beat’s* Readers’ Poll.

His broadcasts fulfilled what Derek Vaillant describes as the power of radio to “entrench a network system.” The FOMUSA chapters, consisting of socioeconomically and culturally diverse groups, were united in their fandom of jazz. The members of this jazz community were provided opportunity to participate in a jazz conversation through correspondence with Conover, who subsequently published his listeners’ letters in the *FOMUSA Newsletter*. Often, they shared similar reactions and tended to cite Conover as a unifying force in the face of cultural, political, and societal adversity.

Deviations in his formula reveal insightful aspects of Conover’s changing views on jazz. In subsequent chapters I further explore Conover’s broadcasting procedure, his learning process, and the effects of fandom on his international audience as it relates to canon formation in jazz and in Conover’s affirmation of jazz as a global music.
The emergence of formal jazz criticism that appeared in the 1950s served to legitimize the genre in the wake of more commercially dominant forms (i.e. rock, and rhythm and blues), and to affirm its place in Western music. In the wake of the social and political turbulence of the 1960s, the practice of jazz criticism was made increasingly precarious by the issue of race. The first instances of racial tension in formal jazz criticism began in the 1930s. Critical infighting arose regarding the acceptance of jazz as a legitimate course of study in secondary and university education curriculums. Critics and musicians throughout the jazz community, particularly those who engaged with avant-garde jazz, debated relentlessly about the state of jazz in America.

The influence of white promoters of jazz emerged in the 1930s, as racial barriers and widespread prejudice impeded cultural and racial integration in the jazz community. White promoters, as Burton W. Peretti asserts, were integral to a small but effective desegregation effort in the post-war era, including the facilitation of performance opportunities in venues such as riverboats and in broadcasting opportunities in radio stations. Black artists endured severe constraints that impeded their involvement in recordings and on radio. Exceptions occurred, but only by virtue of clandestine efforts.

The first promoter whose intentions challenged this situation was John Hammond (1910-87), white record producer and critic, whose efforts to advocate for integration facilitated the success of several jazz artists in the 1930s and ‘40s. Like Conover, Hammond utilized advantages that intensified his influence as a promoter and facilitator for artists. These included political connections, dogged persistence, and the benefits of a non-musical background. Peretti

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notes that the de-emphasis on musical technique in Hammond's writing served to intensify his efforts in regards to social purpose in his criticism.\textsuperscript{223} He writes, “Hammond’s greatest gift was his ability to detect new performers with innovative skills. Perhaps because he did not try to master an instrument or jazz techniques, he felt freer than any musician to associate racial progress with the advancement of jazz.”\textsuperscript{224} As with Conover, Hammond’s criticism was shaped, in part, by his non-musical involvement, which skewed toward passions regarding social purpose, rather than the technical aspects of music. Additionally, like Conover, Hammond’s reputation was shaped by his engagement in the selective promotion of musicians and bands. He had his enemies, and became a controversial figure in jazz criticism.\textsuperscript{225} Hammond’s efforts included facilitating some of the earliest collaborations between white and black performers in his role as producer.\textsuperscript{226} Despite his efforts of desegregation in jazz, Hammond remains a controversial figure by virtue of his application of influential bias as it affected the future of canon formation in jazz. Hammond, therefore, represents the earlier generation of influential, white promoters. As we have noted, Hammond and Conover largely avoided writing from a perspective of musical technique, which enabled them to focus on social aspects of the jazz community. Hammond and Conover shared a passion for a desegregated jazz community, and perceived the music as emblematic of their egalitarian efforts.

Hammond’s reputation serves as an example of a white fan’s assertion of biracial ethics. White jazz fans and musicians developed a sense of belonging in their relationships with black

\textsuperscript{223} Ibid., 202. “Hammond dedicated less of his time to radical politics after 1935, when the worst effects of the Depression eased; in that year he joined the executive board of the NAACP, which he felt was losing some of its middle-class, middle-of-the-road caution.”

\textsuperscript{224} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{225} Ibid., 203. “[Hammond] used his connections and powers of persuasion to promote certain black bands (particular Count Basie’s) over others, and in doing so helped to determine which black jazz musicians and genres would thrive, and which would struggle and wither, into the 1940s.”

\textsuperscript{226} These included recordings with Benny Goodman in collaboration with Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday in 1935; with Teddy Wilson in 1936; Lionel Hampton in 1937; and the Count Basie Band throughout the 1930s and 40s.
performers. Regarding the mentorship of Artie Shaw under stride pianist Willie “the Lion” Smith, Peretti describes the experience as having “crystallized Shaw’s sense of racial equality and justice.”227 This formative experience engendered a “feeling of being accepted [by] living the life of a Negro musician, adopting Negro values and attitudes, and accepting the Negro out-group point of view not only about music but life in general.”228 This sense of acceptance from an out-group is what motivated several bandleaders in this era, including Jimmy McPartland, who consciously employed racially mixed ensembles. He writes, “I usually have a six piece band. . . three white and three black. This represents America to me. And it represents music also.”229 This example illustrates a manifestation of the belief held by many whites that jazz could be a key to dissolving racial prejudice. Nevertheless, exceptions such as Hammond aside, racial integration was not a distinguishing feature in jazz before the 1950s. Circumstances in which racial integration in jazz occurred during this time were exceptional, and carried out by way of efforts by individuals serving as facilitators.

The white promoter’s role in race relations in jazz culture was both a positive attribute and an obstacle to racial understanding.230 White writers, according to Jon Panish, tended to focus on individualism and personal struggle in jazz, rather than history, performance, and improvisation common in criticism by black writers. The environment of structural inequality (white dominance of cultural resources) encouraged a race-neutral, color-blind discourse that prospered by minimizing and subordinating black cultural contributions. This view, according to Panish, “legitimated a public discourse in which white Americans turned a blind eye to the significance and influence of race on the lives of all Americans while reaping the material and

227 Peretti, 207.
228 Artie Shaw, quoted in Peretti, 207.
229 Jimmy McPartland, quoted in Peretti, 207.
psychic benefits of their white privilege.” Panish notes the emergence of cultural and racial homogeneity as a “color-blindness [that] has encouraged Americans to work toward the elimination of all racial difference under the idea that the natural tendency of all minority groups in the US is to assimilate.” Illustrating a similar view, Conover discusses the role of black jazz artists and the eventual dissolving of their cultural significance through assimilation. Regarding the future of jazz, Conover writes,

The people in America who lived under conditions conducive to making the kind of music called jazz happened to be negroes. So long as groups of negroes are caused (or choose) to feel that they belong to a separate kind of group, they will share special cultural traits. . . . Armstrong, Ellington, and Parker, while linked, have their feet most strongly planted in different conditions of geography, personal associations, and musical and chronological background. Each represents different stages of jazz development. Each stage of jazz development parallels change in living conditions. Already the negro American shares in the complexity of professions, tastes, etc. which is known by the Italian-American, the Anglo-American, etc. As his life grows more complex, as he grows more sophisticated, so does his music. Better fed, better paid, better educated, etc. . . . all affect music. Possibly as he becomes a better and better adjusted, Mr. Average American man, his artistry will suffer; there’ll be less need for music making of the kind and extent he has known. He’d be a fool to trade a better life for a better music (though not mutually exclusive), but I hope he’ll never lose the vitality he brought to American (and then international) music.

Conover illustrates his projected view of eventual race-neutrality in his description of the stages of the black jazz artists in the first half of the century. Moreover, he speculates on the eventual suffering of music as the black jazz artist “becomes better and better adjusted,” and “becomes Mr. Average American man,” implying what Panish describes as an eventual evaporation of cultural difference between races. This view undermines the racial significance of black artists’ contributions, and conforms to Panish’s notion of the dominant, race-neutral discourse prevalent at mid-century.

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231 Ibid., 6.  
232 Ibid., 7.  
233 Willis Conover, Untitled document (ca. 1965), Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
Conover voiced his philosophies on racism as a universal and ubiquitous aspect of human nature and advocated for its eradication. He described racism as thoroughly base and animalistic, equating it with rape and murder, and expressed a longing for an eventual end to the endemic of racism in America in the form of a challenge. The solution to racism would involve, according to Conover, advances in government regulation and individual conscientiousness. He writes,

The big question in America today has been improperly stated as ‘How do we get White Americans to be nice to Black Americans? – and vice versa.’ It’s a practical sounding and well meant question, but it goes deeper than that. Such things as murder...and rape...and tribal suspicion...are natural to all animals...including the human animal. But we have outlawed murder (relatively, it’s almost eradicated)...We no longer rape in order to have a FAMILY...We go through certain social rituals which mean that increasingly the woman has something to say about what the relationship is going to be...Now the question, properly stated, I believe, is: WILL AMERICA BE THE FIRST SOCIETY IN HISTORY, to establish a COMBINATION of LEGISLATION and PERSONAL, INDIVIDUAL CO-OPERATION, to OUTLAW and eventually ERADICATE the OUTWARD EXPRESSION of this NATURAL ANIMAL THING – TRIBAL SUSPICION?234

Conover argues for a combination of legislative and individual efforts in bringing about the “eradication of the outward expression” of racism. His opinion to emphasize government regulation informs many of his other choices. First, it further justifies and substantiates his faith in, and reliance upon, governmental intervention in carrying out socially relevant endeavors. His positions with the White House Record Library Committee, as jazz authority to the White House, and as broadcaster for the Voice of America (VOA) provide examples of his ongoing partnership with government related agencies to bring about social change. While denying his own political affiliations, Conover nevertheless maintained a connection with politics that affected his choices, critical, personal, and musical. Moreover, his position made him a target for other critics who sought to discredit him, particularly in his role with the VOA, as a supporter of Cold War propaganda. I focus on the critical position of Conover to show how his achievements fulfilled

234 Willis Conover, Document titled “Keynote,” Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
goals of social responsibility in terms of addressing the problem of racial integration and the legitimacy of jazz.

Black Artists Bring Their Own Agendas Overseas

In terms of appealing to African audiences in State Department tours at the end of the 1960s, the dynamics of dance and religion began to take precedence over ideologies of liberalism, universalism, and an American modernist aesthetic. Many performers found that the physical presentation and activity of the group influenced the reaction of African audiences the most. Tours featuring gospel music in Africa increased in the late 1960s. Despite their initial, dubious assessment by the State Department, these tours illustrated the government’s eventual embrace of the music on the grounds that African American spirituality appealed greatly to African audiences.235

At the same time, African American ambassadors, notably Louis Armstrong, were personally preoccupied by civil rights events, to an extent that their tours were greatly influenced by their motivations driven by the civil rights movement.236 Alvin Ailey’s dance company toured Africa in 1970 with dances that resonated acutely with African audiences. Ailey, in speaking to a Senegalese audience illustrated his intention of addressing racial inequality in America in his tours. He states, “I wanted to do something to show. . . what the Negro had contributed to America. . . what the Negro made out of adversity, what the Negro made out of his sorrow, what the Negro made out of being held down in America.”237 By the mid-1970s, performances by African American groups from the United States incorporated messages of racial injustice in

236 Ibid., 58. Von Eschen describes Armstrong’s refusal to participate as a jazz ambassador in 1955 in light of Eisenhower’s refusal to enforce desegregation efforts in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957. It took three years to persuade Armstrong to tour—a long road that symbolized “the era’s tangled international and civil rights politics.”
their performances as a matter of course, particularly in Africa—exceeding and often deviating from the initial expectations of the State Department. The performance of racially motivated or racially conscious works in Africa underwent several stages, from objectionable status to one of acceptance.

In the 1960s white critics monopolized jazz criticism—a circumstance that affected the task of addressing race issues in jazz. This discrepancy affected black critics adversely, whose criticism was often diverted to and preoccupied with the task of addressing and representing race issues predominantly. The most overt example of such race-central criticism is Baraka’s seminal essay “Jazz and the White Critic,” in which he discusses the evolution of black American musical contributions as guideposts of Afro-American cultural assimilation in the United States. Baraka argues for a “social expressionist aesthetic,” as the dominant framework for the evaluation of black contributions in jazz. The consideration of the conditions of Afro-American life, according to Baraka, is significant for critics who seek to understand and effectively evaluate the music of the black avant-garde. White critics, by comparison, tended to approach avant-garde music on more technical levels. Robert Adlington discusses the differences between Baraka’s social expressionist counter-aesthetic and musicological analysis typical of Martin Williams and Don Heckman that considers “notes and sounds in themselves, without reference to their expressive meaning.” Baraka’s evaluation of jazz emphasized social and cultural experiences of the black American, an assessment often aligned with Black Nationalist goals. White critics, like Williams and Heckman, favored evaluation of musical technique and other manifestations of musicological analysis.

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239 Robert Adlington, Sound Commitments: Avant-Garde Music and the Sixties (New York: Oxford University Press 2009), 224. “For Baraka, authentic black music is to be interpreted and evaluated by reference to the way in which it expresses the evolving philosophies and life forms of African American communities.”
240 Ibid., 225.
Religious Epiphany: Jazz Criticism and Social Responsibility

White critics, regardless of the extent to which they dealt with the historical and cultural biography of Afro-American artists, focused on issues of race and jazz. According to John Gennari, jazz criticism was a platform on which white writers addressed a responsibility to fix fundamental or existential misdeeds. For example, Gennari cites white critic Martin Williams who often described black contributions to avant-garde jazz as representative of “our unsolved problems, all our lack of self-knowledge [that] we refuse to admit or refuse to face up to.”241 Gennari describes the obligation on the part of white critics of the 1960s as a type of romanticism that fuels their engagement with jazz that begins early in life—initiated by “an intense, life-changing shock of discovery that comes during adolescence, packing all the power of a religious epiphany.”242 As a pre-established basis for criticism, such personal agendas played a large role in shaping critical discourse of white writers. This duty to address personal, deeply rooted problems applies substantially to writings of Conover and Kofsky as white critics who addressed racism in different ways. They represent two critical voices of the 1960s, each asserting different ideologies, different solutions to the problem of racial equality, and different approaches manifested through a personal agenda or religious epiphany.

Recent scholars have discussed the role of white promoters of African American art and culture. Jon Panish discusses the emergence in cultural studies of the race-traitor, defined as a “white person who renounces his or her white privilege by actively transgressing society’s still-strict racial boundaries [and] who acts in such a way (individually or collectively) that he or she disrupts the racial status quo.”243 Applied in his study mainly to popular media forms, the concept pertains to Kofsky and Conover in their influential and anti-racist efforts. However,

Panish discusses the problematic application of the race-traitor construct, as it tends to bypass the consideration of the complex relationship and hybridization between black and white culture in favor of the more reductive alternative of simply “going over to the other side.”\textsuperscript{244} Neither Kofsky’s nor Conover’s achievements qualify them entirely as race-traitors in the pejorative sense of acting against the interests of their own race or projecting an anti-white agenda. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to consider their goals in terms of their proximity to this construct in that both were determined to disrupt the racial status quo by asserting anti-racist arguments. While not referring to it by name, Kofsky discusses the race traitor concept as “white dissidents who in one way or another have repudiated their society’s racist institutions and values and gone over to the side of the ‘enemy.’”\textsuperscript{245} He cites pre-Civil War abolitionist John Brown and 1930s clarinetist and self-proclaimed “voluntary Negro”\textsuperscript{246} Mezz Mezzrow as early examples of white adherents whose participation in the Negro ‘cause’ is only marginally significant in the evolution of jazz. Perhaps the nearest indication of race-traitorism is his assertion that avant-garde jazz is a divergent and wholly non-European art\textsuperscript{247} whose origins stem from the victimization and disenfranchisement of black jazz artists. Kofsky voices this sentiment in one of his theses:

\begin{quote}
Today’s avant-garde movement in jazz is a musical representation of the ghetto’s vote of ‘no confidence’ in Western civilization and the American Dream – that Negro avant-garde intransigents, in other words, are saying through their horns, as LeRoi Jones would have it, ‘Up your ass, feeble-minded ofays!’\textsuperscript{248}
\end{quote}

Conover did not agree with Kofsky’s view of the avant-garde as being categorically non-European in origin or a musical reaction to Western civilization. In general, Conover avoided

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{244} Ibid., 144. “More importantly, the race traitor concept almost completely erases cultural difference to emphasize the greater ‘truth’ (or maybe it is ‘necessity’) of social construction.”
\textsuperscript{247} Kofsky, 133. “In what way is this music non-Western? The answer lies not in any reputed ‘atonality’ of the avant-garde performers [but in] its presumably deliberate abandonment of the diatonic scale…: the entire harmonic foundation of European music.”
\textsuperscript{248} Kofsky, 131.
\end{footnotesize}
defining jazz in terms of geographical origin or as a byproduct of revolution and advanced the notion that the origins of jazz were universal.

In an interview with Pauline Rivelli of Jazz, Conover reflected on a discussion with “a Black Nationalist” in which he advised against the movement’s further propagation of, in his opinion, a false premise begun by white people and reasserted in the Black Nationalist movement. His interlocutor describes a recent experience of feeling physically threatened by “a couple of beefy red-necks with cattle-prods [at] a Southern bus station.” Conover’s response was to draw an equivalency between extremes of white and black stereotypes.

Sure, I’d feel damned uncomfortable myself in such a situation. . . . You and I have things in common. The red-neck with the bicycle chain is no more bother to me than the black-neck who throws stones in store windows during riots has anything in common with you. You’re propagating a vicious fantasy that ill-advised white people have established over the years, and that has led us—that is, led many Negroes and whites—into whatever degree of social mess we’re all in.

In his comparison of black and white cultural stereotypes, Conover implies that the “social mess” in America is caused by a “vicious fantasy” propagated through ignorance. Moreover, Conover devalues the Black Nationalist movement itself by stating that “the attraction of the Black Nationalism argument [is to] hold together all the ignorant cats who were kept from knowing anything,” thus labeling its members uninformed racists. In an attempt to be non-discriminating, Conover oversimplifies racial inequality in applying a false equivalence between the “red-neck” and the “black-neck,” insinuating that both whites and blacks are equally responsible for fostering and maintaining racial ignorance. Concluding his argument, Conover advocates for government-enforced changes as a solution, and for the effectiveness of legislation in sufficiently altering the attitudes of the nation. In his opinion, substantive changes in society take place when

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250 Ibid., 30.
law becomes a custom, a process that eventually leads to widespread acceptance by the populace.

The majority of people wait to see what the prevailing attitude is before they feel secure saying, even to themselves, ‘This is good and this is bad’, and as soon as it becomes the law and as soon as it becomes the custom, then, to their feeble way of looking at things, it becomes hip to say ‘Yes, this is the way it’s supposed to be and isn’t it fine?’

This, Conover concedes, relates to how jazz came to be accepted by Americans. “Jazz,” Conover states, “stands for something respectable to the middle-class mentality now. They’ve heard it on the teevee, and so it’s safe for them to parrot the line now: ‘It’s our only American art form.’”

Given this, Conover asserts the idea of arriving at acceptance and respectability not only through a process of legislation, but also through mass media consumption.

It is appropriate, then, to view Kofsky and Conover in terms of their opinions on government intervention in the jazz industry. Kofsky rejects the government’s application of jazz as a Cold War deterrent and condemns the idea (and Conover for being instrumental in its implementation) as a misappropriation of black artists’ contributions. According to Kofsky, the VOA is minimizing the escalating state of racial injustice in America. Conover’s view represents a favorable perception of government intervention in the international dissemination of jazz as one that ultimately mitigates, rather than exacerbates, racial injustice. He defines jazz as a global phenomenon that characterizes any culture and signifies universal struggles, rather than specific, racially, or culturally based ones. By downplaying the Black Nationalist movement, equating it to white-racism, he denies the viewpoint that jazz is connected with it.

Conover and Race Debates

Before becoming Professor of History at California State University from 1969-97, Frank Kofsky contributed substantially to jazz criticism and published many books on jazz. His

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251 Ibid.
252 Ibid.
writings often reflected his personal support of the Black Nationalist movement, his Marxist leanings, and his critical focus on the white-dominated establishment in the jazz industry. Steadfastly suspicious of US foreign policy as part of the dominating status quo, Kofsky was a staunch critic of Conover and his role in cultural diplomacy through Music USA. He labeled Conover an apologist and an active supporter of a white ruling class and hierarchy wherein white ownership of the jazz business seeks to obscure the discrimination that prevails in the jazz community.253

Kofsky’s motivations are most apparent in Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music (1970). Here Kofsky asserts damning opinions of the continual co-opting and misappropriation of jazz by a white-centered culture. Kofsky’s definition of the “white establishment” elite included the US government. He opposed the use of jazz overseas and its continual exploitation as a Cold War weapon, and openly attacked the Jazz Ambassador tours and Music USA on grounds that they maintained an inaccurate picture of America. Conover’s show, Kofsky claimed, ignored the harsh reality of American race relations and, therefore, communicated a degree of complacency. He writes, “Conover’s distortions of life in the United States are not merely accidental.”254 Specifically, he described Conover’s role as maintaining a falsification of the racial state of America and “part of a larger USIA attempt aimed at picturing this country, and its black-white relations in particular, in the most roseate of tones.”255 Kofsky determined that the USIA and the VOA were institutions that thrived on the Cold War. Regarding jazz on the VOA he writes, “Minorities have a tough time everywhere but the

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254 Kofsky, 110. Without the Cold War, Kofsky claimed, the VOA would not exist. This, according to Kofsky, sufficiently explained the VOA’s propagandistic function. Kofsky adds, “The VOA grew out of the OWI, a central ministry of propaganda of the sort established by every wartime government, at the close of the Second World War.”
255 Ibid.
acceptance and success of so many Negro musicians and singers in jazz in the United States makes it obvious that someone like Louis Armstrong, for instance, is not an exception.”

Kofsky deemed Conover’s optimistic view of America as increasingly racially integrated—in his words, “continuing to change for the better”—complacent and erroneous. He noted that, in the Soviet Union, artists featured for diplomatic reasons enjoyed an elevated status in Soviet culture. Such artists in the United States, however, remain insignificant and obscure. He writes,

Contrary to our own practice, the Soviets do not send their artists and intellectuals abroad as roving ambassadors only to consign them to second-class citizenship at home. Instead, there the artist is generally considered on a par with the scientist, the professional, the government bureaucrat, and even the Communist party member… Would that this were true in the U.S.! This juxtaposition… exemplifies the unwritten rule that jazz may be eminently serviceable for Cold War campaigns abroad, but when it comes to winning acceptance at home, the prospects are more grim.

Kofsky opposed Conover’s appraisal of jazz and its optimistic function as a transmitter of democratic virtue. Conover, while not denying prevailing racial biases and injustice, realized the obstacle of racism, but emphasized instead that jazz communicated a virtue of overcoming this obstacle.

Kofsky, until his death in 1997, had gained a reputation in jazz circles of injecting a Marxist agenda into his writing and antagonizing critics. Conover was among many with whom Kofsky took issue. The appropriation of jazz by the State Department and the exploitation of African American artists for the purpose of conveying a less-than-accurate picture of America are valid claims advanced not only by Kofsky, but by other critics and polemists. However, Conover dealt with the situation and exercised his power in a way that was diplomatic. His
programming ratio illustrated the meticulous care he exercised in arriving at choices with a minimum of subjectivity. In striving to maintain balanced programming, Conover presented his choices in a way that ultimately benefitted the genre. Kofsky’s charge against Conover of asserting preferential bias is inevitable. It could be stated that anyone charged with making decisions will inevitably incur criticism from an opposing voice. While both critics disagreed on the status of jazz artists in American culture and on the general function of the music in terms of performing social and intellectual work, their convictions both stem from the same anti-racist stance. And both valued personal relationships with jazz artists. However, they sought different ways to address racial inequality in the jazz community.

In a review of Kofsky’s *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music,* sarcastically titled “The World’s Foremost Authority,” Conover begins, “Truth, for crackpots, depends on who says the words.” Regarding Kofsky’s accusations of his misappropriation of power, he defends himself, taking issue with Kofsky’s clearly defined perception of opposing principles, stating,

> You may love jazz, yearn for peace, hate war, actively work for racial justice, agree with every position Kofsky claims to be taking; but you are an enemy of jazz, an enemy of peace, an enemy of socialism, an enemy of black aspirations. . .when all you’ve done is point out that Kofsky is a pain in the ass.\(^{260}\)

Conover accuses Kofsky of self-contradiction, and criticizes his inconsistency. Moreover, Conover remarks on Kofsky’s theses, deeming them dubious and even indulges in name-calling on par with his opponent’s vindictive writing stance.

> You will find few revelations about either Black Nationalism or a revolution in music. The book is simply the occupational therapy of Little Red Writing Hood, and age cannot wither nor custom stale his infinite monotony…. Can anything good be said of Kofsky’s book? Yes. It isn’t longer…. It does end.\(^{261}\)

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\(^{261}\) Ibid.
The level of disagreement between the two critics illustrates one of the many strains of infighting common among jazz critics in the 1960s. One explanation of the vehemence behind each writer’s accusations involves the defense of their own personal agendas, or, as Gennari writes, their religious epiphany. Such emotionally driven discourse was common in debates, especially in issues of race in jazz. Conover’s stance was likely influenced by his position with the VOA. His writings provide evidence of his advocacy of the goals of the VOA of using jazz to symbolize democracy. When asked to describe the appeal of jazz for his listeners he responded,

> It’s another way of communicating one’s life and one’s feelings about life in a way that’s more effective than perhaps words could be. Love, lust, anger, joy, sadness, can all be communicated along with the vitality, the spirit of freedom that characterizes our country at its best and that people in every country enjoy having when they can. Black Americans were captives of our system that prevailed at the time. This music had a lot to do with liberating them. Jazz was a way to prove something, to express anger, creativity and love, feelings, thoughts, and attitudes. To express their lives through music. This is true of other countries, too. The music helps people to stand up straighter.\(^{262}\)

Notably, Conover characterizes jazz as instrumental in emancipating black Americans. The virtue of improving cultural and race relationships through jazz, as Conover espoused, applied to his international audience who sought a similar spirit of freedom.

Conover often defended his position, stating that it served to strengthen, rather than weaken, his support for jazz artists. In the last lines of the response Conover justifies his place in the jazz community as a provider of deserved attention. He writes, “I believe I am doing the right thing, by working with a number of agencies to bring their attention and long-overdue support to a great music and to its great musicians. I will continue to do so for the same reason I have done so in the past: it needed to be done, and nobody else would do it – until after it succeeded.”\(^{263}\)

Others who have supported Conover’s responsibilities during this time include Down

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\(^{263}\) Willis Conover, Response to Hollie I. West, 1971, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
Beat editor Dan Morgenstern, who, in 1971 wrote in support of Conover and his roles in the jazz community. Morgenstern states that, without Conover’s tireless efforts, a jazz panel at the NEA would not exist. Additionally, he states that Conover’s appointments at the White House were beneficial for jazz, citing that “until Duke Ellington’s seventieth birthday was celebrated at the White House, no American jazz figure had been comparably honored.” Morgenstern also cited that, in terms of money, Conover garnered very little as a ‘paid consultant,’ and used his positions of power, ultimately, for the benefit of the jazz community. Morgenstern’s support for Conover involves representing Conover as a vulnerable human being, capable of alienating people and making choices deserving of criticism.

In my opinion, Conover used his influence to favor personal choices. But this is an inevitable consequence given that he was sole decider of the course of Music USA. Many critics took issue with him because his decisions were influenced by the unique standpoint from which he approached his positions in the jazz community. Having begun in broadcasting, and having approached jazz through a media standpoint, Conover arrived at his choices differently than his colleagues and critics. Firstly, Conover approached jazz from a non-musician’s perspective. This inevitably affected his choices as chairman of the Jazz Panel of the NEA. Moreover, as jazz aficionado, he was subject to a higher degree of scrutiny from those predisposed to the criticism of jazz from an Afrocentric perspective, such as Frank Kofsky. Apparent in his decisions is a persistent display of race-neutrality, a safe position from which to endure as a broadcaster. He sympathizes with the Black Nationalist position, but detaches himself from it, and dismisses it as another strain of racism in America. However, he acknowledges the struggle of black Americans

265 Ibid. “It seems fitting to reveal that for producing Kennedy Center jazz events, Conover is paid the munificent sum of $75 per concert, and for his services to the Endowment, a grand per diem of $50 when the jazz panel meets (which is about three days a year).”
as “captives of our system” and the liberating power of jazz in alleviating racism through individual expression. His accomplishments in the programs and positions he implemented are too numerous and advantageous to justify claims of what his critics would deem his impairment of the development of jazz.

Criticism by Kofsky in 1965 concerned the interpretation of Conover’s unbiased approach as complacency in the face of racial tension. Kofsky argued that Conover’s failure to verbally address racial tension in his broadcasts was an endorsement of commercialism and a manifestation of a white-centered propaganda. Conover’s rebuttal matched Kofsky’s vitriol. In the following manuscript (an unedited version) Conover passionately defends himself and his position. He deflects Kofsky’s accusations of racism, and dismisses him as a reactionary, harmful, and racist provocateur. Of Kofsky’s accusation of his misappropriation of power he writes:

Let me summarize my response to Mr. Kofsky’s accusation that, as a member of the ‘power structure’ (me? What a laugh!), I am opposed to the eradication of our social inequities. I profess my lifelong resentment of injustice to any individual. When injustice is wholesale, I am outraged…. I do not believe in or practice segregation. I will not join Mr. Kofsky in race-discrimination. I will continue to select my associates on the basis of their intelligence, taste, and personality, not the color – black or white – of their skin…. While I don’t expect Mr. Kofsky to understand or accept any of this, except as a welcome trigger for his signal reactions, I can’t allow his incredible distortions of my position to go undefended…. Meanwhile, to the extent that he might hope to fan the flames of prejudice into civil war and turn his coat for favor, let him be reminded that the shooting of liberals is usually postponed until the radicals get it.

Conover denies Kofsky’s claim that his appointments constitute positions of power. Rather, he reverses Kofsky’s accusation and charges him with race-discrimination. Conover attempts to

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267 Conover was not the only critic targeted by Kofsky. Critics on the domestic front including Leonard Feather, Martin Williams, Dan Morgenstern and Michael Zwerin were also seen as complacent advocates of the white-dominated jazz scene.

268 Willis Conover, draft of response to Frank Kofsky (ca. 1965). Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
surpass Kofsky in terms of moral outrage by vehemently denying his charges of race
discrimination, ultimately, calling Kofsky a masochist and accusing him of exacerbating the
issue of race in the jazz community (see figure 4.1).

![Image of handwritten text]

Figure 4.1. Conover's draft of response to Frank Kofsky, 1965.

Conover steadfastly denied charges of racism or propaganda on grounds that the music was
central to his choices. However, Conover's involvement on a political level was inevitable.
Conover attempted to distance himself from the political aspect of jazz (i.e., race discrimination)
by minimizing the issue to an apolitical level—which was, in effect, a political act. Regardless of
his explanations of the music as central to his choices, or of his purported colorblindness, his exercising of personal preference is undeniable and indicative of his nature as a human being.

*Washington Post* writer Hollie I. West also attacked Conover in print, accusing him of misusing his influence at the Kennedy Center, the NEA, the jazz subcommittee of the State Department, as jazz advisor to the White House, and as chairperson of the White House Record Library Commission. West accused Conover of selecting committee members in whom he had a personal interest, allocating funds for his own purposes, and selecting his friends as honorees. In a defense of Conover, Dan Morgenstern notes that West criticized Conover mainly on racial grounds. West conceded that, “the emotional issue of race has clouded the question of Conover’s role and authority at the Kennedy Center.” Morgenstern justifies Conover’s achievements and notes that “without efforts by Conover there would be no jazz panel [of the NEA] or jazz program [at the Kennedy Center].” Morgenstern regards West’s accusations of Conover’s use of power to favor musicians as unavoidable. He writes that, in authority positions, Conover “has been anything but dictatorial and inflexible in his exercise of influence, and to our knowledge has never used his position for devious or self-serving purposes…. Conover acquired his ‘positions of power’ for the benefit of jazz.”

West also accused Conover of monopolizing the jazz scene through undeserved acquisition of his too many positions in the jazz community. He vehemently objected to

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269 Dan Morgenstern, *Living With Jazz*, 664. “If he has gotten some personal recognition and a few little side gigs out of his years of hard and largely unpaid (or underpaid) labor, so what?”


271 Morgenstern states that Conover’s “had become the most popular broadcasts, especially in countries where jazz was in official disfavor and records impossible to acquire.” 663.

272 Ibid., 664.

Conover’s position at the White House and with the Kennedy Center because they enabled him to unjustly shape the future of jazz on a national level. West includes quotes from Julian Euell, a member of the NEA Jazz Advisory Panel, who shared West’s opinions and agreed that Conover’s appointment by the Kennedy Center was inappropriate on racial grounds. Euell states “I think it’s poor judgment to have a white guy in that job. It’s following the old pattern of whites controlling and making the profits from the music.” West reinforced the point by citing that the social conditions under which Conover rose to his level of qualification was one that discouraged blacks from achieving the same position. Euell also accused Conover of misusing his influence and resources on the federal level, citing his leadership positions at the Kennedy Center, the NEA, the White House, the jazz subcommittee for State Department tours, and the White House Record Library Commission as positions in which he expresses choices based on favoritism. “He holds too many positions,” writes West, “It’s like one man’s view dominating part of the music scene…. He deals in cronyism. He’s developed a stable of musicians on whom he depends.” West indicates that among the members of the Kennedy Center advisory panel including Clark Terry, Cannonball Adderly, John Lewis, Stanley Dance, and Tahir Sur, of the VOA, Conover’s decisions seem to dominate. West also takes offense at Conover’s inclination to endorse student ensembles over important jazz musicians. Again, West quotes Euell who states “Willis is pushing the student musician program because he’s interested in the big band movement, but the people in these school band are almost all white, and they don’t end up playing jazz.” According to Euell, Conover’s favoritism toward white performers naturally pushed aside black performers and professional musicians who needed the work.

275 Ibid., 2.
276 Ibid., 3.
While West credits Conover for selflessly endorsing a struggling music, he nevertheless maintains Conover’s acquisition of power in a white-dominated culture as “imposing a single view on a diverse body of music.” Ultimately, West called for Conover’s resignation from his position at the Kennedy Center, citing his misappropriation of power as being rooted in racial discrimination, which, according to West, mirrors the national situation of white domination of black artistic contributions.

Conover’s response to West’s criticisms, while citing them as unjustified, was tactful and even amicable—and included several positive points. Conover credited West’s arguments as emblematic of an evolutionary change in racial discourse and necessary for an eventual arrival at equality in individual expression. Rather than waging a counterattack, Conover acknowledged West as an empowered critic of African American descent, and welcomed his debate. Conover responded by tactfully attempting to pair West’s major points with his own non-racist views (see figure 3.2). He writes:

I am encouraged (by Hollie’s story) because it proves the validity of certain beliefs I have always held and on which I have always acted to the best of my ability: First it proves that jazz is worthy of serious discussion and criticism in the non-jazz press. Second, it proves that America’s black citizens are, now, close enough to achieving the strength that has for so long been unjustly denied them by whites-in-power, to stand up and criticize whites without fear of reprisal. Third, while I regret that the transition form the old way of white-racism, to the eventual way of no-racism, must first pass through a period of black-racism, I recognize that (for some blacks) this may be necessary; in this instance, it helps to clarify for me which blacks argue from a racist viewpoint and which do not – just as it always helped me in the past and, to some degree, still in the present) to be able to distinguish racist whites from non-racist whites, so I knew whom to trust as individual human beings rather than as members of a mob, black or white.

Curiously, Conover posits a model of a racial pendulum-swing in his explanation of white and black racial bias. According to Conover, West’s criticisms comprise part of an inescapable

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277 Ibid., 4.
278 Willis Conover, Response to Hollie West (1971). Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
process involving black-racism as a countermeasure to white-racism. In this light he welcomes West’s criticisms but ultimately suggests that they originate from a black-racist viewpoint. Conover discredits West’s accusations by explaining them as an expression of black-racism—a necessary stage in the eventual arrival at, according to Conover’s logic, a nonracist society. Conover denies his own use of racial bias, stating ultimately his trust in individual human beings (see figure 4.2). Conover responded to West’s accusations with a degree of tact. By contrast, his response to similar accusations by Kofsky, a white critic, was not nearly as amicable.

It is conceivable that Conover favored certain artists in making decisions with the Kennedy Center, the NEA, and at the White House. Conover was used to working alone and making decisions from the sanctity of a programming station. Initially, Conover’s position at the VOA of “virtual autonomy”\(^\text{279}\) regarding his choices predisposed him to making his own choices without having to consult a committee. The nature of these positions invited criticism by the likes of West, as they involved decisions in which Conover regarded certain musicians, and, in turn, disregarded others. I agree with Morgenstern that Conover’s partiality toward artists is an inevitable consequence of a position in which decisions are made. It is problematic to apply racism to his decisions, however, as West would imply, since Conover was an outspoken advocate of both black and white musicians. Moreover, instances exist in which Conover did not support artists whom he “favored.” His affiliation with Sun Ra, three years prior to West’s inflammatory article, serves as an example of Conover’s support of an artist outside his scope of preference.\(^\text{280}\)

\(^{279}\) Willis Conover, quoted in Stokes, “If the Worlds’ Jazz Players Speak Poor English, It's Your Fault,” The Washington Post, September 16, 1984. Conover adds, “I'm a contractor [at the VOA] and I have virtual autonomy of editorial choice on what to play and what to say.”

\(^{280}\) Willis Conover was instrumental in Ra’s Carnegie Hall concert in March of 1968 (See chapter 6).
I've been asked to comment on Hollie West's story in the Washington Post Sunday.

Although of course it's never pleasant reading or hearing heavy criticism against yourself, especially when you feel it's largely unjustified, I am encouraged (by Hollie's story) because it proves the validity of certain beliefs I have always held and on which I have always acted to the best of my ability:

First, it proves that jazz is worthy of serious discussion and criticism in the non-jazz press.

Second, it proves that America's black citizens are, now, close enough to achieving the strength that has for so long been unjustly denied them by whites-in-power, to stand up and criticize whites without fear of reprisal.

Third, while I regret that the transition from the old way of white-racism, to the eventual way of no-racism, must first pass through a period of black-racism, I recognize that (for some blacks) this may be necessary; in this instance, it helps to clarify for me which blacks argue from a racist viewpoint and which do not -- just as it always helped me in the past (and, to some degree, still in the present) to be able to distinguish racist whites from non-racist whites, so I knew whom to trust as usual: individual human beings rather than as members of a mob, black or white.

Two final points: [I believe Hollie West acted according to his conscience; he really believed he was doing the right thing, and that is the most anyone can be expected to do. Similarly, working]

I believe I am doing the right thing, by a number of long-overdue agencies to bring their attention and support to a great music and to its great musicians. I will continue to do so for the same reason I have done so in the past: it needed to be done, and nobody else would do it -- until it succeeded.
He crafts his response diplomatically, emphasizing the earnestness of their goals and as two people engaged in healthy, civil debate, “doing the right thing.” Conover, “by working with a number of agencies to bring their attention and long-overdue support to a great music and to its great musicians,”281 is emphasizing his choices as ultimately beneficial to jazz. However, in making this statement he implies that he decides what constitutes great music and great musicians. Statements such as this provide evidence that forming a jazz canon was an indisputable aim for him. Rather than attacking with another volley of disapproving criticism, Conover acknowledges West’s perspective and recognizes the significance of black critics’ freedom to criticize whites. Conover’s evocation of black racism versus white racism is difficult to interpret in terms of forming conclusive viewpoints. Nevertheless, it shows that issues of race and social responsibility pervade Conover’s discourse, and his implementation of the goal of jazz to fulfill a social purpose.

The charges against him by West and Kofsky represent degrees of skepticism related to his influence on jazz. The issue as to whether or not Conover’s choices were unbiased matters less than the point that he was largely spared such criticism by his overseas audience. Regardless of the occasional criticism (from fans who would criticize music choices in letters sent to the VOA), Conover exercised a firmer level of authority overseas than in the United States. Given Conover’s control of the listener mail, the audience was only exposed to that which Conover saw fit to excerpt for the newsletter. Comparatively, the level of scrutiny in the United States was much higher. This fact substantiates the argument that Conover’s influence overseas was great, far-reaching, and long-lasting. Additionally, West takes issue with Conover’s support for music of a bygone age, stating,

281 Willis Conover, Response to Hollie West, 1971, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
It is no secret that Conover’s primary interests in music are the big band movement and the school band program. He is promoting both in his Kennedy Center position…. The big band movement was a phenomenon of the 1930s and 1940s. Jazz has taken a different route in the last 25 years.282

These accusations are significant given that Conover’s inclination to favor school bands supports the position of Conover as an educational mediator through broadcasting.

Perceptions of Conover in America and by his listeners overseas differed in terms of his capacity as broadcaster. Conover’s choices in his broadcasts for the VOA and his decisions related to the newsletter were not subject to critical scrutiny. Due to the Smith-Mundt Act, which kept American listeners at a distance, Conover was free to make choices and to shape his jazz narratives without such criticism. Outside the purview of American journalists and critics, Conover’s show reflected a creative process. This process consisted of a unique kind of improvisation in which Conover constructed jazz narratives. By planning shows with a weekly, curricular arc, Conover was creating narratives through music.

What is revealing about criticisms such as ones invoked by Hollie West is the conviction placed in the idea that Conover could profoundly (and adversely) affect the course of jazz. In West’s view, Conover’s decisions were gratuitous and biased. He wrote, “The crucial point is that [Conover] is able to control jobs and money for musicians, influence taste on a national scale, and affect the future of the music in a comprehensive way.”283 Considering that Conover, through his involvement with the Kennedy Center and the White House, had, according to Kofsky and West, the power to influence the course of jazz, we are obliged to examine his influence on a global level. Indeed, his involvement in the overseas jazz community was far greater than that of his role in the jazz community in the United States. Simply in terms of time, his job as broadcaster for the VOA lasted from 1955 to 1995, amounting to approximately

283 Ibid.
12,480 shows broadcast worldwide on a weekly basis. Comparatively, the time dedicated to his responsibilities at the Kennedy Center and the White House was insignificant.

Jazz in the University

Kofsky and Conover differed in terms of evaluating the emerging role of jazz in the university. Kofsky criticized Conover’s active support of university jazz ensembles by allocating funds (through the NEA) and in providing airtime for university ensembles in his *Music USA Jazz Hour* shows. Jazz, according to Kofsky, served as a pro-democracy instrument in the Cold War that exploited the contributions of African American artists for the benefit of world diplomacy. This consequence is especially damning in light of the paradoxical fact, in his opinion, that jazz was not considered “legitimate” in America in the 1960s. He equates the state of jazz in America with its role in the university at this time. Kofsky observed that only three out of fifty universities he sampled offered jazz courses by the end of the 1960s. This illustrated an ongoing, white-centered bias in the United States that exacerbated the systematic de-legitimization of the achievements of African American jazz musicians. He also cited that, while other new artistic fields, like photography and film studies, enjoyed a burgeoning place in university curricula, jazz did not. Kofsky regarded the African American origins of jazz as the main reason that jazz suffered from an overwhelming lack of respect. Moreover, as Kofsky noted, the subjugated state of jazz in the university encouraged and maintained the engine of the establishment elite and represented, in microcosm, the deprived state of jazz in the United States.

In a general way, the curriculum of the university is molded so as to conform with the desire of this corporate elite to turn out mid-level technicians with all the approved social attitudes….If one wishes to see the value which the corporate elite….places on jazz

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domestically (as opposed to the value placed on it as a cold-war instrument), one could do worse than look at the university curriculum.²⁸⁵

More pointedly, he stated that, in the university, “attitudes of white intellectual supremacy and European ethnocentrism are so thoroughly ingrained that it is impossible for many whites, even ‘intellectuals’, to conceive of a Negro art as equal in aesthetic value to a white one.”²⁸⁶ Kofsky determined that the government’s support of jazz as a Cold War weapon and the simultaneous rejection of jazz in the university constituted a fundamental imbalance. He cited this discrepancy as a symptom of complacency in the face of racial inequality in America.

Conversely, Gary Kennedy discusses the American jazz-education movement of the 1960s as an era of formative growth in both secondary and undergraduate levels that maintained momentum throughout the 1970s, citing “a threefold increase in the number of colleges offering jazz-related courses for credit, and an almost sixfold increase in the number of competitive festivals”²⁸⁷ by the end of the decade. Kennedy states that the 1960s, “marked the appearance of pedagogical materials in which specific and specialized jazz-education ideologies become evident. In 1968 the formation of the National Association of Jazz Educators (NAJE) helped to codify the movement, and from the 1970s the expansion of jazz education has continued at a regular pace.”²⁸⁸

This continual upsurge in university jazz programs throughout the 1960s conflicts with Kofsky’s grim assessment of it in 1970 as “the unwanted stepchild of the arts.”²⁸⁹ Indeed, as early as 1950, over thirty institutions offered jazz courses in their curriculum. By 1972, degrees

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 113.
²⁸⁶ Ibid., 115.
²⁸⁸ Ibid.
in jazz history were offered in fifteen universities. While jazz continued to struggle as a form of popular music, its emergence in the university setting sustained it in part. Kofsky’s assessment of the role of jazz in the university may have failed to take into account expansion of jazz education that would eventually culminate in vast proliferation of programs across the United States. However, his assessment that university curriculums fostered a process of turning out “mid-level technicians with all the approved social attitudes” was closer to the truth. Kennedy surmises that the jazz education movement continues to fail in reaching certain artistic goals, as most curriculums foster an ideology concerned with “creating generic professional musicians and educators [rather] than jazz musicians.” He suggests a redefinition of jazz education that is restrictive, one whose goal may not have been to produce jazz musicians. In this light, Kofsky was accurate in his assertion that the university curriculum, in its power to “conform with the desire of [a] corporate elite,” may have shaped jazz in a detrimental way.

Conover responded differently and enthusiastically supported the relatively few university jazz programs during his tenure at the VOA. His support of university big bands is evidenced in the frequency with which he included their music in his Jazz Hour broadcasts. In the 1960s Conover became a fan of the University of North Texas (then North Texas State University) One O’Clock Lab Band and included it with frequency in his broadcasts. Conover’s favor of big band jazz culminated in his co-sponsorship and co-directorship of his own big band, THE Band, in the 1950s. His fondness for big band jazz prompted some to

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291 Kofsky, 113.
292 Unknown author, “Lab Bands in Concert,” Denton Record Chronicle, March 31, 1967: 8. The author states, “Conover, who had heard the One O’Clock Lab Band several times, including as judge at the 1960 Notre Dame Jazz Festival (when Leonard Bernstein was on the festival’s board), asked Leon Breeden, in 1967, for recordings of certain numbers. Later that year, Conover featured the One O’Clock Lab Band in an hour broadcast to an estimated audience of 40 million.”
devalue his credibility as a critic. In Julian Euell’s opinion, to favor big band jazz, a genre that was passé, serves to de-emphasize smaller groups and individual manifestations of jazz.\footnote{Hollie I. West, “Jazz Discord: Issue in Black and White,” in The Washington Post, September 19, 1971.} Euell, as fellow NEA Jazz Advisory panelist, takes Conover to task and questions the authenticity of university big bands as adequate representations of the genre. He writes: “Willis is pushing the student musician program because he’s interested in the big band movement, but the people in these school bands are almost all white, and they don’t end up playing jazz.”\footnote{Ibid., 3.}

Conover approved of the utilization of university jazz ensembles, in part, because they performed cultural work similar to his VOA broadcasts. He valued university jazz ensembles in light of their presence overseas as illustrative of racial awareness in the United States and did not hesitate to exploit their usefulness in relating messages pertaining to civil rights. One example was the Southern University Jazz Ensemble of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, led by former avant-garde clarinetist Alvin Batiste.\footnote{Alvin Batiste (1932-2007) was mainly a freelance clarinetist who played with avant-gardists Ornette Coleman and Ed Blackwell in the late 1950s before dedicating himself to academics in the 1970s and 1980s. Led by Batiste in 1973, the Southern University Jazz Ensemble had completed a State Department tour involving eight countries in Africa.} In a letter to the program director for the VOA, Cliff Groce, Conover requested airing a performance by the SU Jazz Ensemble that pointedly addressed civil rights abuses in America (see figure 4.3).

The language of the text is controversial, as it overtly expresses issues of social injustice in America. Moreover, the lines are emphatically reflective of the Black Nationalist ideology as ascribed by Malcolm X. In his autobiography, a narrative outline of his Black Nationalist philosophy, Malcolm X’s description of the exploitation of the African American is as follows:

The devil white man cut these black people off from all knowledge of their own kind, and cut them off from any knowledge of their own language, religion, and past culture, until the black man in American was the earth’s only race of people who had absolutely no
knowledge of his true identity. . . .In one generation, the black slave women in American had been raped by the slavemaster white man until there had begun to emerge a homemade, handmade, brainwashed race that was no longer even of its true color, that no longer even knew its true family names.297

This language and sentiment of Malcolm X’s autobiography bears a telling resemblance to the work performed by Batiste and his group, particularly in the following lines:

You lied to me….You deprived me of my heritage….You exploited me and denied me my past….You raped me….You tried to erase and deface all traces of my beautiful background….But now I’ve found out my true identity, and the whole black world has a frown on its face….We are a great, beautiful black nation; forging onward to gain the due credits; for all the parts we have played; and are still playing; to make you what you are.\(^2\)

Conover’s notes following the transcribed text (see figure 3.3) illustrate a preemptive justification, should the work be aired, in which he proposes the global application and usefulness of the text. In anticipation of objection he writes,

Though I don’t think the decision to broadcast the complete work including these lines must be justified, I append these reasons for your reference if an objection should be made: Whites have lied to blacks, raped them, castrated them, hanged them….the lines cannot be effectively challenged as false…. They reflect accurately the view of many black [and white] Americans….and of whites and blacks outside America—certainly in Africa….The lines are also a message for other people—of all colors—who are still being exploited and denied in other countries.\(^3\)

Conover foregrounds the universality of the message and implies its ubiquitous value as a message of equality. He cites the truthfulness of the message as a validation of it as appropriate

\(^2\) Willis Conover, letter to Cliff Groce, October 3, 1973, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
\(^3\) Ibid.
for the VOA, regardless of likelihood of controversy. This illustrates that Conover valued university jazz ensembles for reasons other than to fulfill his personal affinity for the big band genre. Works like Alvin Batiste’s would, in the context of the *Music USA Jazz Hour*, openly communicate the message of social inequality in the United States. Conover not only supported the proposition to broadcast this work, but also confirmed the sentiments of racial unfairness by emphatically enumerating the reasons for their justification. According to Conover, this work would effectively present *documentary* evidence of racial events in America that would resonate with listeners “still being exploited and denied in other countries.” These examples complicate Conover’s intention of “letting the music speak for itself.” His actions in support of Alvin Batiste’s piece addressing social inequality occurred behind the scenes—away from his listening audience. The choice to broadcast the work itself was an act of politicizing jazz. Conover, in advocating for the broadcasting of works such as Batiste’s, sought to communicate sentiments of equal rights on a global level. The language of oppression permeating the text of the work above mirrored the oppression of Communist or Communist-leaning governments. It reflects the repression and motivations of people denied political and social freedom. This illustrates the clear division of Conover’s achievements overseas and in the United States, which consequently presented two different standards on which Conover was evaluated by his peers. Certainly, his overseas role is the one most often misunderstood in current literature.

Ultimately, the VOA deemed works worthy of broadcasting if they fulfilled the objective of presenting America truthfully, regardless of the extent to which they emphasized unattractive

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300 Conover was co-director of *THE Band* in Washington D.C. (1951-56).
302 Unanswered questions concern the prospective partnership between the efforts of the State Department and the VOA. To what degree were both organizations related or linked in terms of diplomatic function? How was Batiste’s performance received in Africa? By re-airing previous material, was the VOA adopting, recycling, or reinforcing the cultural work already performed in Batiste’s SD tour of Africa? I hope to address these questions in future studies.
virtues. The escalation of racial unrest in America was one such issue. The initiative to “tell it like it is” came in response to the high degree of Soviet propaganda aimed at highlighting racial inequality in America—an activity that crested in light of tumultuous events in the mid-late 1960s. The Soviet press sought to emphasize topics such as segregation, race-related violence, and assassinations as evidence that the United States was not the embodiment of racial integration. Racially motivated music, notably gospel, with its themes of freedom and struggle, undermined the assumptions of a color-blind universalism that the State Department sought to convey as representative of a true America. Penny Von Eschen discusses the efforts on the part of the State Department to dissociate such music from pop culture and its African origins. The performance style of gospel, Von Eschen posits, “tended to convey an oppositional rather than racially integrated image of American culture.”

Similarly, a work such as Batiste’s opposed the race-neutral expression of American freedom that the State Department and the VOA sought to communicate. This conflicted with the State Department’s goal of displaying a balanced, racially integrated America. Conover’s opinions regarding the ubiquitous existence and universality (and non-African origin) of jazz were consistent with the State Department’s effort to dissociate jazz from its African ancestry. Yet his support of works by Batiste implies that Conover opposed expressions of race-neutrality and supported anti-racist messages, at least in terms of jazz’s ability to convey it. Conover intended to present music with a minimum of extra-musical or political connotations, yet he favored works in which overt political messages were conveyed. He advanced the definition of jazz as race-neutral, yet supported works that challenged the concept of color-blind universalism of the State Department’s “true America.”

The act of “letting the music speak” had problematic outcomes. On the surface, it removed the

facilitator from implication and reassigned accountability to the music itself. In “letting the
music speak” Conover attempted to remove himself from critical attention. However, he failed to
remain unbiased, on occasion, given the overt political messages in some works. Like the efforts
of his predecessor John Hammond, and others, his proclivity toward social responsibility
manifested itself in his broadcasting choices, regardless of his intention to remain neutral.

Racism and the VOA

One of the greatest obstacles acting against the pro-American messages of VOA
broadcasts was the racial injustice at large in America. Thomas Borstelmann cites the racism
situation in America as one of the two primary challenges faced by the United States during the
Cold War. The first, in terms of foreign policy, included asserting the United States as the
strongest world power. The second, on the domestic front, included managing the situation of
racial equality.

Emphasis toward racial equality, historically, has depended on external pressures in
which international rivalry has forced the United States into demonstrating inclusiveness and
democratic value to opposing nations—in this case, the Cold War. George Fredrickson asserts
that, “When such pressures have been absent, reversion to the seemingly normal pattern of racial
inequality has taken place…. The Cold War thus provided a window of opportunity that is now
closing.”304 Given that the message conveyed through the VOA was intended to reflect
America’s commitment to social equality, the presence of racial conflict in America stood in

stark contradiction to this message.\textsuperscript{305} Racial injustice, often considered America’s \textit{Achilles heel}, was the primary obstacle working against American diplomacy.\textsuperscript{306}

The VOA and other diplomacy-based programs during the Cold War sought to correct this inconsistency in many ways. The State Department tours encouraged artists to display racially integrated ensembles in the mid-1950s. This, according to the US State Department, was the best way to communicate that American jazz (and America itself) operates independently of racial bias.\textsuperscript{307} Penny Von Eschen discusses a paradox inherent in the State Department’s view of jazz as both a race-transcending art and one that is dependent on black artists. Von Eschen describes the State Department’s intention of promoting a race-neutral American democracy as having “foregrounded the importance of African American culture during the Cold War, with blackness and race operating culturally to project an image of American nationhood that was more inclusive than reality.”\textsuperscript{308}

Due to the nature of radio, the \textit{Music USA Jazz Hour} broadcasts could not visually project racial inclusivity like the tours could. However, Conover believed that jazz thorough radio could illustrate American freedom as effectively as the State Department tours could. Moreover, his notion of communicating democratic virtue would be more impactful than in the United States, as it would resonate with freedom seekers. In this light, he described jazz as a cross between total discipline and anarchy. . . .The musicians agree on tempo, key and chord structure but beyond this everyone is free to express himself. This is jazz. And this is America. It’s a musical reflection of the way things happen in America. \textit{We’re not apt to recognize this over here} but people in other countries can feel this element of freedom. They love jazz because they love freedom.\textsuperscript{309} (Emphasis added)

\textsuperscript{306} Nikki L.M. Brown and Barry M. Stentiford, \textit{The Jim Crow Encyclopedia, Vols 1-2} (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008), 165.
\textsuperscript{308} Ibid., 4.
This quotation illustrates Conover’s belief in jazz as emblematic of America, and as a working model of the virtues of democracy, individualism, and freedom of expression. Moreover, it shows Conover’s appeal to out-group fanaticism. Conover describes the reception of jazz as more pertinent to cultures overseas. These cultures, according to Conover, are more likely to recognize these attributes in jazz, and place more value on them, due to their out-group position.

Conover’s Two Personas

It is important to note Conover’s influence in light of the distinction between his domestically-known role in the jazz community in the United States and his persona as a jazz broadcaster for the VOA. By the 1960s, Conover had gained significant influence in both capacities and earned vastly different reputations for each. While Conover was recognized in the United States as a critic who participated heavily in the avant-garde debates, attracting criticism for the managerial roles he undertook, he was regarded as an oracle overseas. His role as VOA broadcaster and jazz “teacher” bore significant and lasting impact on his friends overseas. Listeners relied on him for information and approval in his capacity as a jazz authority. As Nigerian author and musician Benson Idonije recalls, “Conover was a teacher. . . . Many fell over themselves for Conover to fill the backs of their albums with information, which would serve as endorsement from the scholar of contemporary music, the authoritative voice on Voice of America.”

However, Conover’s overseas persona, one of an educator, was largely unrecognized in America. Because of this he was out of the critical eye, and was thus better able to make confident assertions to his fans, who placed a great deal of trust in his opinions. While Conover avoided linking extra-musical information to music, unlike Kofsky, he did provide

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verbal descriptions of the jazz process and of the jazz lifestyle as he understood them.

Conclusions

Despite the music’s association with political interpretations, canonical debates, and racially-driven criticism common in the United States, Conover resisted conveying preconceived interpretations common in writings of Frank Kofsky, Hollie I. West, and Amiri Baraka. Even in instances in which musical selections were intentionally politically charged (such as Archie Shepp’s Fire Music and Alvin Batiste’s Southern University Jazz Ensemble), Conover avoided injecting his own opinion. Instead, Conover presented the music and allowed the listener to interpret.

Conover’s endorsement of Batiste’s group illustrates his open-mindedness in portraying a balanced picture of America—one that reflects the realities of racism. Additionally, it illustrates his acknowledgement of racial injustice in America, and his faith in music to alleviate it. Batiste’s work, in Conover’s opinion, could effectively perform cultural work beyond the boundaries of racial injustice, of fortifying those who shared characteristics of oppression or exploitation in other countries.

Conover’s understanding of the function of music to perform meaningful, cultural work was more nuanced than many in the United States understood or acknowledged at that time. In drawing attention to works like those of Batiste’s Southern University Jazz Ensemble, Conover anticipated the development of underscoring Afro-diasporic agendas in musical works—in lieu of the original themes proposed by the State Department including liberal, universal, and cultural ambassadorship. He postulated the idea that music, without the visual element of a music performance, could perform this work. Throughout the 1970s and beyond, black artists continued
to express their own agendas in the State Department tours of Africa, and interacted with African audiences in ways that continued to revolutionize the principles originally proposed by the US State Department.

Conover’s unbiased approach to broadcasting nevertheless failed to bring financial rewards. However, his ambition to maintain a position in opposition to racial discrimination seemed to overshadow the unfortunate financial outcome. Kofsky attacked Conover on charges of racism, claiming that by not reporting racial inequality in the United States to overseas listeners by way of verbal description, Conover was implicitly opposing social movements, namely black civil rights and Black Nationalist campaigns. By allowing the music do the communicating, and thereby avoiding social or political suggestion commonly associated with some avant-garde works (and keeping his verbal descriptions of the music, overall, to a minimum) he cultivated a programming style that, he believed, conveyed social equality through music alone.

According to Conover, jazz enabled listeners to identify themselves with an idealized, democratic America. Despite his recognition of racial injustice in his promotion of racially conscious works, he often espoused a romanticized viewpoint that denied the presence of racial injustice in America altogether. Jazz, Conover stated, advanced the idea that “America is the kind of country that they want to believe it is. Jazz corrects the fiction that America is racist.” This idealized picture of America was what Conover believed jazz would bring to those who absorbed it. Conover’s idealized America was one in which jazz fulfills the cultural work of improving social injustice. While Conover steadfastly denied putting forward an agenda in his broadcasts, his goal remained that the music, regardless of its figurative baggage, would convey

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a message of optimism and possibility—and a belief in the unexpected.

Conover had exercised managerial authority since his beginnings in radio. Prior to his position with the VOA in 1955, he broadcast a successful jazz program for WEAM in Washington D.C. In recalling this position, Conover emphasized his inclination for defying the administrators’ commercial interests. He objected to the practices of commercial radio stations and their use of advertising to make profits, maintaining that commercials would interrupt the flow of his concept of a program’s sequential *development*. According to Conover, a meticulously structured program was paramount, as was one’s autonomy in maintaining that structure. Conover understood that his ideal programming process could take place only through acquisition of sole responsibility for the choices of music from week to week, day to day, and minute by minute. It was for this reason, as Conover cites, that the position at VOA initially appealed to him. His position as self-governing freelancer would enable him to make his own choices, but would also bring several disadvantages. Notably, it failed to provide a level of job security commonly granted to government employees. As an *independent contractor*, Conover’s salary was minimal and did not include vacations, benefits, insurance, or a retirement plan. Consequentially, he was obligated to pursue other positions in broadcasting. He fought an uphill battle in his career as a broadcaster for the VOA, which caused personal instability throughout his life. He addressed social inequality in his broadcasts by tacitly supporting racially motivated works, while, paradoxically, taking an unbiased stance as an “impartial programmer.” By asserting that jazz was universal and in challenging the notion of jazz’s African origins, he was broadening the socially constructive qualities he revered in jazz to benefit those outside the United States. Without an initial intention to do so, he became an inspiration for musicians and a creative stimulus for listeners who learned about jazz.
CHAPTER 5
THE EMERGENCE OF NEW THING ON CONOVER’S MUSIC USA

The perception of jazz as a signifier of positive collaboration between racial groups was recognized and popularly capitalized upon by the Voice of America (VOA) administrators and the US State Department. Conover’s rhetoric, both on-air and in print, echoed the egalitarian sentiment of the idealized image of a jazz performance as a collaboration linking diverse people. Common labels for jazz included: the language of democracy, the language of freedom, the freedom principle, or the music of freedom. When attached to this idea, jazz was useful propaganda, whether in the context of State Department tours or artists featured on the Music USA Jazz Hour. In the mid-1960s, free jazz and other avant-garde trends challenged the idealized image as jazz critics continued to associate the new music with social and racial issues in America. In this chapter I argue that, in Conover’s Music USA Jazz Hour broadcasts of the mid-late 1960s, the message of freedom remained consistent, making the broadcasts satisfactory for the government’s aims of cultural diplomacy. Furthermore, Conover’s choice to include avant-garde jazz in his broadcasts not only satisfied the goals of the VOA of providing democratic virtue through jazz (in representing many diverse contributions in the jazz spectrum), but also further legitimized avant-garde jazz as a genre.

In the 1960s the expansion of the jazz framework was an inescapable feature of the new music. Emergence of diverse sub-categories within the avant-garde genre made the process of categorization increasingly problematic. George Russell summarized the evolution of jazz as an inevitably problematic consequence of the 1960s, a changing zeitgeist in which elements of expansion, variety, and innovation are inescapable.

Jazz is changing; the 60s could well be a crucial decade. One thing is certain. A variety of sounds and rhythms, many of which are alien to what audiences are used to, will find
their way into jazz. . . Progress is inevitable. . . ALL feelings relative to life and beauty cannot be validly expressed with techniques now in vogue. What is more, jazz is an evolving art; it is not meant to be restricted. The very nature of the music and its history indicate this.\textsuperscript{313}

Here Russell refers mainly to the increasing prevalence of electronics in jazz. But the sentiment nevertheless speaks to the expansion of the jazz vocabulary in general, as one that will lead to a redefinition of the genre. Coinciding with the expansion of jazz styles was the breakdown of jazz as an accessible and legitimate art form in the minds of the audience. In terms of its function as a symbol of diplomacy, jazz continually challenged the notion that it was a universally shared art. Iain Anderson confirms that, during the 1960s jazz artists’ “practices and growing assertiveness also threatened jazz music’s viability as a respectable and accessible art form that its Cold War champions had cultivated so carefully.”\textsuperscript{314} In order to maintain the theme of jazz as emblematic of diplomacy, Conover had to reevaluate and realign his position on jazz as the new music emerged. The changing aesthetic required his acknowledgement of the new and diverse characteristics as fitting the criteria for jazz as a Cold War weapon. Conover’s reevaluation demanded of him an intellectual paradigm shift in which his evaluation of traditional features gave way to new ones. Elements previously considered reflective of democracy, like accessible form and structure, biracial collaboration, and harmonic and melodic predictability, expanded to include (or gave way to) stylistic individualism, expression of black identity, diversity of form, and expansion of the sound palette to include non-Western sounds and instruments.

The United States Information Agency and the Avant-Garde

Conover’s initiative of change was a gradual process. The USIA intervened in his

\textsuperscript{313} George Russell, quoted in liner notes, \textit{Jazz in the Space Age}, George Russell and his Orchestra, featuring Bill Evans at the piano, New York: Decca, 1960, 33 ½ rpm.

\textsuperscript{314} Iain Anderson, \textit{This is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 91.
broadcasting decisions, as it had in other jazz diplomacy initiatives like the State Department jazz tours. The USIA selection committees favored the traditional, conservative jazz model, and preferred mainstream jazz artists and styles to best represent America. Don DeMichael describes their decision making process as including safer, more traditional choices when it came to the tours and to additional materials sent overseas.\(^{315}\) DeMichael states “just as the State Department tends to be conservative in its selection of jazz groups to tour, the record selections also seem to lean toward the past and what is not too avant-garde.”\(^{316}\) However, Conover maintained that he did not endure such levels of intervention; that he was the sole arbiter, based on his appointment as the person best suited for the position. In a letter to a listener Conover attests,

> The music is chosen by me, and I support the arrangement wholeheartedly, and not just because it’s me who’s doing the choosing. I love the old observation that a camel is a horse assembled by a committee. One person must be appointed on the basis of his performance record, then trusted to do the job. That person should observe the trends, sample the critics, listen to requests and make his own decisions.\(^{317}\)

The process of broadcasting a show, according to Conover, must involve only one decision-maker. This arrangement was, according to his recollections, what he was striving for since his earlier experiences in commercial radio. A condition of accepting his position at the VOA was that the USIA allow him to make his own decisions.\(^{318}\) Moreover, Conover was instrumental in shaping the trajectory of the show from a “disc-jockey” show to a music program. He writes,

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\(^{315}\) In addition to *Music USA* broadcasts (and the State Department tours) other resources dispatched overseas during the 1960s by the USIA were printed materials and recordings as part of the initiative of jazz diplomacy.

\(^{316}\) Don DeMichael, “Jazz in Government, Part 2,” in *Down Beat*, January 31 (1963), 19. In a USIA memorandum, the policy concerning the use of jazz in the USIA programs was formally stated: “…The agency recommends that programs featuring jazz…have as their main objective the projection of jazz as an art form and as a significant aspect of American music.”

\(^{317}\) Willis Conover, letter to listener Jim Todd, April 5, 1968, 2, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.

\(^{318}\) “The Voice of Jazz, An Interview with Pauline Rivelli,” *Jazz*, September 1965, 13. Of the transition from commercial radio to the VOA Conover states, “I was pretty well fed up with the dishonesty and perverted taste of most commercial radio I knew.”
The conviction with which Conover demonstrates his insistence on his own style of programming indicates his passion for sole administration of the *Music USA Jazz Hour*. This caused a degree of contention between the USIA and Conover, given their discrepancy in viewpoints. In his broadcasts, Conover sought to showcase jazz’s diversity. The USIA intended to maintain a perception of jazz as embodying characteristics deemed emblematic of democracy. In this light, the USIA’s ideal image would demonstrate a stylistic central point. Conover, however, in realizing the diverse and complex evolution of jazz, avoided referring to a stylistic central point by presenting shows that brought diversity and individuality to the fore.

Conover maintained that the concept of jazz he espoused in his broadcasts exceeded the intellectual capacity of the general, under-appreciative audiences in America, whose propensity for jazz he considered limited. Moreover, he described the American palate as thoroughly incompatible with jazz. Americans, Conover writes, “like the informality of a crew cut and an open collar. We revel in the friendly insult, the familiar address, the loud conversation. Yet oddly enough we often reject our own music.” Conover observed this disconnect in practice by preparing separate materials for his overseas talks. Dana Adams Schmidt writes “when he goes abroad [he] carries two lectures with him. One is for his foreign friends, who know about jazz. The other is for American embassy officials, who usually don’t.” In perceiving two separate audiences with diverging aesthetics—one clearly supporting him as opposed to the other—he

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319 Ibid.
321 Ibid.
was motivated to provide for his fans and to preserve his status as their jazz educator. This further separates Conover from his home country and asserts my positioning of him as a catalyst of out-group fandom in a geographic sense. In consideration of this separation, it is not surprising that Conover maintained anonymity in the United States while garnering deific status abroad.

Critics and the Avant-Garde

Unlike fellow writers Leonard Feather and Gene Lees, whose musical proficiency infiltrated their writing, Conover wrote from the perspective of a non-musician. Conover’s writing often emphasized a human perspective on jazz, for which he took inspiration from his personal involvement in the jazz community. Furthermore, his relationships with musicians informed a kind of romanticism in his writing, particularly in his newsletter, in which many articles illustrate a sentimental connection with jazz artists and music. These nostalgic accounts echoed themes espoused by the VOA, including camaraderie, democracy, and strength in diversity, which furthered the usefulness of the newsletter for the USIA. However, some of his recollections of the jazz experience deviated from and even opposed these objectives.

Many of Conover’s friends and collaborators in the United States deemed him partial toward mainstream jazz. This is partly due to the separation he maintained between his domestic and international duties. It is mainly for this reason that his actions for the benefit of avant-gardists—programming avant-garde jazz in his Music USA Jazz Hour and producing Sun Ra’s 1968 Carnegie Hall Concert—remains neglected in jazz scholarship. Examination of new information broadens our understanding of his goals as well as his programming method.
Some critics championed the avant-gardists by concentrating their literary efforts on an individual artist’s personality and achievements in articles, reviews, and liner notes. Examples of such critic/artist pairings include Frank Kofsky and John Coltrane, and Martin Williams and Ornette Coleman. In the case of Kofsky and Williams, the relationship served to elevate the artist’s career by exposing what the critic considered to be the true artistry of a hitherto underappreciated and underpublicized artist. In dedicating a portion of their writing to them, they were, in effect, campaigning for them. John Gennari describes Williams’s special interest in Coleman in the 1960s as “evangelizing on [Coleman’s] behalf.” Conover’s support of Ra stands as a hitherto unacknowledged relationship that served to further legitimize Ra as an artist. In his biography of Ra, *Space is the Place*, John Szwed discusses Conover’s support of Ra’s Arkestra prior to and as a participant in his Carnegie Hall Concert in March of 1968. No other source (to date) refers to Conover as campaigning on Ra’s behalf. *Music USA Jazz Hour* broadcasts, letters, and other materials that pertain to Conover’s promotion of Sun Ra in 1968 support the assertion that Conover was not merely a firm traditionalist. Moreover, they provide further evidence that Conover considered avant-gardists integral to the jazz oeuvre.

In some cases, critical evangelizing served to align jazz with social and political causes in the United States. While Frank Kofsky and Martin Williams served to canonize John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman, both addressed political associations differently. Kofsky determined that the music of Coltrane (and Archie Shepp) aligned with black revolutionary causes. Williams, however, sought to dissociate Coleman from all political associations. Gennari asserts that Williams advocated for Coleman’s artistic autonomy, situating him as an artist thriving in a “politics-free zone, uncontaminated by pressures and interests intrinsic to his individual creative

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Avant-Garde Jazz as an Instructing Tool on *Music USA*

Conover was an instructor for overseas fans in that he fostered appreciation for the New Thing through a curricular process in his broadcasts. While he did not explicitly state this as an objective, *Music USA* was a venue for instruction. I assert that Conover’s educational process of jazz comprises three main parts upon which he elaborated in his broadcasts and in the *FOMUSA Newsletter*: his painstakingly prepared verbal descriptions of jazz and the jazz lifestyle, his process of proportioning music in his broadcasts, and the emphasis he placed on personal relationships with jazz artists. Additionally, the proportions of avant-garde music in his broadcasts, and the manner in which he placed them, allowed for conditions in which the listeners would comfortably accept the music. Music selections were carefully proportioned within a broadcasting week, such that the introduction of a new style, sound, performer, or group would meld into a logical progression. In so doing, Conover’s broadcasts became a model of stylistic integration, wherein styles and concepts of the past merged with innovative aspects of the new music.

In a *FOMUSA Newsletter* of 1964 Conover included several excerpted letters from fans regarding the recent death of Eric Dolphy, illustrating a collective sympathy shared throughout the world. Conover included it to express communality and shared experience among the listeners. Conover stated,

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325 Ibid., 261.
326 Ibid., 263.
As many of you have said you would like to learn how people in other countries feel about jazz, perhaps some excerpts from the recent mail will help. . . . Three people half a world apart wrote about the untimely death of reedman Eric Dolphy:

As I saw the picture of my very favourite ‘Avant-garde’ artist, I stopped to read about the man who moves me more than any of his contemporaries. And I read the words “Reedman Eric Dolphy Dies in Berlin.’ ‘Oh no! Oh no!’ And then quite involuntarily, I cried, like a child I cried.” – Club 185, British Guiana.

we decided….the name of our chapter….NEW THING….also because with it we mean the memory of Eric Dolphy, one of the ‘new thing’ experimenters.” – Club 400, East Germany.

my club members and I wish to extend our deepest sympathies to the bereaved family of the late Eric Dolphy. America and Friends of Music USA have lost a great new artist. Yet we believe that it will not be long before a good substitute is found.” – Club 267, Ghana.327

First, Conover’s decision to share sympathetic sentiments illustrates his intention to create cohesiveness throughout his fan base, and his reliance on emotional solidarity to achieve it. For Conover, the fostering of unanimity provided strength and unity to the group. Secondly, each excerpt illustrates the listeners’ support for avant-garde music. While the sentiments may not represent the majority of listeners, the article nevertheless communicated to the reader a common, shared appreciation of Coleman’s music. Third, this example shows that Conover’s listeners formed emotional and personal connections with jazz artists on Music USA. They are not only conscious of specific artists as individuals, but also, in the case of the listener in British Guiana, have formed emotional connections with them. This letter echoes Conover’s amicable, personal style of description and his fostering of familiarity with the artists by describing their individual, human characteristics. It is possible that these excerpts were selected for their similarity to one another, and that they may represent a small demographic—and were not selected for the reason of promoting avant-garde music, or sharing, in a communal sense, feelings of loss in light of the death of Eric Dolphy. Nevertheless, the point is that the topic of

this shared experience relates to an avant-gardist. That Conover chose to highlight listeners’ acknowledgment of Dolphy speaks to the subject of canonization. The acknowledgement of the genuineness of his music to a worldwide audience further legitimized his and other avant-gardists’ contributions. Moreover, given the function of a fanzine as a document that represents the thoughts and ideas of a collective, the FOMUSA Newsletter was intended as such: to be understood by the readers as indicative of the Music USA Jazz Hour listenership.

In a letter to a Hungarian listener, Conover describes his method of programming as one that takes into consideration not only an appreciation of music, but also a personal collaboration with jazz musicians themselves. He writes,

> in addition to appreciation of the music, and in order to maintain... perspective on the human elements of the music... I try to associate with the musicians who make the records as much as I can. This leads to close friendships with such people as Gerry Mulligan, Duke Ellington, Dave Brubeck, Jim Hall, George Avakian, John Hammond, Gene Lees, Paul Stookey, Clark Terry, and Quincy Jones (to name a few).³²⁸

This suggests that Conover placed importance on the human element of the music making process. His social involvement with jazz artists included not only formal interactions such as interviews and festivals, but also alliances of less formal situations as well. These social interactions and personal relationships influenced his perception of jazz.

Particularly in early volumes of the newsletter, Conover described the jazz scene with a kind of romanticism, and tantalized the reader with lengthy, colorful descriptions of artists, settings, and moods. He sought to arouse emotions in the reader by describing events in a way that made the reader seem especially fortunate—as if they were exceptional and advantaged to be privy to inside information, and personally invited to share in this exclusive situation. Conover sets the scene at Jim and Andy’s Bar on 48th Street and 7th Avenue in New York and proceeds to

³²⁸ Willis Conover, Letter to Janos Gonda, Box 32, 1, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
paint a glamorous picture of New York. He describes the jazz scene with a scenario in which the reader is invited to join him.

Let’s say we’re on 7th Avenue, in Times Square. We’ve gawked at the lights, the tall buildings, the huge signs, the theater marquees, the fast traffic, the swift congested current of people, and the noise. Just past the Metropole (where Woody Herman, Gene Krupa, Red Allen, and Lionel Hampton often play), we turn toward 6th Avenue (or “Avenue of the Americas” as it is officially named), past snack counters, boutiques, parking lots, bars, and musical instrument stores.329

After the introduction, Conover emphasizes the exclusivity of the experience by describing Jim and Andy’s as a little known venue for an uncommon clientele. At first glance, his narrative speaks to propagandistic ideals as it describes the busy streets and thriving commerce: the benefits of a blooming democracy that, ideally, all countries should have. However, he illustrates the jazz experience as comprised of a relatively small alliance, which deviates from the objectives of the VOA. These descriptions are remarkable in that they appeal to an out-group dynamic. Conover continues:

If you want to be really “in” there are two or three not-so-well-known places you must see. One of these places is called Jim and Andy’s. Who plays there? Nobody. Who goes there? Everybody. That is, everybody in jazz who knows about Jim and Andy’s goes there. . . . When the members of (for example) Count Basie’s orchestra pause in a recording session a few doors away—it’s Jim and Andy’s.330

He then describes the various personalities encountered during this enchanting excursion upon entering Jim and Andy’s. Here Conover sentimentally depicts a gallery of jazz greats:

The pioneer guitarist Carl Kress, oval faced, thinning blonde, in his fifties, stands smiling at the front end of the bar. Bushy-haired young composer-arranger Gary McFarland waves to us from the other end. Trumpeter Clark Terry turns on his barstool, smiling broadly at us. Over in a booth, eating alone, is redheaded baritone saxophonist Gerry Mulligan. Gerry raises his head, nods greeting, and returns to his food, knowing we’ll join him in time.

330 Ibid.
We’re in Gerry Mulligan’s booth now. Brazil’s Antonio Carlos Jobim is with us, as are Jim Hall, Alec Wilder, Jack Lesberg, and Willie Dennis. The conversation turns to ‘swing’ and Jim Hall offers the first definition of the word ‘swing’ I’ve ever heard that makes any sense to me.

“Swing,” Jim says, “is camaraderie.”

“Right,” says Lesberg. “You have to get it together first, to make it swing.”

“Do you mean,” I ask, “that when everybody in the group is pulsing together, they are swinging, no matter what kind of pulse it is?”

“That’s it,” Dennis says. “Together—when they’re playing music and when they’re not playing. You can swing personally, too.”

After a time, everyone leaves, one at a time, bound for different appointments. Everyone will be back, sooner or later—everyone who knows about the place, that is. Very few Americans do know. We, Jim and Andy’s regulars, don’t tell other Americans. The “inner circle” knows already. Now you know.331

In a sense, the discussion of the topic of swing is analogous to the cohesive dynamics of the friends group itself, i.e., camaraderie. Conover’s booth (including “Brazil’s Antonio Carlos Jobim”) represents a collective of diverse people—yet it also illustrates an “inner circle.” At minimum, it represents a close-knit assembly of jazz minds thinking alike—as we listen to their conversation as a fly-on-the-wall. In the statement “swing is camaraderie,” Conover reminds us of the often-cited directive, in which jazz is compared to social equality.

What is noteworthy is the extent to which his description correlates with out-group characteristics—a striving for exclusivity and an involvement of a small, privileged group—that deviate from the directives of the VOA. Instead of reinforcing the more common idea of democracy: “a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and

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institutions,”\textsuperscript{332} he reinforces the quality of jazz that subsists despite a lack of overwhelming popularity and universal acceptance. He suggests above that, while jazz draws its strength through diversity and camaraderie, it is, characteristically, comprised of a select few.

**The VOA Charter in 1960**

To better define its mission and align its directives, the VOA adapted specific edicts in 1960. Prior to this, the aims of the VOA consisted of two main tenets: providing news programming and countering hostile propaganda by the Soviet Bloc and the Berlin Blockade in 1948. The escalating Cold War facilitated the need for a compromise (for the VOA—now under the auspices of the new USIA\textsuperscript{333}) between the two directives that addressed the social, political, and creative complexities of the age. This added directive was summarized in 1953 as the “preparation and dissemination abroad of information about the United States, its people, and its policies through press, publication, radio, motion pictures and other information media.”\textsuperscript{334} In 1960 the administrators of the VOA drafted a charter consisting of directives intended as mission statements for all VOA broadcasts. VOA director Henry Loomis stated, “The Charter, like the Constitution, is so fundamental and so represents the realities of the world and the moral


\textsuperscript{333} From website archive of the former USIA site, accessed May 8, 2012, http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/usia/usiahome/factshe.htm. “USIA was established by President Eisenhower in August 1953 and operated under that name until April 1978, when its functions were consolidated with those of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the Department of State and the agency was called the International Communication Agency (USICA). The agency’s name was restored as USIA in August 1982.”

principles that undergird this nation, that the Charter will endure for the life of the Voice.”335 The VOA adopted the following statements as guidelines for each broadcast:

1.) The VOA will serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news. VOA news will be accurate, objective, and comprehensive.

2.) The VOA will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will therefore present a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions. (Emphasis added)

3.) The VOA will present the policies of the US clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussions and opinion on these policies.336

His goal in disseminating jazz overseas remained faithful to the goal of representing America by presenting “significant American thought and institutions.” However, Conover’s lengthy, informal description of the Jim and Andy’s scenario diverges from this principle. His depiction of the jazz scene in America reflects that of a specific, “inner circle,” an exclusive and secretive group, and more accurately descriptive of out-group fandom.337

Fandom, a relatively new and commonly overlooked topic of academic study, was defined in 1992 by Henry Jenkins as “more than the mere act of being a fan of something…. A collective strategy, a communal effort to form interpretive communities that in their subcultural cohesion evaded the preferred and intended meanings of the power bloc.”338 I have included this definition as it pertains to Conover’s observance of VOA initiatives in terms of the inherent conflict with his view of jazz as an “inner circle.” Conover’s cultivation of jazz as appealing to and fostering an out-group identity aligns with the definition of fandom as the formation of interpretive communities.

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337 Out-group fandom and FOMUSA groups is discussed further in chapter 6.
In 1965, Sociologist Jacques Ellul defined propaganda as “a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated into an organization”339 and “the relatively deliberate manipulation, by means of symbols (words, gestures, flags, images, monuments, music, etc.), of other people’s thoughts or actions with respect to beliefs, values, and behaviors which these people (‘reactors’) regard as controversial.”340 These definitions reveal noteworthy similarities between propaganda and fandom. The methods employed by Conover and the VOA, including the formation of FOMUSA groups, and distribution of a newsletter, conform simultaneously to principles of fandom as well as propaganda. Conover’s broadcasts and accompanying newsletters served to welcome the listener and affirm their sense of inclusion in a cohesive, though exclusive group. Conover’s participation in the intersection of these domains included mediating between the partisan directives of the VOA and his non-partisan role as a facilitator of jazz fandom.

New Thing, New Criticism, and Black Cultural Identity

A new direction in criticism emerged in the early 1960s which sought to systematize and restrain emotion and sentimentality in jazz criticism. New Criticism enabled a manner of critique that avoided controversy. In removing the social implications of the art form, such as the common affiliation between the avant-garde and Black Nationalism, criticism of avant-garde works would include systematic analyses of the music itself. These critics favored close readings of works, including technical analyses of improvised solos. This new criticism was inspired by a

systematized approach to literature. Focusing on the internal characteristics of a work, New Critics avoid external factors such as social or historical contexts or other information that would serve as a distraction from the art itself.341 New Critics of jazz found the guidelines of New Criticism to be advantageous in light of value-laden and potentially controversial criticism, especially that which concerned racial and cultural domains. Edward Jayne cites the tendency of New Critics to emphasize formal explication over ideological stance.342

*Jazz Review* was the first periodical to feature this style of criticism in 1958. Nat Hentoff, Martin Williams, and Gunther Schuller contributed regularly until its final issue in 1961. As an extension of modernism in other arts, the practice of free improvisation was routinely challenged in terms of its place in the jazz canon. These authors were the first to situate free improvisation as a practice comparable to modern symphonic writing and painting. Early experimental artists like Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, and Charles Mingus integrated free-form characteristics in their own way, and were often praised by critics.343 Musicians less recognized, such as Cecil Taylor and Ornette Coleman, remained in danger of marginalization. As previously noted, critics often aided artists by championing their music in print. Of Coleman, Williams wrote, “I believe that what Ornette Coleman is playing will affect the character of jazz music profoundly and pervasively.”344 Williams sought to evaluate jazz as a means of expression functioning as a self-contained, self-referential art form, thus emulating the ideas of New Criticism. New Thing works, according to Williams and others, were to be evaluated on their technical merits, objectively, and without distractions like historical or cultural perspectives. New jazz criticism

343 Iain Anderson, *This is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). Anderson cites the following recordings as representative of the beginning of the experimental phase of the 1950s: Rollins’s *Saxophone Colossus* (1956), Miles’s *Kind of Blue* (1959), and Mingus’s *Mingus Ah Um* (1959).
344 From liner notes of *The Shape of Jazz to Come*, quoted in Anderson, *This Is Our Music*, 63.
aligned new jazz trends with discourses in other modern arts. In *The Art of Jazz*, Williams advocates for textual, analytical criticism. Specifically, he argued for a more content-based approach with less emphasis on public relations or amateur approaches to the music—in other words, a legitimate criticism that matched the legitimacy of an art worthy of serious contemplation.

Regarding jazz as music, Gunther Schuller published a controversial article in 1958 discussing a meticulous analysis of Sonny Rollins’s recording “Blue Seven.” Schuller argued for an intellectual and creative process in Rollins’s solos that underscored a maturing process in jazz. Gennari writes that “just as in the new jazz criticism, with its more systematic methods and its containment of emotional excess and sentimentality, certain jazz musicians themselves…were now favoring the ‘power and reason and comprehension’ over ‘purely intuitive emotional outpouring.’” Efforts such as Schuller’s indicate an inclination on the part of critics to evaluate the music on technical grounds (thematic and structural unity)—another example of how to negotiate the problematic state of jazz criticism.

Head of Impulse! Records and advocate of New Thing jazz in the 1960s, Bob Thiele oversaw recording sessions featuring many notable avant-gardists, among them John Coltrane, Charles Mingus, Archie Shepp, and Albert Ayler. Thiele writes in defense of New Thing music and accuses its more vehement critics of misunderstanding or refusing to acknowledge the music’s legitimacy and advocates for a simpler understanding of the aesthetic. He writes,

> The critics that say the music is difficult to understand just haven’t taken the time to really sit down and listen to it all…. The critics continually say that the music is complicated, difficult to follow, difficult to understand when, actually, there is a certain simplicity about new music. It is based on the whole of jazz…. In a way it’s a rebellion against the ultra-sophistication of jazz.  

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346 Ibid.
In addition to freeing the musical form, New Thing, according to Thiele, exemplified freedom for jazz as a genre. Regarding the avant-garde innovators of the 1950s and 60s, Thiele states, “Initially, it was definitely a natural feeling; it was experimental, too. They were saying, ‘here, we can play any way we want.’ It was an expression of wanting to be free and out of that has come some great music.” Additionally, he credits the New Thing as helping to change the standard performance venue of jazz from the nightclub to the concert hall. The emergence of avant-garde jazz has not been the sole reason for the venue change, however. This observation regarding the resultant venue upgrade aligns with Nat Hentoff’s view of avant-garde jazz as art music.

Hentoff, like Thiele, advanced the concept that New Thing requires listeners’ patience and that the music does not defy the principles of the jazz tradition, but rather extends it. Hentoff defended the idea that the listener must, to fully appreciate new music, be patient and open to the challenges posed in the music. Regarding Ornette Coleman, Hentoff writes, “Far from being esoteric or abstract, Ornette’s story (as a player, a writer, and a person) is as basically, rawly emotional as anyone’s in jazz, and more than most. [Coleman] plays with impregnable, blues-based sureness of direction and his customary raw passion.” Hentoff focused on the elements of new jazz he considered traditional.

By comparison, Baraka explained the musical language of the jazz avant-garde as one deliberately set apart from Western popular forms. He writes, in reference to musicians such as Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor,

What these musicians have done, basically, is to restore to jazz its valid separation from, and anarchic disregard of, Western popular forms. . . . They have also restored

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improvisation to its traditional role of invaluable significance, again removing jazz from the hands of the less than gifted arranger and the fashionable diluter.350

Baraka, like Kofsky, compares avant-gardists to the modern bohemian, a revered status in Europe but an ill-regarded one in America. He speaks of the production of avant-garde jazz as one that arose directly from the process of its own alienation—a phenomenon that “has also caused the estrangement of the American artist from American society, and made the formal culture of the society anemic and fraught with incompetence and unreality.”351 Ultimately, he perceived the new music as having profound cultural significance and stated that free jazz incorporated the familiar sounds of the African American tradition. According to Baraka, free jazz self-consciously incorporated noises and expressivity originating in the black tradition. On free jazz, he writes, “The new music reinforces the most valuable memories of a people but at the same time creates new forms, new modes of expression, to more precisely reflect contemporary experience!”352 Baraka often cited this new music as one that excluded white jazz languages as an intentionally disconnected form that spoke of a black cultural memory. He asserted that jazz was among the strongest vehicles for the educational goals of art, and the most applicable artistic realm in terms of representing African American culture. He writes, “Blues and jazz have been the only consistent exhibitors of ‘Negritude’ in formal American culture simply because the bearers of its tradition maintained their essential identities as Negroes; in no other art has this been possible.”353 In this light, Baraka shares with Conover the position that jazz should perform cultural work and signify a specific cultural identity.

Baraka regards Ornette Coleman’s recording Free Jazz (1960) as an example of a work

351 Ibid., 230.
that restores the idea that blues is the most important basic form in Afro-American music.\textsuperscript{354}

New Thing jazz, according to Baraka, represented a departure from Western-based musical traditions. Of free jazz pioneers such as Coleman and Cecil Taylor, he writes,

> What these musicians have done, basically, is to restore to jazz its valid separation from, and anarchic disregard of Western popular forms...to approach a kind of jazz that is practically non-chordal and in many cases atonal...In a sense, the music depends for its form on the same references as primitive blues forms. It considers the total area of its existence as a means to evolve, to move, as an intelligently shaped musical concept, from its beginning to its end...shaped by the emotional requirements of the player, i.e., the improvising soloist or group.\textsuperscript{355}

Baraka considered the New Thing illustrative of musical freedom and expressivity in the same sense as early blues forms. He considered the performer’s obedience to bar lines and adherence to preset chord progressions as indications of a Western-based, white musical language. New Thing, however, represented a return to a blues-like musical concept in which the performer relies more upon elements of music such as pitch, timbre, and rhythm and less upon traditional formal considerations, within a framework of an intelligently shaped musical concept.

The preceding critical stances represent the abundance of colliding assertions regarding the social purpose of avant-garde jazz. Conover, like Baraka, acknowledged the presence of the lone jazz artist and the discouragement of imaginative sensibility, often advocating for individual jazz artists on a personal level.

Continuing Dialogue from ‘Friends’ Regarding Avant-Garde Jazz

Conover’s newsletter contains evidence of a productive dialogue overseas regarding avant-garde jazz in America. The listeners contributed steadily throughout the 1960s, offering opinions from 80 countries, regarding the New Thing. The newsletter provides a sample of the


\textsuperscript{355} Ibid., 226.
evolving tastes of listeners throughout the world from 1964-69. Analysis of opinions and trends communicated in the letters, in consideration of country, culture, Cold War position, and socioeconomic status, reveals new insight into the globalization of jazz as facilitated by Conover in the 1960s.

As discussed in chapter 4, Conover excerpted letters pertaining to the discussion of the emerging avant-garde and its place in the jazz canon. Effectiveness Reports, issued monthly by the USIA, provided data as to when and where the letters were coming from, and how often (see figure 5.1).

![Figure 5.1. USIA-VOA Effectiveness Report - March 1966](image)

This example illustrates that, in March of 1966, the majority of letters came from Europe, with England vastly outnumbering the remaining countries. Africa was second, which included 13
from Ghana—the second highest number of letters in total.\textsuperscript{356} The abundance of mail from these socioeconomically differing countries warrants comparison.

The USIA administrators considered the abundance of listener mail from England normal, given the abundance of FOMUSA clubs and the lack of a language barrier. In a US government memorandum, John Wiggin draws attention to the abundance of listener mail from England and the imminent tendency of favoring these letters in newsletter excerpts. He writes,

> There is a danger. . . of publishing a disproportionate number of letters from England. There are over 300 clubs in England, and the English in general write the best English. However, Willis routines them the way he routines musical selections on his programs. He looks for logical sequence (by subject matter) with contrast and surprise playing a part. . . . This month there were 31 letters representing 17 nations. There were 9 from England.\textsuperscript{357}

Wiggin equates Conover’s process of excerpting listener mail with his impartial process of musical selection.

In 1966, a member of a Friends of Music USA chapter in England contributed the following to Conover in response to one of his recent broadcasts:

> We were all very interested in your recent replay of Ornette Coleman’s FREE JAZZ. Ascension is very much the product of a new, \textit{definitely coherent} wave. The pessimists who a few years ago were bemoaning the lack of a new stylistic force to carry jazz forward, out of the hard-bop and Miles Davis, 1958 styles, should take careful note of this record. In FREE JAZZ, however, especially in the ensemble work, it is noticeable how much the voicings of the horns revert frequently to boppish accents and rhythm. Even much of Ornette Coleman’s phrasing and general approach seems in retrospect a \textit{direct development} of some of Parker’s later solos. Despite all the pretentiousness and political infighting associated with the new music (especially through jazz journalism) and though perhaps requiring a revision of what jazz ought to be, the sounds are \textit{moving and beautiful} – as musical noises.\textsuperscript{358} (emphasis added)

\textsuperscript{356} This report is largely consistent with other Effectiveness Reports from the decade of the 1960s regarding the frequency of recorded correspondence from Ghana.

\textsuperscript{357} John Wiggin, in United States Government Memorandum to Alexander A. Klieforth, Subject: \textit{Friends of Music USA Newsletter}, February 28, 1966. Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library. Of the nine letters Wiggin characterizes two as “a literate letter to comfort those who also are baffled by ‘avant-garde’ jazz.”

It is notable that the listener acknowledges the playing of *Free Jazz* as a replay of a previous broadcast. Released in 1960, Coleman’s *Free Jazz* appears in the Music USA Programming Schedule a total of nine times from 1960 to 1969. The show that this listener refers to is Saturday, September 24, 1966, in which *Free Jazz* comprises the entire, 45-minute show. That day, the final day of the broadcast week, is significant in relation to the previous days, as it represents the last in a carefully modulated sequence. Conover writes,

> A sense of programming-sequence is more important than knowing a history of places and dates. I believe that the most tone-deaf of listeners can be reached, through a conscientious selecting and sequencing of records in a program, or of programs within a week, or of program-weeks within a year.\(^{359}\)

The listener characterizes avant-garde recordings in terms of their adherence to jazz principles and acknowledges shared characteristics between Coleman’s *Free Jazz* and those of previous generations in terms of bop styles. The presence of shared characteristics, as the listener notes, provides *coherence* to the music, thus positively affecting the listening process.

The placement of Coleman’s *Free Jazz* as the culmination of the broadcasting week indicates its significance as an important recording. Conover considered this work climactic in relation to the recordings comprising the remainder of the week (see figure 5.2). This week is typical in terms of displaying a diversity of styles and reflecting the jazz spectrum. The Monday show would often feature music marked (by Conover) as *new*, indicating a new release that year—not aired previously on *Music USA*. This show features the July 19, 1966 release of Gerry Mulligan’s album, *Something Borrowed, Something Blue*, featuring David Bailey, Warren Bernhardt, Eddie Gomez, Gerry Mulligan, and Zoot Sims.\(^{360}\) Tuesday through Friday shows feature live recordings of the Newport Jazz Festival, reflecting Conover’s customary process of


airing festival footage on Music USA. Shows #9, #10, and #11 feature mainstream, and, arguably, traditional or cool jazz artists. Friday’s show, #12, features contrasting styles from a range of bop-oriented guitarists.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bdcst. Date</th>
<th>Program No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Sept 19</td>
<td>4281 B</td>
<td>New: Mulligan, Zoot Sims “Something borrowed something blue”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, Sept 20</td>
<td>4282 B</td>
<td>NJF ’66 (#9): Woody Herman: Sal Nistico, Stan Getz, Zoot, Cohn, Mulligan, Buddy, Tony Bennett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday, Sept 23</td>
<td>4285 B</td>
<td>NJF ’66 (#12): Guitar workshop by Grant Green, Attila Zoller, Geo Benson, Ch Byrd, K. Burrell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, Sept 24</td>
<td>4286 B</td>
<td>“Free Jazz” Ornette Coleman double quartet, w/ Dolphy, Cherry, F. Hubbard, Haden, La Faro, Blackwell, Higgins^361</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.2. Transcription of broadcast week: September 19-24, 1966.

Saturday’s show features the remaining sub-genre: the avant-garde. This broadcast day stands out because it is one continuous track, as opposed to the other shows that week, which feature a variety. Comprising one-sixth of a broadcast week, Free Jazz, with a track length of 37 minutes and 10 seconds, covered the entire show and ended the broadcast week. This week illustrates Conover’s process of conscientious selecting and sequencing of records, within which Coleman’s Free Jazz constituted the climax.

Letters from Africa often focused thematically on the need for material goods, and on sentiments of human need in general. For many of these listeners, the friends group takes on additional functions, often as a means to organize a community and cope with hardship. One member in South Africa writes,

^361 Music USA Recording Schedule (1966). Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
Jazz activity in South Africa is spasmodic. Save for Dorkay House, in Johannesburg, there are no jazz clubs. Nothing much happens unless you stir up something and try to get a room or build a tent and do something with jazz; that’s what we do. We appeal to all club members to please donate some old instruments. Not only is our club a jazz club but it is also a cultural organization trying to help the poor delinquents in the streets.362

Many such letters from African countries received from 1965 to the mid-1990s reflect a lack of musical resources. Some, as above, show that despite modest circumstances, ‘friends’ clubs exist in a humanitarian capacity.

From 1945 to 1991 the Cold War influenced international relations economically, socially, and politically, as the United States and the Soviet Union struggled over global leadership. Developing regions of Africa, India, and The Philippines were valued differently than the rest in the context of the Cold War.363 As national liberation was unfolding in many countries on the African continent, the hopes of the people were often dashed by the their leaders’ exploitation of the East-West rivalry of the Cold War. Ghana, for example, was a socialist-leaning country in which its radical leader, Kwame Nkrumah, was a supporter of Marxism-Leninism. Efforts at democratic independence were thwarted throughout Africa as each country experienced “corruption, looting of national wealth, mismanagement of national economies, the establishment of oppressive one-man rule systems and total disregard of human rights.”364 In the context of the rivalry between the superpowers, Africa’s relationship with the United States in the mid-1960s was one of severe neglect. It was an era of decreasing economic aid as America relied on NATO countries, such as England, to assume greater responsibility—which,

363 African countries targeted by the VOA were Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and South Africa.
unfortunately, did not come to fruition.\textsuperscript{365}

England, on the other hand, was considered the third major power after World War II, as England’s empire encompassed the Commonwealth countries of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Britain’s military forces after World War II retained their strong status and, in 1952, “added atomic weapons to the traditional pillars of the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force.”\textsuperscript{366} Given their economy, the strongest in post-war Europe, their secure role in the international sphere was second only to the United States and the Soviet Union.

Vastly differing reactions emerge in each country’s correspondence. Ultimately, the excerpted correspondence shows that listeners in developing nations expressed greater appreciation for avant-garde jazz than those in England. Of the 50 countries whose listeners wrote letters to Conover, England constitutes the largest group, with 77 letters in total, followed by India, with 39 (see figure 5.3).

Listener mail constitutes the majority of the body of each newsletter, with occasional side notes or responses to questions by Conover. The length of excerpts ranges from one sentence to several pages. On average, the typical excerpt consists of approximately 3-5 sentences. Comparisons of letters excerpted for inclusion in the same newsletter (letters appearing adjacent to one another) reveal a narrative of the formation of attitudes toward avant-garde jazz. Some listeners specify artists and groups in a discussion, while others indicate only style characteristics. The following listener from the Philippines writes, “Our club had the pleasure of actually hearing the Albert Mangelsdorff Quintet when they performed here in Manila last year,

\textsuperscript{365} J. D. Olewe Nyunya, “Toward Understanding US-Africa Relations During the Cold War Era,” in The United States and Africa (1995), 182. The author writes: “Without any major visible achievements in her diplomatic strategies in Africa during this period the US foreign policy posture generally became one of neglect. During the period from the mid-1960s up to early 1970s, two crises tested the US-Africa relations: the Rhodesia’s unilateral declaration of independence, and the Nigerian Civil-War.”

and we are looking forward to hearing more of their early performances together with *Now Jazz Ramwong* at our jazz program.”

Referring to Mangelsdorff’s album from his tour of Asia in 1965, this listener describes their group’s affinity for the music of avant-gardist Albert Mangelsdorff, whose recent tour had fostered interest. *Now Jazz Ramwong* is a seminal avant-garde recording that featured Thai, Indian, and German folk music mixed with bop and modal styles. In the same volume of the newsletter, Conover included the following excerpts from listeners in England:

> Regarding John Wiggin’s April Newsletter article *New Music – Old and New*: I’m all for new sounds, new music; diminished fourteenths, anything goes. I listen intuitively and emotionally. Emotions can’t be trusted, I find; but my intuitions don’t usually let me down…If I don’t like it on first hearing I listen again and again. I have a rest, and go back to it in a few days, hoping in the meantime it has filtered through to my sub-conscious. If I still don’t like what I hear, what shall I do?  

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368 This chart includes only the uppermost 75% of countries whose letters are excerpted in the newsletter. It excludes 28 countries whose listener mail constitutes fewer than four letters (each) published in the newsletter (see Appendix G).  
Another listener writes:

Jazz activities here in London have been quite concentrated of late (for a change). Bill Evans’s present engagement at Ronnie Scott’s club has been greeted with enthusiasm and delight by press and public alike…Jimmy Giuffre’s concert performance received polite applause but most…were puzzled by his free form and wished for the return of the good old days of his warm, swinging jazz.370

A listener in England writes:

we have regular meetings at friends’ houses and listen and talk about the many different fields of jazz. I am afraid I am outnumbered in Avant-Garde jazz; it appears that there are only a few of us who really like the works of Dolphy, Hutcherson, Hill, Grachan Moncur III, and other great members of that terrific music generation.371

The listener claims that the avant-garde enthusiast is a minority among English jazz fans. This letter indicates a certainty that, in this particular group, their listening preferences are limited. It is evident that this group has chosen sides and formed stylistic biases, having been exposed to much of the jazz canon. Countries outside England tend to exhibit a viewpoint reflecting less contact with the corpus of jazz music available to English listeners. Published in the same issue, in a letter from Barbados, West Indies, a listener draws attention to the broadcasts as learning experiences, describing them as resources for the expansion of their jazz repertoire, writing,

Our club is quite novice as far as Jazz is concerned. None of our members can play musical instruments and until we had been affiliated to your Music USA Jazz Club, such names as Ornette Coleman, Yusef Lateef, Roy Eldridge, Eric Dolphy and indeed what we now know as famous musicians, meant nothing to us.372

This listener from the West Indies—one of the many small but pivotal territories in the wake of the Cold War—writes from a perspective that suggests a more limited exposure to jazz than their friends in the United Kingdom. While this letter does not attest to preference for avant-garde either way, it illustrates an instance in which a group of listeners are beginning to cultivate an appreciation for jazz. While the English listener reports of group meetings in which they discuss

the many different fields of jazz, the listener from the West Indies expresses appreciation for being introduced to music and artists through Music USA. Furthermore, the group from the West Indies is beginning to build a structural hierarchy of artists in which famous musicians constitute a part. That the listener lists Coleman, Lateef, and Dolphy in the famous musicians category with Roy Eldridge illustrates that this group may not yet have developed New Thing vs. traditional jazz biases.

This volume of the newsletter also contains two relatively vehement letters in regard to avant-garde jazz—one from England, and the other from a member of the Peace Corps in Malaysia. The listener in Cheshire, England evaluates avant-garde jazz: “Lyricism seems to have been thrown overboard in the scramble to create new ‘skull-crushing’ experimental ‘noise’ (well, it’s just not music as we understand it!”373 Another listener (an English-speaking member of the Peace Corps) criticizes the Jazz Hour itself by stating that it features “not enough righteous stuff: Dixie and Swing.”374 These letters reflect a limited scope of appreciation for new trends in jazz—and a demand for earlier jazz styles. There are no letters published in the newsletter from countries outside the United Kingdom that express such a caustic reaction toward the avant-garde.

Another example of intense criticism comes from the following volume. The listener communicates in the following excerpt that Conover’s broadcasts fail to represent great American music altogether. The listener writes:

What the Devil do you mean by, “Music USA”? I must confess with considerable self-consciousness that Music USA in your VOA programs, are mediocre at their best, and at their non-best, are positively horrifying. Hardly ever does this program present music the provenience of which is the United States. When it does, it is some esoteric, far-out technician playing the tympanum, pandemonium, or trampolin in some bistro in Lower

374 Ibid., 3.
Basin Street, or somewhere in Southern California…Why the casual specialization in dissonance, cacophony and the mediocre? Let the world hear some of the great American bands, voices, orchestras, music. Or don’t you think there is any?375

The listener does not specify avant-garde music or specific musicians in his critique. However, the invective closely matches, in spirit, much of the harsh criticism of the avant-garde in the 1960s (as discussed in chapter 3). The listener’s descriptions (an esoteric, far-out technician) evoke dismissive, critical accounts of the 1960s, most commonly associated with new, experimental, or free jazz pioneers. This listener’s tirade mirrors the ferocity of the most vehement critics who make similar appeals toward their own centrist musical tastes.

Conover did not shy away from including harshly negative reactions, like the following letter: “I think the theory behind VOA programs is to get America some friends. [The] Jazz Hour certainly repels them. . . .If you think people enjoy rot, slop and trash broadcast on your so called Jazz Hour, your thinker is badly broken.”376 The friends groups, while engendering solidarity through jazz appreciation for many, also brought solidarity to those unappreciative of new directions in jazz. A less vitriolic response, yet unsympathetic toward the avant-garde, comes from a listener in Ireland:

This letter, I hope, will give you some idea of how we see the jazz scene today and its place in our society. First of all we are not sympathetic towards the avant-garde as represented by Ayler, Shepp & Co. It seems to us that they are taking out of jazz its greatest gift—vitality. . . .It is unfortunate that their music seems to be leading to a complete break in communication. This must be detrimental to jazz.377

Note that this listener, like many, strives to represent his brethren with a collective “we.” This communal sense indicates a general, group consensus and emphasizes that the attitude or opinion comes from an agreement from among the group and not from an individual. The listener

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indicates that communication is lacking in avant-garde jazz. This criticism was a common discussion point in the jazz and the non-jazz press in the mid-1960s. In a panel discussion in 1964, several jazz artists weighed in on the subject of communication in avant-garde jazz. When asked the following questions: “Is the [new jazz] music becoming so anarchic as to be non-communicable? Have some jazz musicians reached the point where they have no desire to communicate?, George Russell replies, “the last refuge of theuntalented is the avant-garde.” While Ralph Gleason disagrees, stating, “I don’t think jazz musicians have reached a point where they have no desire to communicate.” Stan Kenton believed that the New Thing, generally, does not communicate to the public, and that, if it is allowed to continue, will negatively affect the state of jazz in America. He states, “I don’t know whether they don’t have any desire to communicate or whether they’re just desperate for ideas to such an extent that they’re going to try any sort of thing in order to gain attention. I do think that if this stuff is allowed to go on too long, its going to ruin the interest in jazz altogether.” Such stark diversity of opinion on the avant-garde was commonplace in critical reviews of jazz. Listeners in England were more likely to have access to such critical diversity to help form their attitudes regarding the avant-garde. Listeners from developing nations often expressed curiosity for avant-garde, such as the following listener in India who writes,

A few weeks ago you broadcast a program of avant-garde music. Surprisingly, it proved to be a tremendously absorbing ¾ hour for us. I was highly impressed by Mr. Sun Ra’s music. Not so much the music he plays, but the way he plays it. For instance, his “Other Worlds” was an absolute miracle. What I fail to comprehend is the amazing unpopularity of these high caliber musicians. Mr. Ra, I am sure, is not just experimenting or else his music would not be as fetching as it is today. After conferring with 6 other Friends of Music USA jazz clubs in this country I have come to the conclusion that Sun Ra, Paul Bley, Pharaoh Sanders, Roswell Rudd and Archie Shepp are vastly underrated. . . .Why is it so? Can you explain it? In a highly enlightened society like the USA this great injustice prevails, sometimes to the extent of robbing a musician of his bread. Is it prejudice?378

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The listener is clearly aware of the tendency for these artists (Ra, Bley, Sanders, Rudd, and Shepp) to become underrated. Also expressed as a collective decision (“with 6 other friends…in this country”), the attitude among this group is a decidedly positive one. Directly following the listener’s comment, Conover posts a response:

Prejudice? There is some ethnic (or caste) prejudice in all countries, including the USA; but any distaste for the music of the men you name is largely caused, I believe, by the difficulty many listeners have in hurdling the formidable fences the music builds around itself. The jazz press has allotted vast space to criticism of the new music. And we give it a lot of broadcast time.379

Conover avoids addressing racial prejudice and dismisses it as ubiquitous. Instead he diverts to the complexity of the music as the main reason for its criticism. His description is not without musical bias, however, as he describes the “formidable fence” of avant-garde music that the listener must overcome, implying a fear-inducing challenge. However, Conover’s metaphor encapsulates his oft-stated position that the right listener must make an extra effort to appreciate the music, and that “many listeners” may not make it over the hurdle. Conover’s defense illustrates the degree to which he maintained focus on the music, and, rather than address social or political obstacles, challenges the listener to listen. In a sense, Conover was a kind of cross-cultural attitudinal gatekeeper, keeping intercultural biases at bay by diverting criticism toward the music. As listeners speculated as to connections between jazz and external factors like social injustice (a connection that occupied jazz critics in America), Conover responded by maintaining their separation and endeavored to draw attention away from such associations.

His responses often emphasized egalitarian principles on a cultural level. Concluding his response Conover evokes the listener’s musical culture as a teaching point, and addresses the incremental process of reciprocal adoption of music across cultures.

It took thousands of years for Americans to begin to appreciate the complex music of Ravi Shankar and other master musicians of India. For that matter, it was some time before Indians began to appreciate American jazz, even the most simple of its manifestations. As American jazz aims for a new complexity—sometimes, consciously, for the specific complexity of Indian music—it may take a while for more Americans (and more Indians) to appreciate it.\textsuperscript{380}

Here Conover leans toward generalizing in his brief description of mutual, cross-cultural appreciation and musical borrowing between Indian and American music. This illustrates Conover’s tendency for a degree of conjecture in his explanations.\textsuperscript{381} While occurrences of such historical generalizations are rare in his writings, he nevertheless issued the occasional supposition regarding jazz history and, especially, non-Western music cultures. However, given the sheer abundance of critical prose produced over such a long and demanding career, a tendency for historical inaccuracy is virtually inevitable. Conover was not the only critic with a tendency for exaggeration or preoccupation with meandering diatribes. Other critics tended to emphasize altruistic or otherwise subjective goals often to the detriment of flawless, historical accuracy. John Gennari discusses Martin Williams’s tendency to lack a sustained argument in his criticism and failure to offer substantial evidence. This inclination, Gennari states, originates from Williams’s emphasis on the assertion of philosophical claims for jazz, or, prioritization of the “need to reflect more deeply on the meaning of the jazz experience.”\textsuperscript{382} Gennari also describes Stanley Crouch as a critic similarly occupied with advancing the idea of humanistic redemption in jazz, and whose prose often soared toward descriptive extremes. Described by

\textsuperscript{380} Ibid., 15.

\textsuperscript{381} Whether Conover studied “master musicians of India” beyond Ravi Shankar is unknown, and, I suspect, unlikely. Another potentially spurious description is Monk’s evocation of quarter-tone sounds as Orientalized borrowing in his narration to the 1959 film \textit{Jazz on a Summer’s Day} (More on this discussion in chapter 6).

Gennari as “a wild oscillation between jeremiad and jubilee,”383 Crouch’s jazz writing, according to Gennari, was preoccupied with defending the legitimacy of jazz and advancing the idea of overcoming. Likewise, Conover endeavored to make humanistic points in his descriptions that he deemed paramount. His speculation that “it took thousands of years for Americans to begin to appreciate the complex music” of India, and vice versa, while factually dubious, makes the point that the incremental nature of cross-cultural musical borrowing is slow, and, furthermore, inescapable in the globalization of jazz. Finally, he asserts that the complexity of Indian music is a reason for such gradual acceptance. Jazz, as it aims for a new complexity, exists as the appropriate matrix for absorbing such complexity. Such messages advanced what Conover considered the crucial imperative that jazz is music of cultural hybridization.

We arrive, in light of this evidence, at one of two possible conclusions. First, by strategically placing excerpts in the *FOMUSA Newsletter*, Conover intentionally conveyed the idea that English-speaking listeners tended to possess (and actively voice) biases against avant-garde jazz based on their predisposition and preferences for traditional styles and artists. Or, alternately, these biases voiced by English-speaking listeners were abundant, and accurately reflected the attitudes toward avant-garde jazz by listeners in the United Kingdom. In this case, Conover’s placement of excerpted letters in the newsletter accurately reflected the reality that listeners in England generally favored traditional jazz and tended to be dismissive of avant-garde. My opinion is that listeners in the United Kingdom generally held avant-garde in disfavor, and tended to echo critical sentiments that they were exposed to through jazz periodicals and in the non-jazz press. Listeners in nations outside the world powers were socioeconomically less

383 Ibid., 508. Gennari describes Crouch’s writing as “pushing the idea that the high moments of jazz have been not only crowing aesthetic triumphs, but a kind of sanctuary of humanistic values against the ravages of industrial civilization. Unfailingly eloquent, though often tainted by strained metaphor, Crouch’s jazz writing can be a wild oscillation between jeremiad and jubilee.”
advantaged and were afforded far less in terms of exposure to jazz criticism. In light of the circumstances, listeners in the developing nations received jazz more positively. In either case, the newsletter exists as a social document that includes hitherto unrevealed reactions from the time period in which avant-garde flourished. In the form of an ongoing dialogue, the newsletter serves as a barometer for the reception of the emerging avant-garde across diverse cultures, from a non-US perspective. Analysis of the excerpted newsletters reveals significant and measurable trends that indicate differing levels of appreciation between those of world powers and those of developing nations. The results of this analysis lead to further questions regarding this distinction across cultures.

Given that every FOMUSA chapter received issues of *Down Beat* from 1959 to 1971 the listeners in developing nations were privy to debates on the avant-garde movement from Tynan, DeMichael, Morgenstern, Gitler, et al. However, listeners in India, the Philippines, the West Indies, and Africa were less likely to have access to additional resources more likely available to listeners in the United Kingdom such as *Jazz Times, Jazz, the Washington Post, the New York Times, or other non-jazz publications that contained further criticism of avant-garde jazz. Furthermore, the standard of living in these countries did not allow for burgeoning jazz experiences as evidenced in the United Kingdom. For this reason, the limited exposure the friends in developing nations did receive was greatly valued. Conover’s *Music USA Jazz Hour* and the *FOMUSA Newsletter* were prominent among these limited resources in terms of maintaining jazz appreciation and, therefore, represented their most valuable implements of engagement with jazz. Yet, the *FOMUSA Newsletter* was distributed to each chapter as a USIA initiative. The US taxpayer funded its distribution, along with other materials disseminated as part of this initiative.  

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384 The *FOMUSA Newsletter* was distributed to each chapter as a USIA initiative. The US taxpayer funded its distribution, along with other materials disseminated as part of this initiative.
The comparison reveals significant commonalities in listener preferences, but is subject to further critical scrutiny. I allow for the possibility that the excerpted letters selected by Conover did not accurately represent common attitudes and therefore did not reflect the views of that country’s listeners accurately. However, the comparison is nevertheless advantageous in that, if the newsletter did not reflect listener’s collective attitudes accurately, it was designed intentionally to reflect this difference in listeners’ preferences.

Conover and Jim Todd: A Debate about Framework

Conover defended his position not only against the VOA administration and critics America who challenged his credibility, but also with his listeners upon whose affiliation and approval he depended. He maintained many ongoing, long-distance conversations through mail—stemming perhaps from the cultivation of his ongoing correspondence with science fiction writers in his youth. The following debate, with Jim Todd, an American listener in West Germany, includes many of Conover’s most staunch convictions regarding his selection process. The correspondence with Todd was frequently excerpted and published in the newsletter. While Conover sought to keep a majority of the more vitriolic arguments away from his listeners, he considered certain debates as opportunities to address a particular topic in an educational manner.

In the first letter in 1968, Todd takes Conover and the VOA to task on “the framework through which VOA expresses itself.”385 The exchange of correspondence continues for another three issues, however, and grows steadily more accusatory of Conover and his choices. Conover responded, and began the debate openly, by excerpting parts of the conversation in the

385 Jim Todd, Letter to Willis Conover, June 1968, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library. The first three exchanges in this correspondence appear in excerpted form in the newsletter.
newsletter, but chose to discontinue the open debate after the third letter. At this point, Conover continued to respond with Todd, but kept the exchanges out of the newsletter.

One of the final exchanges that did not appear in the newsletter concerned the Vietnam War. The general theme of the criticism included Conover’s decision not to air protest music inspired by this event. The following excerpt from Todd’s final response in the exchange includes his assessment of the *Music USA* broadcasts as being comprised of a

frame-work which is to both entertain and, most importantly, to propagate the U.S. government’s view on world affairs with the specific aim of countering the Communist perspective. The entertaining aspect is obviously not divorced from this objective. The U.S. understandably wants the world to like it, and good entertainment is a key to that liking. . .The music you play causes [the U.S. government] little distress, which might not be the case if you regularly played some of the recent protest music. . .your general matters of taste do not in all likelihood arouse any suspicions on the part of the government that you’re subversive. In this respect, your program meets at least indirectly the above stated objectives of VOA, and you may therefore be considered part of the “establishment.”

Todd accuses Conover of remaining complacent in the face of great nationwide turmoil and of ‘playing it safe’ as a member of the ‘establishment.” According to Todd, Conover fails to take full advantage of a position that could be used to political effect, namely, the airing of protest music in light of the war in Vietnam. Conover responds by voicing his disagreement, reminding Todd that he occasionally programs music by the Beatles and Bob Dylan. However, he rails against such youth-driven popular music in the United States and defends his show as one that centers intentionally on jazz. He states, “I believe that Bob Dylan and the Beatles have been promoted vastly beyond their worth. It’s the story of the Emperor’s New Suit all over again: because everyone else says they’re great, hardly anyone dares to believe they’re not.”

Conover was never averse to condemning groups or artists he considered musically deficient. He

386 Ibid.
387 Willis Conover, Letter to Jim Todd, June 1968, 4-5, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas.
determines his selection process by the quality of music, which, he asserts, concerns a level of sophistication that rock, folk, or other youth-oriented popular music does not generally possess. He writes,

When the Rolling Stones are as good as the Chicago blues bands, I’ll give them equal time with Muddy Waters. And when the groups cry of love, lust, protest, and hate, or add “psychedelic” cacophony, and do it well, then they’ll be broadcast on the jazz hour; until then, what they seem to be trying to do, and what their fans believe they’re doing, is done much better by John Coltrane, Sun Ra, and Cecil Taylor.388

This quote shows Conover’s lack of admiration for popular genres, but acknowledges his recognition of jazz as protest music. He cites the music of Coltrane, Sun Ra, and Cecil Taylor as superior examples of the type of music Todd is requesting. It is understandable that he chose to leave this portion of the exchange out of the newsletter. In attaching the terms protest, hate, and psychedelic cacophony to popular music, he is receding from his impartial stance of letting the music speak for itself. Conover’s response demonstrates the severity of his opinion, and the dogged forcefulness that he employed when defending his position and musical choices. It reveals a man with deep-seated opinions and convictions. But it also shows that Conover drew a line of separation between what he chooses to reveal to his listeners. In keeping debates of such intensity from his listeners, Conover shows his unwillingness to let criticism cloud the “impartial” air of the broadcasts. While he possessed definite proclivities and tastes, as well as severe distaste for rock, for example, his choices as broadcaster were a separate matter. Conover strove to represent jazz with objectivity, despite his personal leanings.

The exchange between Conover and Todd also illustrates the careful self-editing process Conover undertook in the newsletter. It is apparent from this exchange that Conover maintained an inner debate with himself that took into account the significance of his role as facilitator of jazz for an international audience. Conover was aware of the impact of his musical choices, and

388 Ibid.
was exceedingly careful in regard to this impact, and meticulous about voicing his responses to questions concerning politics or motivations behind his personal choices.

The listener concludes, “I wouldn’t have written such a long reply if I hadn’t detected a certain exaggerated righteousness in your commentary on my statements.” Conover’s decision to include this exchange in a 1968 *FOMUSA Newsletter*, totaling 20 pages, excluding the listener’s final response: the longest newsletter in its entire run, implies an air of righteousness, and perhaps an abuse of power. Ultimately, Conover’s inclination to justify his decisions and to defend his role as music programmer reveals that Conover strove to keep separate his personal preferences from his persona as broadcaster/teacher. This separation was greatly influential in his shaping of a musical aesthetic overseas.

**Opinions on Conover’s Musical Tastes from His Contemporaries**

Many of Conover’s colleagues remember him as a musical centrist. As of September 2011, a few of his colleagues, still active in jazz criticism and scholarship, replied to my online posting of September 2010 in regards to Conover’s association with Sun Ra’s Solar Arkestra in 1968. In the post I proposed that Conover’s participation in the Carnegie Hall event signified an endorsement of avant-garde jazz. Jazz journalist Chris Albertson writes, “I had him tagged as being a little bit on the conservative side.” Gitler was, likewise, skeptical about Conover’s proclivity toward avant-garde jazz, and requested concrete proof of Conover’s support of free jazz and the artists he supposedly championed. He writes, “I knew him but I’m drawing a blank

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390 Chris Albertson, e-mail message to author, September 12, 2010. Concluding his posting, Albertson adds, “I really don’t buy the free jazz love angle.”
on his strong advocacy of free jazz players.”  

Morgenstern, friend of Conover and editor of *Down Beat* in the 1960s, claims, “Willis was scrupulously impartial when it came to programming jazz, but it would be quite a stretch to paint him as a champion of free jazz. As far as his personal tastes were concerned, this school of jazz was far from his favorite, but, as I said, he was an impartial programmer.” Morgenstern’s recollection illustrates an understanding of Conover as unprejudiced in terms of his programming choices, and unbiased when it came to representing the range of jazz styles, artists, and genres of the 1960s. Additionally, his posting lends credibility to the fact that Conover’s programming choices should be considered separately from his musical preferences. Considering that Conover was not a fan of avant-garde jazz, in terms of musical taste, to what degree was Conover’s participation in Sun Ra’s concert motivated by personal taste? What other motivations were involved? What other considerations need to be investigated in order to gain a better understanding of Conover’s seemingly unlikely partnership with Sun Ra? The answers lie in a more detailed understanding of Conover’s motivations as a jazz programmer throughout the 1960s.

John Szwed offered a different opinion on Conover’s preferences and his role with the VOA. Of the relationship between Ra and Conover, Szwed writes, “Conover supported Sun Ra, for sure. At one point he came up to Philadelphia just for an Arkestra concert. It was obvious that he and Sunny had known each other for years. I know about this because I was there, and introduced Conover that night.” Szwed’s recollection opposes the others’ claim of skepticism regarding Conover’s partnership with Sun Ra. Szwed notes the inherent problem of characterizing a broadcaster’s taste based on the music they choose to broadcast. Furthermore, he draws attention to the fact that many his contemporaries were not allowed, by virtue of the

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391 Ira Gitler, e-mail message to author, September 12, 2010.
392 Dan Morgenstern, e-mail message to author, September 12, 2010.
393 John Szwed, e-mail message to author, September 12, 2010.
Smith-Mundt Act, to hear the broadcasts. For this reason he recommends caution when assessing Conover’s musical preference based on friendly reminiscence. Szwed warns,

I would be careful is listening to those who didn't hear VOA characterizing him and his tastes. He played lots of European bands from time to time, including Enrico Rava and Albert Mangelsdorff, early Euro-out players. Also pop music, too. And can we ever judge a person's tastes by what they played on the air?394

Szwed implies that, despite his choices for broadcast, which were too diverse to be considered reflective of his tastes, Conover cannot be accurately judged, in terms of musical taste, based on his broadcasts or on how he was remembered in America. As an extension of this position, my argument is that Conover maintained a broadcasting persona separate from that which his acquaintances understood. To better understand his impact as broadcaster, we should consider his position with the VOA as separate from perceptions formed by his peers in America. Moreover, Conover’s position with the VOA imparted a sense of detachment from the critical sphere in that Conover broadcasted to and interacted with overseas audiences solely and exclusively.

Conclusions

Conover’s practice of keeping explanations to a minimum (and avoiding political talk altogether) furthered the VOA objective of conveying avant-garde jazz as democracy. Listeners in developing nations, who were furthest from critic-espoused, political perceptions of the avant-garde, received the music with greater objectivity than listeners in the United Kingdom, whose access to critical aspersions in the jazz and non-jazz press affected their attitudes. Conover’s listeners in general received the music with fewer imposed biases than those in the United States.

Disagreements among top jazz scholars regarding Conover’s stance on avant-garde jazz

394 Ibid.
makes arguments in this dissertation necessary. A closer examination of Conover’s broadcasting persona reveals a greater complexity to his position than what his peers recall. Also, consideration of Conover’s broadcasting persona as separate from that conceived by his contemporaries reveals his further achievements as a jazz educator. Ultimately, a greater consideration of Conover’s broadcasting persona is essential in understanding the breadth of his influence on overseas listeners and musicians. Moreover, the significance of this argument becomes paramount considering that Conover’s acquaintances and colleagues in the United States often underestimated or misunderstood his achievements.
CHAPTER 6

CONOVER’S MUSIC USA, FANDOM, AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

As discussed in chapter 4, many of Conover’s achievements had developed by virtue of an obligation and striving toward an altruistic goal. Several critics shared a similar inner compulsion that influenced their criticism. For Conover, this inclination has early roots that formed the basis for not only his critical discourse, but also his programming choices and overall method in broadcasting. In chapter 4, I discussed Conover and Frank Kofsky in terms of their differing ideologies regarding the role of jazz as it concerns racism in America. In this chapter I discuss Conover’s science fiction fandom as a precursor to his role as broadcaster. In science fiction literature and fandom, and later, in the promotion of avant-garde jazz, out-groups—rather than in-groups—resonated with Conover. Because of their relatively lower numbers and obscurity, out-groups of fans demonstrate a stronger sense of identity than those in the mainstream, or in-group. Conover’s motivation behind his support for obscure and underappreciated artists begins with his early fascination with science fiction authors during his teen years. Additionally, the stimulus for Conover’s later achievements in the jazz community had early roots in his involvement in science fiction circles.

The Friends of Music USA Newsletter: An International Jazz Fanzine

Chris Atton defines a fanzine as “an amateur form of publishing, one that is prompted less by commercial gain than by an enthusiasm for its subject.” Fanzines differ from standard

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395 John Gennari, *Blowin’ Hot and Cool* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). Gennari discusses this inclination on the part of white critics as “an intense, life-changing shock of discovery that comes during adolescence, packing all the power of a religious epiphany.”

periodicals in that they are written, edited, and produced by those who constitute their readership. Also, they are produced, generally, with a minimum of financial support. The formation and distribution of a fanzine serves a defined need for a specific group that the mainstream does not provide. Its function is to establish and maintain a forum for discussion to meet the particular needs of the group, usually, as a counter-discourse to more typical, mainstream conversations. Because of the lack of financial or commercial strength, fanzines typically display rough, rudimentary production values, often consisting of hand-lettered, typed, or even hand-written copies. In terms of science fiction and fantasy, the distribution of fanzines began in the late 1920s, less than a decade before Conover’s involvement in them in 1935.397 Commercially published jazz periodicals such as *Down Beat, Jazz, Swing,* and *Tempo,* emerged as fanzines in the 1930s, serving the demands of listeners who were determined to explore the music further than what mainstream media would provide.398 While many such publications eventually faltered and disappeared, some graduated to a professionally produced status, enjoying great longevity and a worldwide circulation. Concerning music fanzines, Atton discusses their additional function in cultivating support for underappreciated genres and artists. He writes, “The fanzine is typically necessary in the evolution of a genre in order to validate music that is generally ignored or reviled by the mainstream critics.”399 Moreover, Atton discusses the sociological and ideological implications inherent in the emergence of a fanzine as the empowerment of a small but deeply rooted subculture. He suggests that fanzines were not intended simply to observe musical trends. Rather, they existed as a manifestation of “a very real

397 Ibid. Atton states, “The term ‘fanzine’ was first applied to science fiction fan magazines in 1941 by U.S. science fiction writer Russ Chauvenet.”
399 Ibid., 226.
desire to declare the individual identities and the various communities that made up the scene. It is not only the content of the fanzine that is important here, but its attitude and position in relation to the dominant culture. Likewise, the FOMUSA Newsletter served to empower its readers by making them contributors to a shared, ideological goal. It not only provided a supplement to the broadcasts and a means to further enhance the listening experience, but also served as a site that encouraged individual criticism and opinion and brought attention to the sociopolitical dimensions of its readers. In publishing listener correspondence, the newsletter created a means of identity for the group and brought to the fore aesthetic and subcultural values fostered outside the United States. The newsletter, like the fanzine as defined by Atton, served as a site for the promotion of jazz as an underappreciated genre. While the typical fanzine served as a supplement to more mainstream sources, the newsletter was exceptional in that it constituted, for most readers, the only source of jazz information. For this reason, the newsletter encapsulates Atton’s definition of the fanzine as illustrative of individual identities and the various communities that made up the scene. Finally, the newsletter was instrumental in advancing the idea of jazz as a global music by presenting it to a worldwide readership as an evolving, multinational, and all-inclusive music welcoming diverse styles and artists.

“Unseen Friends”: Conover and the Science Fantasy Correspondent

Conover was enthusiastically active in forming and maintaining science fiction and fantasy fanzines. His venture into science fiction literature began with his editorship of Science-Fantasy Correspondent in 1935, a fanzine that featured the work of amateur science fiction writers and, occasionally, minor works by more famous authors. In addition, Conover assumed editorship of another serial, Fantasy Magazine, in 1936, which contained works of lesser-known

400 Ibid., 227.
writers in sub-genres of science fiction and pulp science fiction literature. His involvement as editor led to eventual friendships with several notable science fiction authors including Jack Williamson, Brian Aldiss, and Arthur C. Clarke. Conover often reflected on his early fascination with the unknown and the mystic as an escape from an upbringing by a father in the military. He recollects,

I could read almost as soon as I could talk. . . As a child I lived in Oz, Barsoom and Pellucidar. Beginning in the 1930s, when I found Amazing Stories and Weird Tales at newsstands, I travelled to the moon, to Mars and Venus, to the past and the future, to the fourth dimension, and into crypts and castles and haunted houses. 401

He describes such early experiences as a kind of escape that he believed to be shared by other like-minded youths.402 Seeing this as a necessity for many like-minded youths, Conover introduced the *Science Fantasy Correspondent* as a means to communicate across what he predicted to be a vast, virtual network of young fans. Conover described the initial formation of a club as an irresistible impulse to connect with others of a similar inclination. He recalls the first instances of correspondence with great enthusiasm, stating, “[Within the first week of this correspondence] I was exchanging letters with half-dozen youngsters I’d never met. The sweetest music I heard was the morning clank of the gate in front of our house in Cambridge, Maryland, when the postman arrived and I prepared for new conversations with my unseen friends.”403 In 1937, the year of Lovecraft’s death, Conover was replaced as editor. While specific reasons for Conover’s parting are unknown, it is likely that the impetus slowed after the death of Lovecraft, who had been one of the main inspirations for the fanzine.404

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402 Ibid., 6. Conover writes, “My father was an Army officer. . . He expected me to be one, too. In due time I was to attend The Citadel—the Military College of South Carolina. But I had lived on enough Army posts and seen enough regimentation to know it wasn’t for me. . . . Therefore, early in life, I retreated into myself.”  
403 Ibid., 7.  
404 Willis Conover, Unfinished autobiography, section titled “Science Fantasy Correspondent,” Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
Conover facilitated inter-connectivity among subscribers to the *Science Fantasy Correspondent* by systematizing and compiling the correspondence. In this regard the publication served to cohere the previously separated amateur group through an organized network. Conover recalls that, “Inasmuch as all my correspondents were now writing to each other and we had a sort of long-distance club…why not publish and circulate a club magazine or paper?” In this capacity Conover served a growing niche market across America.

Perhaps the most notable contributor was H.P. Lovecraft, whose correspondence with Conover culminated in a distant friendship. Lovecraft supplied Conover with many unpublished short stories and poems that he subsequently published in the newsletter. Continued correspondence with Lovecraft and others quickly invited exponentially more connections with fans, which grew continuously until the end of Conover’s editorship. Notable contributors included Robert Bloch, Henry Kuttner, Greye La Spina, and C.L. Moore. In 1937, upon moving to Cambridge, Maryland, his family visited New York, whereupon the young Conover was provided at long last the opportunity to come into contact with his heroes. He writes,

> [In New York], I was going to visit fellow luminaries, long-established Famous Fans (referred to in today’s fan circles, I hear, as First Fandom)...I didn’t have stories I wanted to sell them. I just wanted to say hello to them; actually just to meet them. They were the elite of my world, the gods who produced my dreams.

Conover’s inclination to pursue relationships through correspondence with other writers and establish a network of fan groups set him apart from the average literary aficionado. From 1937 to 1940 he was an associate editor for *Fantascience Digest*, edited by Robert Madle in

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405 Ibid., 8.
406 Ibid. Of this achievement Conover recalls that, “Soon I was in correspondence with more than 50 people I’d never met, all over the USA.”
407 Willis Conover, Unfinished autobiography, section titled “Science Fiction,” Box 134, 7, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
Philadelphia. His predisposition toward communication across great distances aligns with the establishment of the newsletter as a networking resource for jazz fans overseas.

*Music USA Jazz Hour* Fans as Out-groups

Many of Conover’s listeners embodied characteristics common to out-groups, including a collective dissatisfaction in their government and the voicing of rebellious attitudes. From the beginnings of the Voice of America (VOA) in 1955, the Soviet government sought to hinder activities related to the VOA and impede its momentum by jamming the signal, thus discouraging participation in FOMUSA. In Russia and the Eastern Bloc countries in the 1960s jazz had been banned as “degenerate art.” Membership in FOMUSA served to bind these disparate groups and affirm an identity. Furthermore, the clandestine nature of these groups, particularly in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, appealed to disenfranchised youths. I assert that the members of FOMUSA constitute out-groups in terms of their position in Cold War politics.

According to Henri Tajfel, out-groups are formed as a result of conflict or resistance to an opposing in-group. Both groups are developed “as a result of emerging social norms, [and are] directly due to an explicit intergroup conflict of goals.” Tajfel states that a sense of belonging is formed among outlying groups in the process of discriminating or rebelling against a larger, or more dominant group. The out-group tends to grow stronger as the dissonance between groups intensifies. One example of this is Conover’s removal from his editorial position with *Science*.

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408 This characteristic applies especially to youth sub-cultures, which, in the former Soviet Union were referred to as *stilyagi*, or style-hunters.

409 Henri Tajfel, “Social Identity and Intergroup Behaviour,” in *Social Science Information* 13 (1974), 66, accessed September 27, 2011, http://ssi.sagepub.com/content/13/2/65.full.pdf. In positing the constructs of in-groups and out-groups, the author argues that, “just as the effects of [social psychological variables] are determined by . . . social, economic and political processes, so they also acquire in their turn an autonomous function which enables them to deflect in one direction or another the subsequent functioning of these processes.”
*Fantasy Correspondent*, which served to deepen his resolve and strengthen his allegiance with others of his kind, namely lesser known and underappreciated science fiction authors. During these years, Conover voraciously absorbed works by lesser-known authors through science fiction pulp magazines and books.\(^{410}\)

In the 1960s, as Conover broadcast jazz on the VOA, he relied again on out-group dynamics in forming a fan base. He described avant-garde jazz in terms that resembled out-group fandom. According to Conover, the appeal of avant-garde jazz was, like science fiction, its exclusivity, rather than its universality. Studies involving in-group vs. out-group dynamism assert that groups with relatively lower status, numbers, or power show a stronger sense of collective self and identification than those that constitute the majority. The influence of out-groups applies to listeners to (and creators of) avant-garde jazz, a genre that gained popularity, not in the United States, but in *Music USA* broadcasts during the late 1960s. Conover’s endorsement of fan activity served to unify the groups and provide a sense of continuance and expansion. The formation of social groups fulfilled a need for listeners and fans outside the United States to connect socially. Jazz served as the conduit for this connection.

**Conover as an Alienated Youth**

The unfortunate consequence in both editing science fiction literature and radio broadcasting occupations was that of Conover’s inexorable isolation. While both occupations provided some personal fulfillment and a sense of communion with sci-fi and, later, jazz audiences, Conover’s position as mediator resulted in personal anonymity in and alienation within his native country. An article in 1960 encapsulates this alienation and describes the

\(^{410}\) In addition to the approximately 130 boxes of material related to Conover and the VOA, the Willis Conover Collection holds 14 boxes devoted to his books, writings, and memorabilia on the topic of science fiction literature.
separation inherent in his role as mediator of jazz both nationally and internationally. Dana Adams Schmidt reports that, in 1960, “few Americans know Willis Conover’s name. Jazz does not captivate most young Americans the way it does young people elsewhere. That makes Willis Conover something of a prophet without honor in his own country.” While the appeal of jazz waned for listeners in America, jazz continued with greater momentum on the international front.

Conover never fully realized his lifelong goal of becoming a musician in the traditional sense, despite several earnest endeavors at musical composition and song writing. As previously discussed, he spent much of his teen years as editor of *Science Fantasy Correspondent* and other publications. In this regard, Conover’s responsibilities involved management and manipulation of pre-existent sources. His creative development consisted of organizing others’ written contributions into a structured whole. As editor of the *Science Fantasy Correspondent*, Conover maintained personal correspondence with authors, publishers and a growing fan-base. He worked with a small staff of associates who shared the responsibility of collecting, compiling, and responding to correspondence. Likewise, as music programmer, he used a similar process of working with assistants to compile and disseminate the work of others. In this capacity, as I argue in chapter 7, Conover’s achievements constitute artistic creations in that they exist as one individual’s manipulation of sonic resources into a creative whole. Conover’s broadcasts, like his newsletter, consist of carefully organized entities arranged within a predetermined framework to achieve a specified goal.

**A Shared Reclusiveness**

Conover identified with what he considered the private or reclusive characteristics of jazz artists. In an interview from 1987, Conover cited Duke Ellington and H.P. Lovecraft as two

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artists who had provided the greatest impact on his professional life. He admired the two artists as individuals with a carefully guarded personal lives. In sustaining relationships with both artists he achieved a level of intimacy not easily gained. In an assessment of Lovecraft, Conover speaks of the exceptional quality of their relationship. He states that, “Lovecraft was a recluse, but in correspondence he was completely open in conversing with you; and that’s the way it felt when you read his letters.” Conover valued correspondence as a way to form significant bonds with unseen friends whose socially reclusive nature would complicate such an alliance.

Conover and Nictzin Dyalhis

In recollecting his teen years, Conover described his obsession with the stories of Nictzin Dyalhis (1873-1942). Upon discovering him in the February 1934 issue of Weird Tales, Conover was determined to make personal contact. His eventual visit with Dyalhis occurred in 1937, in Salisbury, Maryland, after months of researching his whereabouts. In his recollections, Conover goes into great detail about having hitchhiked 37 miles from his home, meeting the author and his family (with whom he would eventually form strong bonds), and hearing numerous tales of Dyalhis’s experiences with the occult. Conover recalls one of many discussions in which Dyalhis related the following story: “I was accepted into a Chinese society of occult sciences…. I spent a lot of time in the orient, and I know its splendor and its squalor, intimately. I’m one of the few white men ever to enter Tibet and leave with its secrets. I know secrets from this part of the world, too–such as they are.” Dyalhis became known for stories involving themes of occult

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413 Nictzin Dyalhis, in “Nictzin Dyalhis” by Willis Conover, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
fantasy such as reincarnation and spiritual travel on the astral plane. From a very young and impressionable age, Conover became absorbed in the mysticism such personalities revealed to him.

Conover and Howard Phillips Lovecraft

Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937) maintains a place in Conover’s life by virtue of many allusions to him in Conover’s writing and recollections. Additionally, Lovecraft was the basis for Conover’s only widely successful publication, *Lovecraft at Last* (1975), which contained letters from a lengthy and affable correspondence between them in the last two years of Lovecraft’s life. Lovecraft was an American author whose works of horror and weird fiction enthralled and influenced Conover in his teen years. Particularly appealing to Conover’s taste was Lovecraft’s aesthetic principle of cosmic horror, one that, “stems not from traditional supernatural themes, but from the concept of an indifferent and unknowable universe, [with] imagery reflecting his view of the universe as a vast, purposeless machine.”

Conover maintained that, from an early age, the influence of Lovecraft instilled in him a high intellectual standard. The influence endured, and, in the context of radio, served to cultivate a staunchly non-commercial approach to broadcasting. He wrote of his early exposure to Lovecraft as one that “accounts in part for my failures in commercial radio stations and my success in the non-commercial Voice of America.” Lovecraft’s artistic fortitude in the face of popular adversity and the perseverance of his true literary voice resonated with Conover. He

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416 Willis Conover, Unfinished autobiography, section titled “Nat Hentoff,” Box 34, 1, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
writes: “[Lovecraft] impressed me with his scorn for commercial hack writing and his admiration for the giants of literature. For me, this transferred into my scorn for quick-buck radio and admiration for good-program radio. It set my standards for events and people outside radio too.”417

Lovecraft’s stories often focused on themes alienation, specifically on the inability of man to comprehend the universe, thus resulting in his inexorable isolation. Biographer J.T. Joshi speaks of Lovecraft’s primary audience eventually consisting of smaller amateur groups. Lovecraft’s prosperous years of fiction writing, and amateur appeal, coincided with a period of intense correspondence. Joshi writes, “It was in the amateur world that Lovecraft recommenced the writing of fiction, which he had abandoned in 1908. . . .Lovecraft also became involved in an ever-increasing network of correspondence with friends and associates, [and having] never trained for an occupation, eventually drifted into poorly paying work as a ‘revisionist’ or ghostwriter.”418 The resemblance between Lovecraft’s eventual outcome and Conover’s inexorable, though undeserved anonymity demands comparison of both artist’s eventual destiny of not only low financial status, but also the relegation to facilitator—and intermediary—of the work of other artists. Lovecraft maintained a largely isolated life. Biographies have noted his reputation as a misanthrope and neurotic. Notably an author of sub-genres of fantasy and horror fiction, Lovecraft’s themes of separation and isolation underscore his own indifference to human belief and philanthropy.

Conover and Duke Ellington

Conover also admired Duke Ellington for his motivation to surpass societal boundaries

417 Ibid.
set in place by racial segregation, and for his success in spite of adversity. During his military service in 1944, as part of his role as music producer, event organizer and publicist, Conover exercised an active interest in desegregating Washington D.C., ensuring that black musicians be admitted to nightclubs. His subsequent efforts regarding desegregation in Washington are documented in several accounts.\footnote{Gene Lees, *Friends Along the Way: A Journey Through Jazz* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).} In Conover’s later recollections, he wrote of Ellington’s reclusiveness as a quality they both shared. Regarding a late night opportunity to talk openly with Ellington, an event not often granted, Conover recalled a duality in Ellington’s personality in his activities as a bandleader and as a person, He writes that, “Whereas Ellington was very out-going in many ways. . . inside himself he had a wall that he stayed behind. And he very seldom stepped around that.”\footnote{Ibid., 10.} Other biographical accounts on Ellington note his personality as fundamental to his success as a composer, and the answer to why, as James Lincoln Collier notes, “a man with no easily discernible gift [can] produce a body of work so important.”\footnote{James Lincoln Collier, *Duke Ellington* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4. Collier describes Ellington as an artist without the “melodic inventiveness of a Bix Beiderbecke [or a] Johnny Hodges, [with a weak] sense of larger form [and] musical architecture…. And did not have the exquisite rhythmic sense of a Louis Armstrong, a Benny Goodman, [or] a Lester Young.”} Collier describes Ellington personality as inward and secretive, characterizing him as “a private person who was difficult to know.”\footnote{Ibid., 3.} Conover valued his experiences with Ellington in the 1940s, having accompanied the orchestra on tour. It was during this time that Conover became closely acquainted with Ellington—a friendship that would last until Ellington’s death some 30 years later. Furthermore, Collier posits that Ellington’s intentionally optimistic and formal qualities were directed by a lifelong impetus to cultivate a Victorian genteelness.\footnote{Ibid., 5. Collier writes, “Of particular importance ot Ellington’s development was the presence in this Victorian culture of a genteel interest in the arts.”} John Szwed describes this quality as a survival technique that helped Ellington and other artists “who dwell
and create on the margins of society and art...whose art is rewarded less with fame than notoriety.\textsuperscript{424} For Ellington, Szwed posits, his process of dealing with the jazz life manifested itself by maintaining “a velvet wall of savoir-faire and sophistication.”\textsuperscript{425} This upwardly mobile manner of deportment began in the post-Emancipation period, cultivated by a new, black middle class. Ellington embodied these characteristics not only in his outwardly sophisticated tastes and formal dress, but also in his intellect and “genteel interest in the arts.”\textsuperscript{426} Ellington’s aspirations to cultivate this image came, initially, from a desire to assert a higher level of social status than was actually the case, which began in his youth. Harvey G. Cohen describes Ellington’s family as having cultivated an upper class, Victorian sensibility despite their income, which placed them below the level of the average white, middle class family. Cohen writes, “Ellington’s parents lived and acted like they were among the black upper crust, but were not.”\textsuperscript{427} This aspect of Duke’s life illustrates his exceptional personality in the face of adversity, an intentional veer from the stereotypical image of the black jazz musician in the 1950s and 60s. Gene Lees describes Ellington as a misunderstood, intensely private man whose true gifts were unrecognized by most, but who served a valuable role in providing an optimistic model of Afro-American jazz for utilization by the Kennedy Center, the State Department, and the White House.\textsuperscript{428} Lees asserts that Ellington was “the right black man in the right place at the right time, one who spoke well and had manners and posed no apparent threat, and so they held him up for all to see not as the artist he was but as evidence that America is really not what those marchers

\textsuperscript{424} Szwed, \textit{Space is the Place}, 97.
\textsuperscript{425} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{426} Collier, \textit{Duke Ellington}, 5. The author states that this manner of embracing “the “best” art—the music of the “Three Bs,” the painting of the academic formalists, Greek statuary, the plays of Shakespeare, and the novels of Scott—was thought to be “uplifting” and to turn the mind to higher things and away from depravity and debauchery.”
and malcontents say it is. Conover shared Lees’s assessment of Ellington as an ideal figure for representing jazz. Conover admired this quality in Ellington, as one who overcame obstacles and carried himself with dignity, and therefore, substantiated the idea that jazz is art music. The deep admiration for Ellington is further illustrated in Conover’s 1974 poem, *May Recessional*, which depicts Ellington’s distinctiveness and sophisticated nature (see figure 6.1).

![May Recessional by Willis Conover (1974).](image)

Inscribed by phrases evoking his more popular songs, the lines reflect Conover’s knowledge of Ellington’s oeuvre, utilizing quotation in the manner of a well-informed and deferential jazz soloist paying homage. The words “he bowed a perfect angle,” and “sophisticated gentleman” convey Ellington’s dignity and poise. The lines, “taller, deeper, faster, fuller, wiser, older, younger longer, no one knew him. Now we know him come Monday. No, never. Never me. Dookey,”

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429 Ibid., 47.  
430 The last lines of each stanza suggest lyrics to “Sophisticated Lady,” “Love You Madly,” and “Come Sunday.”
“younger longer,” illustrate reverence for Duke and an admission of the greatness of his attributes. The phrase, “no one knew him,” acknowledges Duke’s secrecy. Conover illustrated his admiration by programming Ellington’s music with great frequency in *Music USA* (see figure 6.2).

![Ellington on Music USA 1962-69](image)

**Figure 6.2.** Duke Ellington on the *Music USA Jazz Hour* from 1962-69 by minute.

In the years 1962-69, the timespan relevant to the major arguments in this study, Ellington’s music maintained considerable popularity in *Music USA* broadcasts. The gradual decrease (from 1964 to 1968) notwithstanding, Ellington represents the artist most frequently aired on *Music USA*, by a large margin.\(^{431}\) It is fruitful to compare the frequency of Ellington’s music to Gerry Mulligan’s (see figures 6.2 and 6.3), as Mulligan represents the second most popularly featured artist on *Music USA*. Analysis of their totals reveals that Ellington’s music (approximately 81 hours in total) exceeds that of Gerry Mulligan’s (around 25 hours in total)—by a ratio of three to one.

\(^{431}\) The decrease in popularity regarding both Mulligan and Ellington during the 1960s pertains to Conover’s shift in priorities in light of the avant-garde movement.
The degree to which Conover prioritized Ellington is further emphasized by the fact that, after 1966, Conover featured Ellington’s music on the *Music USA – Part A*, the show which featured popular music. Also, Duke Ellington’s *Take The “A” Train* remained the signature theme for *Music USA Jazz Hour* from its first broadcast to the last. That Ellington received such a popular position, and, consequently, becoming the utmost representative of jazz for overseas listeners, confirms Conover’s admiration for him. As previously discussed, Conover often based his choices on criteria aside from matters pertaining to musical technique. He admired and sought to emulate Ellington for his dignity in the face of adversity. According to Conover, Ellington was the ideal jazz artist who embodied the sophistication and respect that jazz deserved.

Ellington’s reputation to display a genteel, Victorian sensibility was, incidentally, a shared by Lovecraft, whose exterior posturing, likewise, did not reflect his actual social standing. Lyon Sprague De Camp writes, that “from 1909 to 1914, Lovecraft turned from adolescent to adult [at which point he] exemplified the Victorian ideal of a gentleman: polite, dignified,
poised, imperturbable, tasteful.” Accounts of his professional life hardly reflected personal or professional success, however. Bernd Steiner writes, “Although Lovecraft had achieved stardom in the realms of amateur journalism and pulp fiction…. Only one of his narratives…was published by a small press during his lifetime.” Conover also saw the need to project an image of financial success that did not exist.

Conover’s Finances: The Cosmos Club

Despite his achievements, Conover earned only a modest salary from the VOA. Washington reporter Joy Billington notes the obscurity and financial modesty of VOA employees in general.

At home, the broadcasters are unknown in their own country. Abroad, their fans tune in regularly on shortwave radios…. By comparison to the inflated salaries in commercial broadcasting, even the top VOA stars—Willis Conover, Pat Gates and Phil Irwin—earn salaries that are modest…. Conover can move about Washington and New York quietly, unrecognized. In Warsaw or Moscow he’d be lionized…. For these government radio stars, the anonymity and medium-range salaries are equalized by two factors: the security of government work and the fulfillment of the low-key but none-the-less missionary zeal that is their driving force. They want to tell the story of America.

Billington notes not only the modest salary but also the altruistic motivations shared by the broadcasters of the VOA. Despite the modest financial compensation, Conover enjoyed the benefits and prestige commensurate with the government elite, and boasted of numerous friendships and associations in and around the White House.

Conover took satisfaction in his membership in the Cosmos Club in Washington D.C, with which he remained from 1968 until his death. Established in 1878, the Cosmos Club is a

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435 Ibid.
private, fraternal, social club for “men distinguished in science, literature and the arts.”

Conover cherished his membership to this group and enjoyed its prestige long after the membership dues posed a challenge to his financial means. Regarding a meeting in 1996, Doug Ramsay recalls meeting with Conover at what would be one of his final visits to the Cosmos Club. Ramsay writes, “It was about a month before he died. Willis invited me to lunch at the Cosmos Club, where he maintained a membership. I doubt if, at the end, he could afford it, but it was important to him to be there, to feel a part of the old Washington he loved.”

Despite his financially unsuitable state, Conover maintained a connection to the Cosmos Club, according to Ramsay, for reasons related to sentiment and nostalgia. In continuing his membership in the Cosmos Club, Conover maintained his inclination to portray dignity and poise despite financial hardship. His partiality toward projecting a level of prestige higher than his actual status is directly reflective of the outward gentility in the characters of Ellington and Lovecraft.

Furthermore, Conover’s inclination to reflect an image of prestige manifested itself in his method of broadcasting, and served to further legitimize jazz in the minds of his listeners. As with Ellington’s dignified stature, Conover’s outward dignity, too, reflected on jazz a quality of distinction and sophistication. His carefully orchestrated broadcasts, his seriousness, and the meticulous quality of his spoken narrative served to portray jazz as art music. Additionally, his insistence on avoiding commercialization, outside influences, and other trappings common to the role of disc jockey further legitimized the genre. Ultimately, the backdrop of sophistication served to advance the position of jazz as art music.


Conover as Autonomous, Independent Contractor

Throughout his broadcasting career, Conover took great pains to maintain autonomous control over his *Music USA Jazz Hour* program. Largely disregarding commercial interests and eluding national recognition as a consequence, Conover cultivated a programming style that avoided engagement with commercial or personal gain. Throughout his forty years with the VOA, Conover sought to remain an independent contractor, which prompted a continual struggle against “grumblings in Congress about wasting taxpayers’ money by broadcasting frivolous music.” Nevertheless, he was acknowledged to have persevered despite having “his share of run-ins with Voice of America officials over the years but never backed down.” In maintaining his anonymity, Conover was able to fulfill personal goals such as airing underappreciated works.

Conover often noted the importance of providing airtime for underappreciated works that he valued. He considered his efforts in championing underappreciated artists as motivating positive change in America and expressed personal satisfaction in providing this necessary change. Specifically, many of his personal recollections about broadcasting reflect such altruistic goals, which often emphasize a strong, anti-racial motivation. In an interview from 1974, Conover reflects on past decades and discusses the motivation behind his choices in broadcasting both before and during his years with the VOA. Recalling the 1950s and 1960s he claims that:

> the best of my programs were good enough to bring credit to the station. I never made any money out of it, but I got satisfaction. . . .I was very concerned with a number of things. One was that under-appreciated works of quality should be broadcast; I felt very strongly about race relations; the town was officially segregated then, and this was also a way of saying “Look, no matter what the laws are, not every ‘whitey’ feels the way [that] all white people do.” It’s going to change, and if my efforts in that direction, both personally and through the selection of music by blacks as well as whites, presented with

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439 Ibid.
respect for the accomplishment of those performers, can in any way contribute something toward righting an injustice, then I feel that that’s another reason to have lived.440

Conover sought altruistic goals in his process of broadcasting jazz—one that surpassed the virtues of personal gain or financial profit. His broadcasts illustrate expressions of his opinions and beliefs.

As previously noted, Music USA broadcasts contained a minimum of verbal description. In instances in which Conover included such description, his comments would pertain to the individual qualities of the musician. In the following description from the film, Jazz on a Summer’s Day, Conover introduced Thelonious Monk as an innovative artist altogether unconcerned with criticism. He described Monk as,

one of the complete originals of music. A man who lives his music, a man who thinks his music, and it’s possible to say he lives and thinks of little else. We can’t describe him exactly as daring, because he is unconcerned with any opposition to his music. He concerns himself with such elements as the quarter-tone, which he doesn’t find in our Western scale, so he’ll strike two adjacent keys on the piano to imply the missing note between.441

Consisting of music, imagery, and Conover’s spoken introductions, the film embodies what John Gennari describes as a “self-conscious artiness,”442 a quality that the producers of the film sought to emphasize, even to the point of pretense.443 The quote above illustrates the extent to which the filmmakers were advancing the image of the complicated, intellectual, and uncompromising jazz artist. While Conover’s description skews toward conjecture, even bombast, it nevertheless illustrates the outsider quality of jazz artists that he found attractive. Indeed, Conover’s

440 Willis Conover, quoted in Gene Robinson, Oral History: Interview with Willis Conover, March 27, 1974 for the University of Maryland and The National Association of Broadcasters Broadcast Pioneers Library, Box 4, 27, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
441 Jazz on a Summer’s Day, VHS, Directed by Bert Stern (Galaxy Attractions, 1959). This documentary features footage from the Newport Jazz Festival of 1958.
442 Gennari, Blowin’ Hot and Cool, 235.
443 Ibid. Gennari states, “Jazz On a Summer’s Day is full of artifice: the yacht trials actually took place later in the summer, the audience shots were reconstructed in a New York studio over the winter. But the film’s very quality of self-conscious artiness was itself a telling point, a symptom of jazz’s association with the rarified discourses of modern art.”
discussion of the quarter-tone as an element “which he doesn’t find in our Western scale,” implies a geographical otherness to a categorically Western-based musician. The description advances not only, as Gennari notes, an image of a jazz modernist “with deep emotion, anxiety, and searching intensity,” but also one that situates Monk in a distinct subset of artists who deliberately set themselves apart from the norm. Monk, according to Conover, embodies an eccentricity, given his obsession with non-Western sounds. As an artist who “thinks of little else” than his music, Monk is detached from not only the critical sphere, but also from the listeners. Conover’s description, implying a connection between Monk and non-Western sounds. Whether Monk considered his sounds truly non-Western is factually dubious. Regardless, Conover’s portrayal of Monk as one who seeks the unknown or unfamiliar and who is “unconcerned with any opposition” aligns with the outsider appeal of the out-group whose shared meaning and connectivity appealed to a smaller fandom subset. Such colorful descriptions of personalities as well as the daily life of the jazz artist featured prominently in Conover’s narratives. His anonymity entitled him to not only fulfill his own altruistic goals, but also to establish a means of classifying that would delineate styles and artists for his international audience.

The presentation of music through the Music USA Jazz Hour consisted of broadcasts designed to expose listeners to a variety of styles. Conover’s design involved the implementation of a series of frameworks comprising an underlying organizational structure. This structure, as discussed in chapter 3, consisted of a preset ratio that would delineate music categories and serve to justify Conover’s musical choices. The first means of compartmentalizing music styles was the delineation of two principal categories: popular music and jazz. Conover titled them: the Music USA Jazz Hour, Part A: Popular music; and the Music USA Jazz Hour, Part B: Jazz. The division of Music USA into two separate shows was initially intended as a means to rationalize

444 Ibid., 236.
his decisions. Additionally, the two-category method created a means of compartmentalization that would become an underpinning for his teaching method. Conover further specified that the two sections would present music that is *satisfying*, describing popular music, and music that is *challenging*, describing jazz. By this rationale, Conover could dedicate significant portions of airtime to new artists. This method of compartmentalization was a means of defending his choices. Listeners who did not respond positively to jazz were allowed a safer alternative, which was *Music USA Part A – Popular Music*.

Initially proposed as a means to structure the broadcasts and establish a classification system, the two-part configuration illustrated Conover’s adaptation to change, and became a barometer for the evolution of jazz according to Conover in the 1960s. Examination of his broadcasts, in the context of this system of compartmentalization, reveals his changing mindset, and sheds more light on his didactic intentions. By 1965 Conover began to program Ellington’s music in *Music USA Part A, Popular Music*. While Duke’s music occupied a consistently prominent place in *Music USA Part B* in 1962 (25 hours in total), it underwent a gradual decline from 12.75 hours in 1964, to 90 minutes in 1968 (see figure 5.2). While it would seem from this data that Ellington dropped in popularity, the fact remains that Ellington’s music was aired at largely the same frequency, in *Music USA Part A*. In other words, while the frequency of Ellington’s music declined in the latter half of the decade, it was maintained in the popular music show. Between April 4 and April 9, 1966, for example, Conover broadcast six consecutive shows consisting of Duke’s music in *Music USA Part A*. The repositioning of Duke’s music also occurred in a six-show run of Duke’s music between Nov. 18 and Nov. 23, 1968 in *Music USA Part A*. Incidentally, Conover began situating Duke Ellington in the pop music category between

\[445\] *Music USA Jazz Hour Recording Schedule*, 1966, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
1965 and 1966, at a highpoint for the programming of avant-garde music (see figure 1.1). This phenomenon illustrates Conover’s evolving process of negotiation in light of the expansion of the jazz canon in the 1960s. Conover possessed a deep admiration for Ellington, and valued his music greatly—as he did other jazz greats that he continued to venerate. However, as other musical styles emerged, he was compelled to accommodate them and integrate them into the jazz hour in order to represent the course of jazz faithfully. Consequentially, he either minimized the frequency of formerly dominant artists and styles, or relegated them to the secondary category. Conover’s reallocation of Ellington into the popular music category illustrates his constant awareness of the evolving jazz canon. Furthermore it shows that he remained true to his programming procedure, which took into account an evolutionary process. According to Conover, styles and artists initially considered innovative or modern advance through a process in which their music is eventually considered “in the tradition.” Conover stated,

One of the most illuminating remarks I ever read was addressed to me by a listener, some years ago, saying, ‘I like the modern jazz you play, but I wish you’d play more traditional jazz—like Bix Beiderbecke, and Charlie Parker.’ And it was even more illuminating at that particular time, because Charlie Parker at that time had been with us a little bit more recently that he has been with us today. Nevertheless, for CP to be called traditional jazz is something that most of us thought would never happen.

Conover acknowledges the reception history of jazz wherein new music challenges the predetermined framework and expectations of the listeners, but eventually is deemed accessible and traditional. One manifestation of this evolutionary process was the implementation of his broadcasting principles (see chapter 4). Often these principles would involve a systematic means of presenting jazz in its “truest” form, by incorporating specific amounts of both “traditional”

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446 As discussed in chapter 3, Conover described the Music USA Part A – Popular Music show as “satisfying,” and the Music USA Part B Jazz Hour as “challenging.”
and “modern” styles and artists. Conover illustrates his criterion for the selection and frequency of music chosen for broadcast into the following categories:

1.) things being tried; once in awhile we play these. 2.) things that are making it; a lot more times we’re going to play these., and 3.) things that have made it and are still with us; and a lot of times we’re going to play these., and 4.) And once in awhile, these are the things that made it and are no longer with us.448

This illustrates the large degree of subjectivity in his process based on his own evaluation of selections. Conover determined what music was considered tried, making it, made it and are still with us, or made it and are no longer with us. The music of Ellington, therefore, underwent this evolutionary process, initially as “things being tried,” and moving eventually to “things that have made it and are still with us.” Conover’s choices, regardless of the degree to which his selections reflected personal bias, represented his inclination to convey the jazz canon faithfully.

The two-part structure of Music USA illustrates Conover’s process of evaluating jazz in light of emerging styles. Conover used this method, originally an artifice employed to separate two general styles, to include a diversity of styles while striving to maintain his original fixed ratio of 20/60/20. In effect, it was a balancing act. As Conover strove to offset the increasingly challenging genre of jazz with music situated as satisfying, consequently, he redefined it.

This method began to show its inherent limitations (and problematic oversimplification) in light of emerging styles in the 1960s. Generally, this simple means of demarcation would lead to the following tendency: that widely-accepted, popular jazz, by established jazz artists would be afforded far more airtime—since half of the Music USA broadcast (Part A) provided exclusive space for such music. Additionally, Part B would also include music deemed widely accepted, popular, or established to a certain degree. As a result, avant-garde jazz would be afforded far less exposure. While there was never a predominance of avant-garde jazz in a given week, there

448 Ibid.
were occasions where avant-garde remained the focal point of a specific show. Conover remained within his originally prescribed guidelines of representing the jazz canon, in his opinion, by affording a fixed ratio of, respectively, new music, ‘established’ jazz, and early jazz. However, examination of the manner in which the shows were organized reveals a goal-driven method of jazz programming—one that takes into account the nature of jazz’s development and the placement of avant-garde as a genuine part of that development.

Throughout the evolution of jazz, often described as “reinventing itself in the present,” jazz history becomes ever richer as present styles continually intersect with those of the past. Conover’s broadcasts provide a picture of this evolution and illustrate jazz as a process of musical renewal. Describing the constantly developing quality of jazz, Stuart Nicholson discusses it as a music that thrives on musical appropriation, looking simultaneously backward and forward, and grounds itself in the premise that jazz, “from its very beginning [was] a pluralistic music.” Nicholson describes the process of appropriation in jazz as “a recurring theme in the subsequent evolution of the music and reveals a continuing dialogue not only with popular culture but other musical forms to broaden the scope of jazz expressionism.” In light of this process, Conover’s fixed ratio stands as a testament to his comprehensive understanding of jazz as embodying this pluralism and ever-changing complexity.

Musicians who recall Conover’s teachings often describe his influence in terms of what the music provided, more so than the spoken or written comments. Verbal description of the music was nearly non-existent in the broadcasts. The newsletter, however, contained descriptions

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450 Ibid.
451 Ibid., 161.
452 I discuss this facet of Conover’s influence in chapter 6. Polish Bassist Roman Dylag, Polish pianist Adam Makowicz, and Czechoslovakian bassist Jan Arnet all attest to Conover’s broadcasts as instrumental in their musical development.
and narratives by Conover. However, the majority of the newsletter containedexcerpted listener mail, ultimately comprising written contributions from 50 countries. This feature defined the newsletter as a document containing disparate attitudes and opinions on jazz outside the United States.

Listeners across countries expressed differing values, attitudes, opinions, and sentiments that varied according to culture, standard of living, and their country’s position in the Cold War. For example, many of the letters from the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc acknowledge Conover’s broadcasts reverently, as salvation. In a letter from 1962, a Russian immigrant living in New York characterizes the broadcasts in a fond memory:

We listened every night to your programs, after our work in the bars or nightclubs. You don’t realize how many people you have listened you at the other side! You don’t realize what your programs are for musicians, for jazz fans from the other side. You hold alive the modern jazz in their hearts; they listen carefully, they make comments; it is the only one source of jazz, jazz with explanations. . . .And if I speak a little English now it is only from listening every night for years your programs. . . and reading Down Beat which you gave us from hand to hand to know exactly what’s going on in jazz, what’s new?453

This letter illustrates a reverential tone typical of listeners in Russia and Eastern Europe.

Listeners from these countries tended to express appreciation for the broadcasts for their function (in helping them learn English) and for their intrinsic value. They often elevate Conover as a musical hero and neglect to discuss musical and technical details or criticize the music. The most noteworthy comparison of responses involves listeners separated by the socio-economic divide, between “world powers” and developing nations. Correspondence from England and Ghana reveals trends common to each country regarding the reception of the avant-garde and the attitudes of listeners concerning the new music.

453 I. Diamant, letter to Willis Conover, February 1962, Box 31, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
As discussed in chapter 3, the FOMUSA Newsletter provided a platform for Conover to make choices free from critical eyes in America. It was also helpful in organizing and maintaining cohesion among fan groups, and created a forum in which listeners could debate and share ideas in a global network. The newsletter functioned also as a teaching tool, as it served to educate fans about the process of jazz and the jazz lifestyle. The instructional value of the broadcasts was a prevailing theme in much of the correspondence. Polish bassist Roman Dylag cites Conover as instrumental in his development as a musician.

I’ll never forget hundreds (thousands!) of hours I have spent trying to catch on my little Polish "Pioneer" radio the Willis Conover Jazz Hour. This was like entering the jazz-paradise. "Take the A-Train" was the loveliest music in my ear. I’ve learned to play on piano the whole Duke Ellington solo! I was sitting every night at my radio with the sheet of music paper in front of me and tried to write down some interesting tunes which could take a month of time. . . not every night I could hear "my tune" - sometimes I had to wait few weeks to continue my job. This was my best school in jazz and I developed the ability to listen, to analyse and to have these "big ears" that are essential for a good jazz musician.454

Dylag describes aspects of learning such as active listening, repeated listening, note-for-note transcription, composition, and analysis. Mark Tucker and Barry Kernfeld discuss the techniques and application of transcription as essential in the learning process for jazz musicians. As aural dictation, transcription requires accurate listening, analytical consideration, and notation skill. The authors cite the inherent difficulties of transcription across the technological spectrum.455

Given that repetition constitutes the transcription process, the available technology presents differing degrees of complexity. Describing the traditional materials used in transcription, Tucker and Kernfeld state, “Repetition is an integral part of the process; accordingly, tape recorders are generally easier to work with than record players, and reel-to-reel machines offer

454 Roman Dylag, e-mail message to author, October 17, 2010.
more flexibility than do cassette players.” Without access to recorded shows, which would have allowed for playback and repetition, transcription was difficult. And because Conover’s show was broadcast once a day, the process of transcribing material proved exceedingly daunting. Tucker and Ternfeld describe transcription as fundamental in the learning process for a would-be jazz player and a conduit for learning other essential aspects of jazz theory and practice such as analysis.

The first musicians who wished to learn jazz had to find ways to translate the music they heard into something they could play. Most commonly they achieved this by developing their aural memory. ... By notating a solo, a player might come to understand the basic principles of improvisation and thereby generate fresh, original statements. Thus transcription facilitated analysis as well as performance.\(^{456}\)

In this context transcription was, for musicians like Dylag, a valuable as a tool for studying and means of disseminating jazz. As the primary source of jazz, the *Music USA* broadcasts constituted the basis for such learning experiences. Dylag serves as an example of one who attributes his eventual success as a musician and recording artist to the instructive quality of Conover’s broadcasts. Aside from the technically instructive advantages of the broadcasts themselves, the newsletter also served as an educational platform.

**Sun Ra and The Arkestra in 1968**

Given that the music of Sun Ra spanned several styles, from blues, free jazz, and Eastern influenced styles, categorization of his music and placement among other jazz greats in the jazz canon is problematic. For this study I focus on the mid-late 1960s, in which Ra released the following LPs: *The Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra* (1965), *Interstellar Low Ways* (1965), and

\(^{456}\) Ibid.
*Holiday for Soul Dance* (196-?). These recordings, which Conover broadcast on the VOA, in addition to his performances in New York at this time, were categorically avant-garde. In recollecting this era of Ra’s musical output Szwed recalls:

> [Ra’s] band, about the time [Conover] introduced them at Carnegie Hall, was out! No way could it just be [that Conover] heard some older jazz connection, or that he was following their space trail as part of his reading. They were then as out as it gets.  

Szwed refers to an alleged, “older jazz connection,” regarding the confusion among critics of the 1960s regarding the accessibility of Sun Ra’s music. Some argued that his music maintained familiar aspects that made Ra’s performances more grounded to tradition, thus setting them apart from other avant-garde contributions perceived as deviating from tradition. One popular position was that Ra’s role as bandleader exemplified Ellingtonian aspects by virtue of his leadership presence and his arrangements, which were fashioned toward specific band members. Henry Martin and Keith Waters describe the widespread opinion of Ra in the jazz community that he, like Ellington, used the orchestra as his main instrument. The authors, dubbing him an avant-garde Duke Ellington, note also that his “idiosyncratic arranging techniques and long term tenure of his players” were qualities shared by Ellington. However, this aspect of Ra’s directorship as familiar was discernable on a visual level. It is unlikely that this detail influenced the accessibility of the music for overseas audiences. The visual appeal of Ra’s performances was a notably influential characteristic, but one that was limited to live performances. In some accounts, the Arkestra itself was purposefully peculiar and unconventional looking. Describing Ra’s performances of this period, Szwed writes,

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457 Music USA Jazz Hour Recording Schedule, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library. The exact release date for *Holiday for Soul Dance* is unknown.
458 John Szwed, e-mail message to author, March 12, 2012.
459 Henry Martin and Keith Waters, *Jazz: The First 100 Years*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Schirmer, 2012), 279. The authors also cite Marion Brown, who noted, “Sun Ra plays the piano, but his real instrument is the orchestra.”
The music moved from stasis to chaos and back again, with shrieks and howls pouring out of an Arkestra... Performance rules were being broken one-a-minute. Somehow Sun Ra’s spectacles seemed to capture all the promise and the threat of the 1960s—especially since no one in the audience had a clue as to what was going on.\textsuperscript{460}

This evaluation of Ra’s live performance speaks to the issue of audience reception in light of unusual performance practices, providing evidence that Ra’s music of this time challenged the expectations of the audience on both an aural and a visual level.

Dealing with the aural level only, Conover dealt with the issue of track length in his broadcasts. Longer musical selections, a characteristic of some avant-garde works, posed a challenge to a show that allegedly allowed airtime for a diversity of styles and eras. As cited in chapter 3, Conover’s proportioning style consisted of “Roughly one-tenth, the roots and origins of traditional jazz; roughly one-tenth, the free-form or ‘avant-garde’ ways of making music…and eight-tenths, a mixture of music that has endured.”\textsuperscript{461} Conover managed the issue of track length by dedicating large portions of shows, often entire shows exclusively, to Sun Ra’s music. So, the 10/80/10 ratio, instead of being applied to a single 45-minute show, was applied instead to a broadcast week. On March 16, 1967, Conover broadcast Sun Ra’s *Heliocentric, Vol. 1* (16:25) as the first half of a 2-part show. The second half of *Heliocentric* closed the next day’s broadcast. The tracks were situated within a mixture of styles which included “Hodges, Basie, Basie/Ella, Joe Henderson, and *Sun Ra Heliocentric, Vol. 1* (16:25) (1\textsuperscript{st} of 2),”\textsuperscript{462} and “Benny Goodman: M. Gould’s “Derivations for Cl. and Band (15:52),” “Airmail Special (1941),” and Sun Ra (18:30) (2\textsuperscript{nd} of 2).”\textsuperscript{463} The structure of these broadcasts shows how Conover managed the problem of broadcasting long selections in the context of a 45-minute show. While some

\textsuperscript{462} *Music USA Recording Schedule, March 16-17, 1967*, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
\textsuperscript{463} Ibid.
broadcasts include Sun Ra’s shorter works, also featured as part of a broadcast mix, Conover managed to include the more lengthy works as well, like *Heliocentric Worlds, Vols. 1 and 2*. The result was that the longer tracks would comprise an entire show or be divided between two consecutive broadcasts. Conover could have limited his choices to tracks better suited to satisfying the criteria of presenting a stylistic mix. However, he did not shy away from committing entire 45 minute broadcasts to longer, avant-garde works. An examination of data from the *Music USA Jazz Hour* Recording Schedule reveals trends that illustrate Conover’s support for Sun Ra’s music, particularly prior to the Carnegie Hall concert in March 1968.

![Figure 6.4. Total time dedicated to avant-gardists from 1962-1969.](image)
As discussed in chapter 3, the greatest surge in programming of avant-garde music occurred in the mid 1960s. From 1962 to 1969 Ornette Coleman was consistently the most frequently aired avant-gardist, nearly doubling John Coltrane, Roland Kirk, Sun Ra, and Archie Shepp in terms of airtime (see figure 6.4). However, a discernable change occurred in 1967, as Sun Ra replaced Coleman as the most frequently aired artist in the avant-garde category (see figure 6.5). Within this eight-year period Sun Ra’s music comprised approximately 350 minutes, surpassing Archie Shepp, Eric Dolphy, Charles Mingus, and Wayne Shorter.

Graphical representation of the Music USA Recording Schedule shows that the years 1966 and 1967 were years in which Ornette and Sun Ra, respectively, prevailed in terms of airtime, both of whose music constituted approximately one-fourth of the total minutes afforded to avant-garde artists. In 1968, Conover featured avant-gardists in a more uniform distribution, with each artist being featured between 3 and 8% of the time allotted.

“Sounds for Adventurous Listeners”: Sun Ra on the Music USA Jazz Hour

In 1969 a discernible de-emphasis on the number of avant-gardists is evident (see figure 5.5). Coleman returns to the top of the hierarchy at 28%, while Sun Ra constitutes the least aired artist at 4%. One reason for the seeming decline in avant-garde jazz in this year concerns the emergence of third stream, funk, and electronic artists, who, on the eve of the 1970s, began to supplant the artists common to the preceding years. Conover promoted Sun Ra prior to the Carnegie Hall concert in March 1968. In addition to lending his voice to Ra’s performance, Conover featured Ra on days immediately adjacent to the concert on March 28. Dates in which entire shows were dedicated to Sun Ra’s music included Tuesday, February 20, Sun Ra’s The Magic City; Monday, March 25, Heliocentric Worlds, Vol. 2; and Monday, April 1, Strange
Strings. However, the broadcast of Ra’s music largely ceased after 1969. Despite the fact that Ra continued recording throughout the 1970s, his music does not appear in the Music USA Recording Schedules after 1969.

Figure 6.5. Frequency and distribution of avant-gardists on Music USA 1966-1969.

The reasons for these surges in frequency are numerous. The celestial themes of Ra’s performances may have resonated with Conover and appealed to his science-fiction proclivities.
Dan Morgenstern verifies the likelihood that Conover may have been attracted to Ra’s mystic persona. He writes, “As for Sun Ra, Willis most likely was fascinated by the overtones of science fiction—he was a huge Lovecraft fan, corresponded with him in his teens, edited a SciFi publication at that tender age, and wrote and self-published, at considerable expense (which he could ill afford) ‘Lovecraft at Last’ (1973).” Conover, having gone to great lengths and expense in his fascination with Lovecraft, may have found the mysticism in Ra’s music equally irresistible and worthy of considerable personal attention.

Surely, the music of Ra had epitomized exotic and space-related themes in a number of ways. In 1967, Ra’s musical concept had moved from a more elusive space music to music of infinity, a conceptual change that incorporated variation and hybridization on many levels. The instrumentation included a blend of symphonic and non-Western instruments and included unconventional, self-constructed instruments like the fireplate and the sunharp. Ra had made every attempt to erase his factual origins, and developed a personality based on mysticism and paradox. As the reinvented artist, Sun Ra epitomized combined elements of cross-cultural borrowing, musical hybridization, and creative individualism that Conover admired most in those he considered great artists. Thereby, Ra embodied the democratic virtue that Conover advocated for throughout his career. Conover’s affinity for out-groups also reveals itself here, given that Sun Ra’s music was not, at the time, easily accepted in critical reviews in the United States.

Reviews of the Carnegie Hall concert emphasized the innovative aspects of the music, with evaluations both positive and negative. A review by John S. Wilson is dismissively Headlined: “Space Age Jazz Lacks Boosters: Cosmic Group Fails to Orbit with Rhythmic

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464 Dan Morgenstern, e-mail message to author, October 21, 2011.
Propulsion.” Other reviewers were more open to the adventurous sounds. J. C. Thomas notes the originality in the music and describes Ra’s performance as transcendental.

To some ears, at least, his music is strange. His space music, with its emphasis on extraterrestrial vibrations, seems more than music; spiritual, almost religious in feeling, as if something more than waves from a pulsar star, many light-years removed from us in the outermost boundaries of immeasurable space, is turning him into a cosmic consciousness.

Thomas acknowledges, also, the aural and visual diversity in Sun Ra’s Arkestra, describing the group’s dress as fulfilling “the wildest dreams of any Upper East Side boutique—fur hats, flowing robes, African print shirts, beads and bells.” Thomas describes the array of instruments, among them a “Chinese bamboo flute, a Japanese Koto, an African koru, Sun Harp, and a Chinese violin,” as “a veritable United Nations of sources.” The abundant mix of musical sources may have also appealed to Conover, who, as discussed in previous chapters, favored the definition of jazz as embodying global and ubiquitous qualities.

Szwed considers the position taken by Conover in regard to the dissemination of Ra’s music as unique. In *Space is the Place*, Szwed recounts the music of the Arkestra in the mid-1960s and discusses Conover’s connection with Ra. He writes that, “as soon as the ESPs were issued, Willis Conover…bravely began to play them nightly on his jazz show aimed at Europe, where an intensely loyal following began to develop. But while Ra was becoming a weapon in the Cold War, most Americans remained ignorant of him.” That Ra would be considered a Cold War weapon merits discussion. First, Ra’s philosophy would stand in disagreement with the VOA directive of promoting a “balanced and comprehensive projection of significant

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467 Ibid., 20.
468 Ibid.
469 *ESP Disk* was an avant-garde record label established in 1964 with the intention to provide to artists full artistic freedom.
470 John Szwed, *Space is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra* (New York: Pantheon, 1997), 217.
American thought." Secondly, the ‘myth-scientist’ inclination adopted by Sun Ra toward the end of the decade convinced him that “white historians manipulated the past to serve their own racist ends.” In this statement the opposition between VOA guidelines and Ra’s philosophy is apparent. However, it illustrates that Conover sought impartiality, and, more importantly, was inclined to leave much of Sun Ra’s philosophy out of the broadcasts.

Further evidence of Conover’s support of Ra exists in the form of radio scripts that accompany each of his albums of the 1960s. Of *The Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra, Vol. 1* (1965), Conover’s introduction reads: “Now, sounds for adventurous listeners; some listeners may find these sounds difficult to enjoy, or even to listen to. Tonight, the 1st of 2 programs by a leading in the avant-garde musical activities now engaging many jazz musicians: composer, conductor, pianist Sun Ra and his Solar Arkestra.” (see figure 6.6)

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471 See VOA Directives (cited earlier in this chapter).

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Figure 6.6. Conover’s broadcasting notes for Ra’s *Heliocentric Worlds* (1966)
Deemed by Gary Giddins as his first “national mark as a 50-something avant-garde visionary,” Heliocentric represented a turning point in the Arkestra’s development. Key to this development was the unique process of music making via Ra’s guided improvisation by his ensemble. Of Heliocentric, Marshall Allen recalls:

Sun Ra would go to the studio and he would play something, the bass would come in, and if he didn’t like it he’d stop it, and he’d give the drummer a particular rhythm. . . then he’d begin to try out the horns, we’re all standing there wondering what’s next. . . .A lot of things we’d be rehearsing and we did the wrong things and Sun Ra stopped the arrangement and changed it. Or he would change the person who was playing the particular solo, so that changes the arrangement. So the one that was soloing would get another part given to him personally. ‘Cos he knew people. He could understand what you could do better so he would fit that with what he would tell you.

Aside from describing the uniqueness of this process, this recollection suggests traditional bandleadership aspects as well. Ra’s interaction with his ensemble is similar to that of Ellington, who also composed according to individual strengths within his ensemble and created a highly personalized musical product. However, while the musical structure contained contrasts, motives, and patterns prescribed and conducted by Ra, the resulting sound was nontraditional as it redefined the common functions associated with the sections of the jazz ensemble. Conover’s introduction does not provide information about Ra’s philosophy or other information that would distract the listener from an objective listening experience. He describes the music simply as “adventurous,” which suggests a challenge to the listener to accept the music on its own terms.

In March 1968 the Arkestra performed at Carnegie Hall in New York. This concert was facilitated, promoted, emceed and narrated (in performance) by Conover, who sought to validate the event, and future events, in supporting letters. In a letter to Mary Lou Wolfgang, associate editor of Bravo in 1968, Conover endorses Ra’s upcoming event (see figure 6.7).

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475 Marshall Allen, quoted in Szwed, Space is the Place, 216.
Miss Mary Lou Wolfgang  
Bravo Magazine  
10 Columbus Circle  
New York, N. Y.

Dear Miss Wolfgang:

These are artists' bios for April 12 and 13.

As a reasonably solid citizen, I readily admit their veer from your norm; but I believe they are right for the event.

Sun Ra's own autobiographical notes could leave you gasping. The straight statistics (assuming their availability) would be too prosaic, diminishing the evening's impact -- an impact that depends upon atmosphere more than reality. In any case, hard statistics simply aren't available from Ra or anyone who knows him. I think my notes are an acceptable compromise and hope you will run them as they are.

Please contact George Schutz if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Willis Conover

Copy to Mr. Schutz
Figure 6.7. Letter to *Bravo* on behalf of Sun Ra (March 27, 1968)

This letter illustrates Conover’s non-biased manner of description. Conover explains that, despite the mystique, the *music* provides the answers. Heralded as an aural and visual experience, the
event was titled *The Space Music of Sun Ra and His Space ARKestra: A Freeform Excursion into the Far Reaches of Sound and Sight* (see figure 6.8). His notes illustrate a semantic compromise and reflect a straightforward and diplomatic approach to Ra’s characteristically perplexing themes, while still honoring his mystical and cryptic characteristics. Promotional documents noted the event’s diversity of sound and visual resources. The performance included “17 musicians, 60 instruments, 14 projectors, primitive dancers, space costumes and throat singing” (see figure 6.8). In addition, some compositions included spoken voice parts, performed by Willis Conover, also billed as consultant on the official program.

Figure 6.8. Promotional Flyer for Sun Ra’s Carnegie Hall Concert, March, 1968.
One of the works on this album, “The Bridge,” featured Conover in the role of poet/priest reciting the poem “The Fire and the Dry Weeds (1967).” The notable similarity between Ra’s poetry and Conover’s is that both styles included cosmic and otherworldly references and tended to emphasize the concept of alienation.

Conover used not only his voice, but also his notoriety in promoting the Carnegie Hall event, both in the US and abroad, through interviews, broadcasts, and written endorsements. Additionally, Conover’s then wife Shirley Carroll Conover joined her husband in the promotion of Sun Ra and the Arkestra. In a 1968 letter to Rhett Evers, a New York-based jazz broadcaster, she encouraged the airing of Sun Ra recordings on WFM and encouraged promotion of the Carnegie Hall concert by requesting that Evers run on-air advertisements. She also personally delivered to him Sun Ra’s new album that, at the time, was not yet released. Together, Conover and wife Shirley campaigned for Sun Ra in promoting his concert through press releases, radio spots, and encouraging the circulation of his music at radio stations in New York.

Conover’s “Guide to Broadcasting the Music of Sun Ra”

Included in the Willis Conover Collection are broadcasting guides consisting of brief notes (usually one to five pages) containing descriptions of individual tracks on a recent recording. These documents serve the programming process by providing descriptions that can be used repeatedly for the same recording over time. One, titled, “A Fresh Aire Christmas for Radio,” consists of durations for each track, a brief explanation of each, performing forces, stylistic details, and notes on the overall character of each. Descriptions are simplified and not

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477 Shirley Carroll (Conover), in a letter to Rhett Evers, WFM, April 4, 1968. Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
technically or musically complex. Therefore they would be understandable by a broadcaster without professional or specialized knowledge in music. Distributed by record companies, such guides complement many recordings in the collection. The purpose of the guides is to provide ease of playability on the part of the programmer, to encourage circulation of a particular recording, and thus, to promote the recording and increase listenership.

In the same fashion, Conover, in 1965, penned a “Guide to Broadcasting the Music of Sun Ra.” Developed as a guide for other programmers, it contains a description of each of Sun Ra’s album’s individual tracks, as well as information on durations, tempos, stylistic features, level of accessibility (degrees of New Thing in each track), band members and soloists, and other information considered helpful to other programmers. While it is not clear whether Conover published this guide or distributed it to other broadcasters, its existence illustrates several key points. First, the document attests to Conover’s interest in carefully describing the music as well as selecting specific works (in the context of a carefully-programmed broadcasting week). Also, this guide serves to further validate Ra’s music. The preface reads as follows:

This [guide] is intended as neither recommendation nor warning. Those listeners who are enthralled by Sun Ra’s music and those who are appalled by it will find this irrelevant and useless. In my own broadcasts... I have found it helpful to give some sort of characterization to individual pieces of his work, in order to select pieces from different records (rather than uncritically play any one record from beginning to end) and place them in some sequence that will afford contrast and development according to my programming scheme.

Intended as a guide for the uninitiated, this document serves as evidence of Conover’s inclination to integrate Ra’s music into a broadcasting schedule. This guide benefits Ra in that it encourages

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479 Willis Conover, A Guide to Broadcasting the Music of Sun Ra, ca. 1965, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
the circulation of his music on other radio stations. The guide effectively asserts the notion that this music can (and should) be situated within a jazz show. It is likely that Conover observed an inherent danger that such music faced: that it would be set apart from the rest of the current jazz canon. Conover’s guide encourages its playability by providing a synopsis of the music, highlighting key aspects of the music, and advancing the position that it should be played alongside mainstream jazz music as part of a jazz mix.

As a further didactic element, Conover provides the recommendation that broadcasters experience all of Ra’s music themselves and design broadcasts that showcase his musical development and achievements. His descriptions are not critical, emotional, or judgmental. In the following descriptions from the guide, Conover illustrates thorough knowledge of Ra’s discography, and describes his stylistic periods. In an explanation of *Interstellar Low Ways* and *We Travel the Spaceways* of 1966, Conover refers to them as period pieces, as they represent a merging of styles from both present and past. For example, Conover sets some tracks apart from the less conventionally sounding works by describing them as “conventional bop” or “blues.” Regarding these descriptions he writes, “These are useful in programs tracing the history and development of Sun Ra,” and that they “are mainly of historical interest, though the titles indicated above stand well on their own.”480 Here Conover recommends consideration of historical context, encouraging a broadcasting scheme with a historical arc similar to that of his *Music USA* show. This chronological view encourages a deeper, holistic understanding of Ra’s music and underscores its traditional, yet innovative, characteristics. Conover’s recommendation to broadcast Ra from a historical perspective further legitimizes his music by situating him in the jazz timeline alongside figures whose musical achievements also encompass discernable and often studied historical periods (i.e., Ellington, Miles Davis, and Coltrane).

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480 Ibid., 2.
The guide is intended to make Ra’s music playable for broadcasters who may not be able, or inclined, to grant a large portion of time to the music. Conover’s description of Ra’s 1965 album *In the Outer Heavens* caters to a broadcaster whose programming schedule may not be conducive to their airing. This section reads, “*In The Outer Heavens* is out-of-tempo, longish, with ‘new thing’ solos, possibly too cacophonic for casual broadcast.”\(^{481}\) This example shows that not every description is without opinion. His explanations, either here or in the newsletter, were intended to avoid social or political bias. However, they were not entirely free of musical opinion. Conover’s description of *In the Outer Heavens* as “possibly too cacophonic” exemplifies a showing of Conover’s hand. The use of the word “cacophonic,” in the context of a general description, suggests distaste. It should not be assumed, however, that Conover found this, or any other work by Ra, cacophonic. Rather, his description demonstrates Conover’s shorthand that is more conducive to a broadcaster whose schedule does not allow for lengthy explanations. He may have used the word for the purposes of expediting the process; to simplify for broadcasters whose musical tastes are unknown. It was not intended as a musical interpretation. Alternatively, Conover may have truly disliked this selection by Ra. He was, as previously discussed, not without musical opinion. It is important to note that such statements did not make their way into his broadcasts on the VOA.

Conover was also sensitive to the issue of time restrictions in broadcasting. In a pithy description of “Strange Strange” from the album *Strange Strings* (1966), Conover indicates that “it lasts 20 minutes 10 seconds; the title is not inappropriate.”\(^{482}\) Many of Conover’s points emphasize the lengthy durations of tracks, an inconvenience in terms of programming. He describes “The Magic City” (from the album of the same name), despite its non-radio-friendly

length of 27 minutes and 21 seconds, as “the most interesting Ra on record…. It should be used when length is of no consideration and the truest recorded approach to a live Sun Ra performance is wanted…. For all the apparent meandering, there is definitely form and development here.” Again, Conover’s shorthand provides a brief explanation of the music. From a broadcaster’s perspective, brevity is key. This document attests to Conover’s support for and legitimation of Ra’s music. He clearly wanted others to afford broadcast airtime to it. In composing a guide aimed specifically at other programmers, Conover bolsters the authenticity of the music by making it more accessible. The level of detail contained in the document shows Conover’s careful, moment-to-moment attention to each album. Ultimately, it illustrates Conover’s attention to details that could have been easily avoided in favor of more popular, accessible styles and genres.

Despite divided opinions regarding his legitimacy, Ra gained popularity with the help of other supporters thanks to Conover’s initial validation. The proposal to feature the Arkestra in two concerts at Carnegie Hall was initiated by promoter George F. Schutz, who had previously promoted overseas jazz musicians, as well as several classical ensembles. In a press release of March 1968, Schutz described the critical acclaim of the new music, and of Ra as a visionary and pioneer. It reads, “Sun Ra was the first jazz musician to go beyond bebop. When Ornette Coleman was working in a stock room in L.A., Sun Ra was exploring the possibilities of his ‘Astro Infinity’ and ‘Myth Science’ music.” Of his latent critical reception, Schutz states, “The critics’ neglect of Sun Ra is criminal in that they have restricted the spreading of his music for 20 years, and have hindered the large scale distribution of his records…. They have deprived many

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483 Ibid.
484 John Szwed, *Space is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra* (New York: Pantheon, 1997).
thousands of people of the music of one of the major creative figures of our age." Such support for Ra served to elevate his musical contributions to art music status.

Conover’s inclusion of Ra’s music in his *Music USA* broadcasts resulted in a loyal following of overseas listeners, thus preparing them for a State Department sponsored tour in August of 1970. Ra’s appearance at the Fondation Maeght, a modern art museum in France, signaled a level of acceptance from the overseas avant-garde world. Szwed notes that this performance, which was not part of the official State Department tour, nevertheless provided a level of legitimacy and art music status to Ra.

Given Sun Ra’s Afrocentric and exclusionist philosophies, his presence in the *Jazz Hour* broadcasts would seem anathema to the goals of the VOA. Ra’s spirituality did not imply sentiments of universal brotherhood. Moreover, Ra intentionally distanced himself from white sponsorship and common spiritual contexts. Monson notes that, for Sun Ra, the concept of spirituality signified blackness in the context of the black arts movement and functioned as a means to “draw a boundary around African American cultural space at a time when the cultivation of self-help and self-love was essential in creating a sense of black pride and autonomy.” Conover’s affiliation with Sun Ra and his support of his music would seem to oppose his efforts to maintain the tenets of a traditional jazz framework on *Music USA*.

However, I argue that Conover eventually determined Ra’s music worthy of canonization, in spite of his personal tastes. Ra’s music fulfilled Conover’s criteria as art music on par with his beloved Ellington.

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486 Ibid.
487 Szwed, *Space is the Place*, 279. Szwed writes, “The gig at the Fondation Maeght in Saint-Paul-de-Vence announced that Sun Ra had been accepted by the international avant-garde. The Maeght was one of the premier small museums in the world, and its sculpture gardens and halls had received Picasso, John Cage, and many of the world’s most influential artists since its opening in 1964.”
Conclusions

Into the late 1960s, Conover maintained the freedom principle, welcomed avant-gardists into the jazz canon, and inspired novice jazz artists overseas. Additionally, the didactic manner in which Conover distributed jazz entailed careful, verbal appraisal that served to bolster its sincerity and legitimacy in the minds of the listeners. The didactic function of the broadcasts enabled fans overseas to receive and understand the music differently than audiences in the United States.

Listeners with less exposure to jazz criticism in America show a greater level of appreciation of avant-garde jazz. While many of the avant-gardists I discuss (in light of their inclusion in Conover’s broadcasts) are understood today as generally accepted in the jazz timeline, including John Coltrane, Eric Dolphy, Ornette Coleman, Sun Ra, Albert Ayler, Archie Shepp, and Cecil Taylor, it was not necessarily so in light of jazz criticism at that time. Avant-gardists were continually in the crosshairs of critics throughout the 1960s. Through Music USA these artists and styles were comparatively well received overseas, as evidenced by Conover’s letters from listeners in the FOMUSA Newsletter.

Reflection on the avant-garde from friends ranges from firm support to patent rejection. However, most letters, regardless of their position in the debate, illustrate listeners’ thoughtful synthesis of the music. There are very few excerpts in the newsletter drawing attention to contextualization of the music with regard to sociopolitical factors, racism, or statements questioning the ability of the musicians. While the possibility remains that Conover may have chosen not to include such excerpts, his decision to keep these sentiments out of the newsletter (if this was the case) attests to his inclination to maintain an impartial stance. Many of the listeners who voice a dislike for avant-garde jazz, while attesting to their distaste for the music,
also express awareness of the importance of avant-garde as a logical stage in the development of jazz.\footnote{See Appendix J.}

In terms of distributing cultural diplomacy through jazz, the USIA encouraged a stylistically centrist view, and did not encourage the distribution of avant-garde recordings. Their selection of albums for distribution to \textit{friends} groups in the 1960s reflected this centrism. However, Conover aired avant-garde jazz and was a supporter of Sun Ra. By including avant-garde, Conover’s broadcasts continued to maintain the message of freedom in jazz. Ra’s music sustained the ideological connection between jazz and democracy, and was, for this reason, valued by the USIA. By presenting the avant-garde within a programming week that also included other styles in the jazz spectrum, Conover showed that avant-garde was integral to the jazz timeline and tradition.

Conover legitimized avant-garde as a respectable sub-genre, deeming it an extension of previous jazz precepts. He challenged his listeners to actively listen, and emphasized features in avant-garde works such as collective improvisation, evocation of non-Western techniques, and bandleadership (in the case of Sun Ra) to attach this music to the past.

Conover’s working life was one in which the achievement of popular success was constantly diverted by paradoxes: Conover introduced jazz to listeners whose countries banned or stifled its dissemination. He hosted jazz events and festivals, both overseas in America, and made decisions affecting the jazz canon, but he was not a musician in a traditional sense. He was deified by listeners in Poland and Russia, but remained largely unrecognized at home (due to the government ban on the reception of VOA broadcasts from American airwaves). His role as a \textit{jazz ambassador} contributed to his perpetual isolation in his own country. By contrast, his role as jazz instructor for his international audience was hugely significant. Through his broadcasting
persona he sought to keep music in the foreground, which allowed listeners the opportunity to interpret and engage with it on individual merits. His broadcasting process avoided the tendency for listeners to draw connections between jazz and social or political ideology. Rather, it encouraged listeners to interpret and learn from his broadcasts.

Conover advanced a perception of jazz, and avant-garde jazz in particular, that appealed to listeners as members of fan groups set apart from the majority of the population. The quality of exclusivity, in part, is what attracted listeners. This attraction compares, in its emphasis on individuality rather than universality, to science fiction fandom Conover cultivated in the decades prior to his affiliation with the VOA. The friends groups provided not only a foundation on which listeners could share a common goal, but also a sense of affirmation for its members. Inclusion in the groups provided a means of disseminating information about jazz across a wide, geographical spectrum, which is the function of fan groups. Additionally, it provided the additional benefit of education for its members. Thus, the Music USA broadcasts and the FOMUSA Newsletter were effective in empowering a small but deeply rooted subculture of fans as an alternative to the dominant culture.

The altruistic nature of Conover’s achievements is indisputable given that he was continually plagued by financial hardship. In a quality shared by H.P. Lovecraft and Duke Ellington, Conover was intent on projecting a sense of dignity and sophistication, often in the face of conditions contrary to such qualities. Despite opposition, Conover advanced the concept of jazz as art music. Conover sought to challenge his listeners, and task them to actively listen and engage with the music. He continually addressed the inherent challenges posed by jazz, particularly avant-garde jazz, and structured his shows within a two-part construct in which music was programmed based on the criteria of challenging vs. satisfying. Ultimately, Conover
was significantly forward thinking and prophetic in that he advanced the concept of jazz as a global art music. His affiliation with Sun Ra represents an aspect of his life kept out of the purview of his contemporaries. Moreover, examination of detailed evidence relating to this relationship provides deeper insight into Conover and his broadcasting process, leading to a broader understanding of him as a promoter of music.

Broadcast among other styles, the avant-garde selections in Conover’s *Music USA Jazz Hour* program were received more positively given that the broadcasts represented a historical mix. By intentionally avoiding a musical central point Conover’s broadcasts represented the universal effectiveness and potency of jazz: its diversity. Conover presented avant-garde as part of that diversity—one that resonated aptly with overseas musicians who sought to partake in the jazz experience.

The relationship between Conover and Sun Ra is a major factor in determining how the broadcasts took shape. Both Conover and his then wife Shirley were avid supporters of Ra’s Carnegie Hall concert in 1968. Considered a major breakthrough for Sun Ra and his Arkestra, the concert validated Sun Ra and encouraged listeners to recognize him as a serious practitioner of art music. Additionally, Conover’s association with Sun Ra has deeper implications, as both share a common fascination with personal alienation and, specifically, their interest in the infinite and the otherworldly.
Expressions of the avant-garde jazz movement in the mid-1960s coincided with many artists’ aspirations to articulate personal aims or spiritual transcendence in their music. Ingrid Monson discusses Sun Ra and John Coltrane as artists who emphasized spirituality in music rather than the modern, Western-conceived notion of avant-garde as a revolution. Monson argues that the stance adopted by Ra and Coltrane was rooted in their adoption of a persona in which an advanced consciousness endowed them with an ability to “help audiences more richly imagine their liberation.”490 Musical innovation became a manifestation of the artist’s search for resolution in a chaotic world. Musical texts associated with the new black music after 1964 reveal an interest in spiritual transcendence in the wake of cultural struggle.491 While controversial social events underpinned many avant-garde artists’ music, voiced almost exclusively through critical discourse, most avant-gardists did not personally express political opinions or directly attempt to engage with current events. What is apparent, though, is that many avant-gardists embraced the abstract idea of truth in their musical process and mediated it in a variety of ways. Among artists who sought order in chaos through the jazz language were John Coltrane, Archie Shepp, and Sun Ra. Conover was influenced by their search for truth and incorporated it into his broadcasts as a matter of course. This discussion brings to light previously undiscovered aspects of Conover’s character, his broadcasting procedure, and, ultimately, his role as jazz broadcaster overseas. While commercial success and financial reward

491 Amiri Baraka, Black Music (New York: Wm. Morrow, 1967), 199. “The content of The New Music, or New Black Music, is toward change. It is change. It wants to change forms. From physical to mental, or from physical-mental to spiritual.”
continued to elude him, Conover maintained conviction in his position because of a striving for personal aims. Coltrane, Shepp, and Ra were similarly motivated in their search for transcendence on an intrinsic level. Conover’s broadcasts exhibit features that illustrate creativity and musicianship. Examples of his editing procedure illustrate that his judicious manipulation of musical selections in his broadcasts were creative impulses that culminated in a musical result. Conover’s voice, through the medium of radio, possessed a musicality and heightened influence that contributed to his impact and credibility. Ultimately, I argue that Conover’s pursuits were fueled by a stylistic individualism and a spiritual search for order in chaos, and that his broadcasting persona was instrumental in his achievements and in maintaining his deified reputation.

Spirituality in the Avant-garde

Coltrane’s search for an elevated consciousness resulted in meditative, sacred works released in 1965 including A Love Supreme, Meditations, and Ascension. A Love Supreme was the direct result of a spiritual awakening in 1957 that coincided with Coltrane’s period of heroin detoxification. Coltrane intended these works as meditative, spiritual expressions of self, and defined them as “the spiritual expression of what I am—my faith, my knowledge my being...[an expression of] the divine in a musical language that transcends words.”492 Arranged as a four-part suite, the tracks comprising A Love Supreme, including “Acknowledgement,” “Resolution,” “Pursuance,” and “Psalm,” signify a representation of personal struggle and acknowledgement of a higher power. Stylistically, the music reflects ritualistic qualities in its incantatory, repetitive structure. The final movement consists of a “wordless recitation” in which Coltrane voices the

words to a sacred poem through the saxophone.\textsuperscript{493} This and other works by Coltrane in the mid-1960s illustrate a personal style reflective of this ethereal higher power, and the subjugation to a \textit{divine musical language}, rooted in Christianity.

As a self-appointed myth-scientist, Sun Ra constructed cosmic mythologies to correspond to his music, including themes of interplanetary travel and the positing of his own alien origin. As Sun Ra (rather than his given name, Herman Blount, Jr.) he embodied the persona of an eccentric seer and truth-teller, and deemed music his means of exploring the cosmos. His stance was one that intentionally set him apart from Americans or any social order. David Such compares Ra to a medieval court jester in that his self-appointed detachment from society makes him “immune to the values and norms that shape the perceptions of others.”\textsuperscript{494} Ra advocated for a spiritual connection to music as a means of overcoming personal and social barriers, as opposed to indulging in more common, human sources of satisfaction. He asserted that communication between human beings and the otherworldly was a means of arriving at spiritual peace, and of spiritual enlightenment through music. He states that:

\begin{quote}
Celestial beings can conceive of Earth beings and also directly communicate with other types of beings. Earth people... need to be enlightened on certain things. They’re just concerned with eatin’ and sleepin’ and sex and dope and politics and religion and philosophy... . Angels like their minds and spirits to take wings. They’re always movin’ forward... . The point is, dealin’ with things that does keep people alive and one of the things that keeps people alive is happiness and music is happiness.\textsuperscript{495}
\end{quote}

Ra, unlike Coltrane, deemed mainstream religions wasteful preoccupations. Ra’s philosophy represents, arguably, the furthermost stance in terms of enlightenment based in outward, spiritual striving. Enlightenment through music, according to Ra, involved arrival at mental and spiritual

\textsuperscript{494} David Such, \textit{Avant-garde Jazz Musicians Performing ‘Out There’} (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 118.
happiness to maintain healthy forward momentum. Earthly concerns, among them politics, religion, and philosophy, kept people from moving forward.

Archie Shepp, unlike many of his contemporaries, openly voiced his opposition to the dominant, white establishment, and protested against discriminatory racial and economic policies. His response manifested itself in Afrocentric themes in his works, in which he sought to voice his discontent with racial injustice, particularly in the jazz community. He especially objected to favoritism of white musicians whose appropriation of styles—and subsequent achievement of greater popularity—impeded the success of African American musicians who were, according to Shepp, truly innovative and more deserving of recognition. Of the white-dominated jazz industry, Shepp stated,

White folks make a lot of money playing black music. A nigger will never make a dime; if he makes a dime, he’s lucky. But that’s good, because this country is giving up less and less. I’m opposed to what I see, and I’ll go on record as being opposed to what I see being done to my people!496

Shepp, at the forefront of the politicization of avant-garde jazz, expressed these sentiments in *Fire Music* (1965). This album, which included a spoken elegy for Malcolm X, derived much inspiration from African music and ritual, in its synthesis of African rhythmic elements and improvisation. *Fire Music* and also *The Magic of Juju* (1967) represent Shepp’s fusion of African percussion music and saxophone improvisation in musical applications of Afrocentrism. Of the groundbreaking qualities of the work, Eric Porter cited it as “an aesthetic vision. . . that encompassed avant-garde elements, a repertory impulse, and a populist ethos.”497 Shepp’s expression of black identity differs greatly from the spiritualism and mysticism of Coltrane’s and Ra’s philosophies. Each placed greater emphasis, in the mid-1960s, upon transcendence through

music, either spiritually, through engagement with Afrocentrism, or elevation from an Earthly plane.

Coltrane, Ra, and Shepp gained iconic status as a result of their musical achievements during this time, as each artists’ motivating force manifested itself in their creative work in response to an injustice they sought to correct. These artists, in light of their engagement with transcendence through music, share a common aim with Conover, who sought order through his own creative process. He reflected on broadcasting as an achievement of deep, personal necessity; a process that enabled him to find belonging, and order in chaos. He stated,

> It may be an entirely different order from that which someone brought up on the other side of the world, or in an entirely different culture would find. But, we must find order in chaos. And I... never really found order for myself until... I began to edit a small magazine connected with science fiction... to give me a sense of form, that I could hold on to and feel a part of. A framework within which I could improvise, myself, was the radio program. And, it is essential to me to have a radio program. Because, without it I go back into chaos.498

Conover found illumination and a sense of responsibility in both science fiction editorship, and later, through the process of broadcasting. Both occupations provided a form within which Conover could improvise. The quotation above resembles the aforementioned artists’ strivings for transcendence through spirituality, mysticism, and Afrocentrism. All are illustrative of a musician’s creative process in performance, notably through improvisation and the manipulation of sound. Conover’s process of creation begins with the voice, an instrument that engendered a kind of mysticism and spiritual influence.

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498 Willis Conover, interview transcript: *Oral History: Interview with Willis Conover* by Gene Robinson at the Voice of America, March 27, 1974 for The University of Maryland and The National Association of Broadcasters / Broadcast Pioneers Library, Box 4, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
Conover, the Deified Voice

Recollections by Conover’s fans attest to the magnitude of idolization afforded him. While visiting the Soviet Union in 1982, Conover was greeted by a fan who took his hand, kissed it, and stated, “If there is a God of jazz, it is you.”\textsuperscript{499} It is frequently documented in accounts of Conover’s career that, while visiting countries behind the Iron Curtain, Conover was more recognized and applauded than any other American.\textsuperscript{500} The level of celebrity and adoration he accrued demonstrates his reputation as a spiritual leader that inspired millions of disciples.

This god-like status may have originated with the quality of his voice. Conover implemented a meticulous vocal delivery style to counter the continually problematic conditions inherent in short wave radio. The most challenging problem in overseas shortwave transmission was \textit{jamming}, the intentional prevention of transmission by superimposing static, or noise, on another station, which matches or approximates the same frequency. The Voice of America (VOA) continually countered jamming by transmitting on multiple frequencies, each possessing varying signal strength.\textsuperscript{501} The problems of intelligibility demanded a regimentation that maximized vocal clarity. Regarding the need for linguistic precision, Kristen Haring describes the necessity of vocal clarity for adequate intelligibility on shortwave radio broadcasting. The resulting standardized vocal style, Haring states, possessed informal and characteristically nonhuman qualities, as “an attempt to strip away the individuality of human speech and replace it with a mechanical uniformity.”\textsuperscript{502} This quality describes Conover’s intentionally uncomplicated vocal delivery, first proposed as a practical device that would enable intelligibility and transmit

information in the clearest possible way. Described by Fred Bouchard as a “sonorous, serious, meticulous basso,” Conover’s VOA voice, stripped of characteristically individual qualities, was a practical and effective means of providing an unbiased, objective stance.

Moreover, this impersonal, mechanical vocal style enabled a persuasive quality. VOA listeners frequently took note of the specific qualities of his voice. Joseph Brodsky, who grew up in the Soviet Union, describes Conover’s voice with poignant nostalgia, as “the richest-in-the-world bass baritone.” However, a noteworthy consequence of his vocal delivery was that the allure of Conover’s voice served to contradict the original intention of the broadcasts to let the “music speak for itself.” As discussed in previous chapters, the spoken commentary was minimal, serving mainly to provide essential information such as titles and artist names. However, while not always intelligible to the non-English speaker, the voice held the listeners in rapt attention, and often came across as musical. Polish bassist Roman Dylag recalls, The sound of his voice was already like music and certainly it had an impact on the listeners. . . Without Willis Conover and his Jazz Hour it would be impossible for us to follow the development in jazz and try to assume it on our level. Dylag’s recollection attests to the musicality attributed to Conover’s voice. Additionally, it confirms the instructional aspect of the broadcasts as essential to the listeners’ jazz education. Moreover, the listener recalls the experience not only as an educational one, but also as a meaningful ritual. Dylag recalls that, despite the fading memories, the emotional significance remains.

More than 50 years that has passed and what is left that’s just a certain mood, atmosphere, a reminiscence of a feeling like taking a part in a religious ritual just sitting

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505 Roman Dylag, e-mail message to author, March 12, 2012.
in front of a little, simple, Polish radio receiver and being introduced of Willis’s melodic voice into world of wonders and miracles.\textsuperscript{506}

Memories such as these attest to the power of the voice in energizing and enlightening a wide spectrum of listeners.

Since the mid-1930s the radio voice has had profound political and spiritual impact. Marc Fisher discusses Franklin Roosevelt’s fireside chats as one of the first instances in which a distant voice connected intimately with listeners’ imaginations to great success. The medium of radio offered a pure and more direct form of communication, one whose separation from the visual element served to great advantage. According to Fisher, the success of radio messages was due to the absence of physical details, which would have distracted the listener and hindered the potency of the message. He writes,

\begin{quote}
When citizens visited their president’s home each week for his fireside chats, they had little concrete sense that Roosevelt’s hands shook as he stood before crowds, or that braces held him up on legs crippled by polio. On the air, there were no tremors: Roosevelt’s voice was clear and strong, and he used radio as an instrument of power.\textsuperscript{507}
\end{quote}

Deprived of the visual element, listeners formed their own image of Roosevelt and assigned a greater level of credibility to his messages. Roosevelt’s enhanced radio persona, Fisher cites, was instrumental in his success. Similarly, Conover’s voice played a key part in the overall success of his broadcasts. It granted him an elevated status and bolstered listeners’ assurance of him as a consistent and dependable source.

In the persona of a radio speaker, Conover addressed his audience differently than he did in person or when speaking to a crowd. Moreover, he possessed a range of radio voices, each specifically tempered according to the requirements of the venue. In addressing an overseas audience, consisting mostly of non-English-speaking listeners, regulation of the voice was a

\textsuperscript{506} Ibid.
practical necessity, essential in maximizing clarity. The technique included slower speech, concise diction, the use of active-voice sentence structure, and the avoidance of idiomatic expressions. While it is unclear whether Conover was first to practice this technique, it has become customary in overseas broadcasts through the VOA ever since the late 1950s. Listeners copied Conover’s voice as they claimed to have learned the English language from his broadcasts. News reports as early as 1959 note that listeners copied his slow, deliberate, rounded manner of speaking. John S. Wilson writes that travelers abroad report that “the Willis Conover accent can be encountered in all parts of the world.”

Other responsibilities in which his voice played a key role include hosting and announcing at jazz festivals, conducting interviews, and speaking at a symposium or committee meeting. As master of ceremonies, Conover’s voice took on vastly different characteristics than in his radio persona. In an introduction for the Barney Wilen Quartet at the Newport Jazz Festival in 1959, Conover announces the band members in a conversational, informal manner.

Barney Wilen … will be accompanied today by … the swinging Roy Haynes at the drums. Roy. (applause) Tom Bryant, who I’m … happy to see back again, on bass. Tom Bryant. (applause) At the piano, having completed her course at the Berklee School of Music, and, therefore, shortly to return to Japan, Toshiko Akiyoshi. (applause) And on tenor saxophone, in his first American appearance, … that is, playing music, Barney Wilen (applause).

Note the relaxed, informal style Conover uses to relate information. Each player is given a short, genial introduction followed by applause. The comments are innocuous, somewhat vague, and suited for a general audience. No attention is given to specific characteristics of the music or artist. Nor are the introductions exclusively informational. Conover asserts his individual opinion by addressing the drummer as “the swinging” Roy Haynes and by introducing Tom Bryant,

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508 John S. Wilson, “Who is Conover? Only We Ask,” The New York Times Magazine, September 13, 1959. Wilson adds that this radio voice is “a carefully calculated device designed to cut through the vicissitudes of short-wave transmission and to help the listener whose knowledge of English is limited.”

509 Barney Wilen, Barney Wilen Quartet: Newport ’59, Fresh Sound R-167645, 1959, compact disc.
whom he is “happy to see back again.” In terms of tempo, Conover’s spoken words progress at a pace characteristic of the venue. Conover speaks somewhat quickly with intermittent pauses (indicated in the quotation above with …) showing that his comments are not only extemporized and unrehearsed, but also intentionally hurried for the sake of advancing the overall pace of the festival. His manner of delivery indicates an unrehearsed, off-the-cuff, and, ultimately, entertaining style of speaking to accommodate the casual nature of the festival audience. In radio, Conover spoke differently as programmer of the *Music USA Jazz Hour* and the *House of Sounds*, two separate shows in which he exhibited further vocal and stylistic ranges.

From 1948 to 1954 Conover was music programmer for *House of Sounds*, a nightly, US-based radio program. Broadcast on WEAM in Washington, D.C. until the mid-1950s, HOS was a jazz program for a domestic, English-speaking audience. Conover’s spoken comments for this program were, as in his emcee persona, informal and conversational. Conover’s tongue-in-cheek, even flirtatious manner comes across in the following quotation, used to end a broadcast:

“[dance music in background] Well, may I have the pleasure of the next waltz? Wha…Oh!, You’re right. Time is up. Well, we’ll have to foxtrot for a few seconds. Anyway, come back to the *House of Sounds* again tomorrow. Same time. Please.”510 The cadence and tempo of his voice complements the informal, conversational banter reminiscent of other jazz deejays of this period. Intended for a domestic audience, the *House of Sounds* contained music selections comparable to the *Music USA – Part A, Popular Music* show. As many of the programming choices in the early 1950s began to escape Conover’s control, he eventually left it to concentrate his efforts on the *Music USA Jazz Hour*.511 His departure was due also to his conflicting opinions with station managers who, against Conover’s judgment, began encouraging the circulation of pop music and

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511 Willis Conover, document titled “House of Sounds,” Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
of the emerging rock genre. Dismissing rock music as a trite appropriation of African American jazz and rhythm and blues, he maintained the opinion that most rock-and-roll was not quality music. Conover valued his autonomy in broadcasting, and determined that the VOA was the venue in which he would achieve this independence.

Incidentally, the title *House of Sounds* corresponds to a short story by Matthew Phipps Shiel (1865-1947), British horror/fiction writer of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century. Shiel was admired by H.P. Lovecraft, a spirited collector of his work. Often cited as his most significant and widely appreciated short story, *The House of Sounds* takes place in a cold, isolated space, wherein the lone protagonist is summoned to investigate a blood-curse of a doomed family. While its connection to Conover’s *House of Sounds* is speculative, it is nonetheless likely that Conover knew Shiel’s work intimately, through his experiences with and immersion in editorship of weird tales and horror fiction. This connection reveals another intersection between Conover’s two fandom sources.

Recorded examples of other vocal personas include his address to the Duke Ellington Society, wherein Conover argues on behalf of Ellington after his death and advocates for the circulation of his music in radio stations. Conover cites Ellington as an artist worthy of canonization and attempts to convince other programmers to incorporate Ellington into their broadcasts as classical music of the twentieth century. At this event, Conover’s vocal style illustrates his passionate, zealous side—unheard of in any other context. Here Conover fiercely advocates for the promotion of Ellington’s music and asserts that radio broadcasters and music societies should educate America on the importance of jazz.

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If the society could call in the station managers, the program managers, the time salesman and others from every damn radio station in this area and tell them there’ll be a half hour in which they can talk business with each other…but then they’re going to hear something they have not heard before; and we’ll expect their attention for an hour and have your program selected to demonstrate … to educate these people unto the fact that not just this country but this city created a man whose music is regarded as classical music in every other country in the world except this!  

This quote illustrates Conover’s demonstrative and passionate qualities. The tempo of the vocal performance varies from the previous informal and conversational examples as he relates his passionate and enthusiastic support. The recording reveals an emphatic, audible, fist-on-the-podium thump—coinciding with the last word of his statement (this!), underscoring the magnitude of his conviction. The tenor of his speech in this context is like a politician or activist—boldly assertive and enthusiastically dynamic.

Conversely, Conover’s vocal style on the *Music USA Jazz Hour* is characterized by carefully chosen and consistently delivered dialogue. His comments are informational, economical, straightforward, and make no attempt at humor or idiomatic reference. His vocal style is markedly slow, containing short pauses between words. Additionally, sentence structure is simplified. These vocal characteristics align with the tenets of Special English, a VOA initiative in 1959, but employed by Conover from the first broadcasts in 1955. Special English is described on the VOA website in its characteristic, simplified, active-voice style. It reads:

On October 19, 1959, the Voice of America broadcast the first Special English program. It was an experiment. The goal was to communicate by radio in clear and simple English with people whose native language was not English. Special English programs quickly became some of the most popular on VOA. They still are. Special English continues to communicate with people who are not fluent in English. Over the years, its role has expanded. It helps people learn American English while they learn about American life and stay informed about world news and developments in science. It provides listeners with information they cannot find elsewhere.

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514 Willis Conover, Unknown recording, compact disc, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
The site lists three characteristics of VOA Special English broadcasts, including,

1. A core vocabulary of 1500 words. Most are simple words that describe objects, actions or emotions.

2. [The use of] short, simple sentences that contain only one idea. They use active voice. They do not use idioms.

3. [They] read at a slower pace, about two-thirds the speed of Standard English. This helps people learning English hear each word clearly. It also helps people who are fluent English speakers understand complex subjects.516

These qualities describe Conover’s vocal persona throughout his broadcasts with the VOA. In a broadcast from 1967, Conover introduces the show and the first selection with similar straightforwardness and simplicity.


Throughout the broadcast (consisting entirely of selections from McLean’s *Old and New Gospel*), Conover maintains a slow, carefully chosen, rhythmically consistent, non-idiomatic vocal style. Furthermore, he makes no mention of stylistic details that would influence reception of the music itself. The album embodies avant-garde characteristics that would likely surprise the average listener. According to Lee Jeske, Old and New Gospel remains one of McLean’s more adventurous, avant-garde works. Leske writes, “McLean has a raw, urgent style that is grounded in bop but also greatly affected by free jazz.”518 Furthermore, New and Old Gospel has received criticism regarding the inadequacy of the performance. Scott Yanow writes,

This set should have been a classic, but it has one fatal flaw. The only recorded meeting between Jackie McLean and Ornette Coleman features Coleman exclusively on trumpet,

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516 Ibid.
517 Willis Conover, *Music USA Jazz Hour* broadcast #4894-B (1968), Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
[who] had been playing trumpet for only three years at the time, [and who is] much weaker on that instrument than on alto and is simply no match for McLean, [who,] (one of the few hard bop veterans to embrace Coleman’s innovations) was in the middle of a peak period.\textsuperscript{519}

This quotation illustrates Conover’s straightforward and informational style. The tenor is genial, but not jokey or verbose. It is free of idiomatic references and is presented with vocal clarity and consistency. His VOA persona, characteristically different from his other personas, also engendered an instructional quality. As a freelance programmer, Conover invented and utilized a programming method that reflected a personal, creative vision in his selections, and not in his personal descriptions of them.

Conover as Creator and Improviser

Conover was ruthless in advancing his creative vision and direction for the \textit{Music USA} broadcasts, and persisted in keeping them free of commercialism. His recollections attest to his perseverance and his struggle with administrative interference in defending his programming choices. In a 1974 interview, Conover recalls the safekeeping of his vision as a continuous necessity,

On the average of once a week I was called to attention before the station manager to explain why I was playing the music I was playing. And, I would explain it. And, he said, ‘why don’t you play that stuff at home, and broadcast things that people can hum or whistle or sing?’, and I said, ‘I’ll whistle you a chorus of \textit{Ornithology} if you will whistle me \textit{Begin the Beguine} from beginning to end.’…. [For] a commercial radio station, the first word is about ninety percent of the operation – and I simply could not give in to it.\textsuperscript{520}

His refusal to cater to commercial or administrative demands remained with him throughout his


\textsuperscript{520} Willis Conover, in an interview transcript: \textit{Oral History: Interview with Willis Conover} by Gene Robinson at the Voice of America, March 27, 1974 for The University of Maryland and The National Association of Broadcasters / Broadcast Pioneers Library, Box 4, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
broadcasting career and solidified his willful and often stubborn reputation. As discussed in chapter 3, Conover’s tenacity manifested itself in his positions as jazz critic in the United States, and in his appointments with the NEA and the Kennedy Center, prompting criticism from his colleagues. However, this sense of determination was a formative principle for the broadcasts, which, I argue, served an educational purpose. Conover was afforded freedom to choose his own music selections and, thus, showcase his own understanding of the jazz canon conveyed through a programming method that, as I illustrate in the following paragraphs, a creative product.

Musicality in Conover’s Programming

_Music USA_ programs were designed as carefully prepared, didactically arranged segments. Conover illustrates the importance of his prescriptive process in the following quotation in which he cites two possible options in broadcasting: selecting music from an outline supplied by an outside source (such as a “Top 40” chart), or selecting music based on one’s own judgment. Conover states, “The first way is the easier way: the programming has already been done for you. The second way is harder, but far more satisfying—to you and, quite likely, to your listeners. And only the second way is true programming.”521 Providing further nuance to the process of “the second way,” Conover describes the importance of impartial selection. He states,

> If you may indeed do your own programming, remember that the music you might prefer hearing may not be the music you should program. While you will feel, I hope, that the music you do select is genuine and honest, you must consider your listeners: what do they want to hear? I don’t mean let your listeners determine what you play. . . . I mean keep in mind what your listeners are accustomed to hearing you play and what will continue to please them—but also, and most important, what will please smaller groups of your listeners who, from time to time, will want you to include some music that the majority of your listeners may not enjoy.”522

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522 Ibid.
Conover emphasizes the importance of providing attention to an outlying demographic that, despite their minority status, constitutes the most important group. Despite the fact that the “majority of listeners may not enjoy” a given selection, it is of primary importance to please the smaller group of listeners. This statement supports the argument that Conover favored out-groups by playing to smaller groups rather than satisfying the audience as a whole.

Conover was quick to describe his programming process as one that was highly personal, and different from that of an ordinary radio programmer or deejay. Rather than catering to the demands of a crowd, he designed each broadcast with specific, musical traits. He described programs as comprised of musical qualities, including theme, mode, sound resources (materials or other available assets), texture, contour, contrast, dynamism, transition, and climax. He states,

> Once you’ve determined the nature of a given program, its *texture* and flavor, start pulling records—many more records than you’ll end up needing. When you’ve pulled enough of the appropriate records to choose from, decide which record is to be the program’s *climactic* number; then choose whichever records seem to lead most logically to the climactic one . . . as a poet writing a sonnet may first write the last two lines and then seek twelve more lines to precede them. Along the way, you might insert a record or two that are merely *transitions*, to provide a sort of valley, here and there that will make your peaks taller by *contrast*. Having conducted the whole program in your head and in your heart beforehand, you’ll find that doing the program in the studio is (relatively) easy.523

Described in these terms, Conover’s broadcasting process befits a musical one. Additionally, he likened his method to a creative process of poetry. He equated his method to the composition of a sonnet—working backward from the penultimate and ultimate lines to complete the work in reverse. Conover concludes by emphasizing the importance of envisioning a program holistically, prior to its formulation, considering all the formative elements as a creative whole. This description compares to that of an artist who envisions a creative work prior to its conception.

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523 Ibid., 3-4. The quotation includes musical elements emphasized (by me) in italics.
The following analysis of *Music USA Jazz Hour* Recording Schedules illustrates Conover’s creative process as well as the didactic intent of the broadcasts. This analysis addresses the timeframe of January 1962 through December 1969 as a basis for comparison of trends and anomalies involving Conover’s programming process. Regarding broadcast weeks, recurring patterns demonstrate instructional intentions. Through analysis of shows in the 1962-69 timeframe I have observed that weeks generally fall under either of four categories:

1.) A jazz mix: Typically on Monday, several selections (5-10), marked as *New*, indicating recently released selections not previously aired on *Music USA*.

2.) Entire albums broadcast on subsequent days featuring one of the artists/groups from the earlier jazz mix. The entire show is dedicated to this artist/group. With this format, Conover builds on previous material, reinforcing concepts and providing further depth to selections already introduced.

3.) The entire week’s broadcasts incorporate a diversity of styles and artists that represent Conover’s 20/60/20 formula of “unbiased” programming.

4.) No single style/subgenre/artist is given prominence over the course of a given week, with the exception of tribute shows, interviews, and jazz festival re-broadcasts (see below). Tribute shows, featuring artists or groups in a series of shows, constitute a small portion of the *Music USA Jazz Hour* shows.

Shows that deviate from these four general rules include broadcasts featuring jazz festivals. These include the Newport Jazz Festivals of 1962-68, Warsaw, Monterey, Vienna, Bled, Prague, Inter-collegiate, New Orleans, and Tallin. When broadcast, these shows constitute between 10 and 20 shows and are broadcast consecutively, over the course of 2-3 weeks. These broadcasts represent an exception to the four general rules enumerated above. Another exception occurred when Conover featured a single artist in a weekly series, over the course of several weeks. The Recording Schedule of 1962 shows Conover’s programming of “Duke Ellington night,” broadcast each Saturday for fifteen weeks. The shows, arranged chronologically, consist of a sequential showcase honoring Ellington’s music. This structure is didactic in that it provided, in the context of a broadcast week, a framework within which listeners could anticipate the next
lesson. The broadcasts were numbered (1-15) and included the following (transcribed from the Music USA Recording Schedule):


This format constituted a curriculum by allowing the listener to follow the developmental periods of Ellington.

The majority of the shows constituted other curricular patterns in which each show’s content would alternate between a diverse, but purposefully calculated ‘mix’ of selections and a show dedicated to one specific artist, group, or album. Figures 7.1 and 7.2 illustrate two programming weeks that represent Conover’s mediation of two genres: bebop and New Thing in 1965:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Record#</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>3903 B</td>
<td>New: Woody Herman: <em>My Kind of Broadway</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>3904 B</td>
<td>Rod Levitt “Insight”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>3905 B</td>
<td>“Be-bop” RCA Victor, mid-1940s: Diz, Bird, Miles, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>3906 B</td>
<td>Roland Kirk “I Talk to the Spirits”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>3907 B</td>
<td>Mix (“New Thing”) Moncur, Anthony Wms, And. Hill, Hutcherson, Shepp, Rudd, Cecil T., J. Lyons, Dolphy, Coltrane</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7.1. Broadcast week demonstrating instructional aspects

Conover intended to introduce the bebop era in Wednesday’s show, highlighting the fundamental bebop practitioners of the 1940s: “Diz, Bird, Miles, etc.” Thursday’s show features a 1964 Roland
Kirk album representing a continuation of the bop tradition by a contemporary artist decades later. Conover placed Kirk’s *I Talk to the Spirits* between Wednesday’s “Be-bop” show and Friday’s “New Thing” mix. Scholars have identified *I Talk to the Spirits* as a work that bridges the stylistic gap between genres. Paul Berliner describes Roland Kirk as an artist who, in this period, commonly combined different idioms and styles in experimentation. According to Gary Giddins, Kirk applied bebop practices combined with avant-garde styles but “rejected the total immersion in protracted improvisation preached in Ornette Coleman’s *Free Jazz.*” Kirk’s quiet, introspective and intimate, all-flute album constituted an appropriate link from the bebop classics to the New Thing artists the following day. Closing out the week on Friday is a mix of New Thing (tracks unknown), featuring prominent New Thing artists, Grachan Moncur III, Tony Williams, Andrew Hill, Bobby Hutcherson, Archie Shepp, Roswell Rudd, Cecil Taylor, Jimmy Lyons, Eric Dolphy, and John Coltrane. This broadcast week illustrates Conover’s implementation of a stylistic transition from one style era to the next.

The next week continues in the style of bebop, but features “new” bebop artists of 1965 on Monday. The following show introduces Shepp’s *Fire Music*, a recording stylistically emblematic of New Thing. Note that the listeners were acclimated to Shepp’s music both in Friday’s show (3907 B) and Monday’s show (3910 B), which immediately preceded the broadcast of *Fire Music* the following Tuesday. After *Fire Music*, the style returns to bebop, as Wednesday’s show features Sonny Stitt’s interpretations of Charlie Parker. The remainder of the week features *Shelly Manne & Friends* and Kenny Dorham’s *Trompeta Toccata*, continuing in the bebop vein.

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>3911 B</td>
<td>Archie Shepp “Fire Music”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>3912 B</td>
<td>Stitt plays Bird</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>3913 B</td>
<td>Shelly Manne: Eddie Heywood, J. Hodges, Byas, Nance, Bigard, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>3914 B</td>
<td>Kenny Dorham “Trompeta Toccata”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7.2. Broadcast week demonstrating integration of avant-garde music

These broadcast weeks illustrate a Conover’s intent of illustrating the manifestation of bop roots in avant-garde jazz. The weeks contain mainly bop or bop-inspired works and artists, with avant-garde works inserted, strategically, to illustrate their inclusion in the jazz timeline.

Composition Through Editing

Conover’s own recollections substantiate the argument that he intended to create musical events in the form of broadcasts. The following is an excerpt from an interview from 1989 in which Conover illustrates his musical intentions:

Interviewer: I remember vividly when a news-oriented official proposed that you change the Music USA format completely – which in my view would have destroyed the program and its effectiveness.

Conover: It was proposed by someone in the upper level of VOA the Music USA be a talk program about music rather than a music program. I have felt that Music USA is a composition, a composed program, on a different scale from the composition of a symphony…having done some composing, there still is something like composition in the construction of a program. But within that program, or within a series of programs, I sometimes feel that the music should be constructed in a certain sequence, with a theme with variations and a climax and possibly a post-climax, like the movements of a symphony or a suite, with just enough commentary – or just remarks – to identify the performers and what they played, what they performed, who wrote it, that kind of thing, when it was done. At other times, to talk about some aspect of the music, and select the music to illustrate what I’m talking about. So certainly there are different ways to approach it, and I try to incorporate different ways of constructing the program: talk, with
music to illustrate the points in the talk, or music, with talk to identify the elements of the
music.526

He states that, like movements of a symphony, his shows represent individual creative entities in
which musical moments are created. Also, he describes the shows as instructional by describing
them as either “talk, with music,” or “music, with talk,” to illustrate points or identify elements
of music. By constructing music in a sequence, arranged as a ‘theme with variations and a
climax’ Conover was creating and fulfilling an artistic vision.

The recordings in the Willis Conover Collection, including compact discs and LP
records, contain supplemental information either hand-written directly on the item or noted
separately and inserted in the jacket. These recordings show Conover’s hand-written remarks,
timings, textual editing, and other indications as evidence for his meticulous programming
process. Examination of marginalia in avant-garde jazz recordings serve not only to illustrate his
process and reveal trends in his choices, but also reveal evidence about Conover’s evolving
understanding of the music of the 1960s. Moreover, his broadcasts share characteristics with
avant-garde jazz of the 1960s, as they constitute expressive works.

In Sun Ra’s My Brother the Wind, Vol. 2, handwritten notes accompany all tracks, which
include the following shorthand notes:

1. Tempo indications (S, M, or F to indicate slow, medium, or fast); combinations of these
   indicate gradations of tempo (MF = medium fast)

2. Timings: total time, track length (if not present on the item)

3. Notes on performing forces (Example: track 2: mix – vocal / June Tyson) (see figure 6.3)

Other noteworthy details include underlined sections of the text that highlight sections intended
to be spoken in an introduction. This information commonly includes recording dates,

526 Willis Conover, document titled “Interview 8/8/89” 15, Box 97, Willis Conover Collection, University
of North Texas Music Library.
information on soloists, and historical information (such as Sun Ra’s date of death—presumably for the purpose of on-air acknowledgement of this in 1993). Conover draws a line between tracks 6 and 7, separating tracks featuring the Arkestra and tracks of Sun Ra alone. Tracks 7-11 (see figure 7.3) are labeled ad lib mix, or mix, indicating an extemporized, free-form solo by Sun Ra on Moog synthesizer, with the notable exception of track 9, “Journey to the Stars,” in which a discernible pulse exists. Conover labels this track MF/MS, a shorthand indication of tempo meaning medium fast/medium slow. It is open to speculation whether or not Conover intended to divide the tracks based on their suitability for broadcast. The Music USA Recording Schedule indicates the album title only, and does not list the individual tracks broadcast on that day.

Conover’s drawn line between tracks 6 and 7 is significant, however, in that it delineates two aspects of Sun Ra’s musical aesthetic: his “New Thing” solos, and his ensemble arrangements for his Arkestra. Delineation of these two components of Sun Ra’s musical output provided Conover the opportunity not only to introduce the music clearly and promptly, but also to allow for a curricular focus, here, and in future broadcasts. By demarcating the tracks according to musical texture, style, and ensemble forces, Conover could quickly reference given tracks to illustrate musical concepts in other shows.

Such information in Conover’s marginalia reveals that Conover endeavored to be stylistically impartial. Considering his colleagues’ charge that he was not a supporter of the avant-garde, it would be tempting to assert that Conover would have ignored the tracks featuring the rhythmically and melodically far-reaching solos by Sun Ra. However, what this data shows is that he afforded genuine consideration to each track by providing each with measures of shorthand summary.
He used this classification style and shorthand in nearly all his recordings, not only avant-garde albums. All artists and styles were subjected to similar criteria and standards. In *Artie Shaw and his Orchestra ‘1949’*, the liner notes contain handwritten additions similar to that in Ra’s *My Brother the Wind, Vol 2*. Comparable levels of detail include the addition of track lengths and tempo indications, and the underlining of noteworthy information and soloists. Close inspection reveals that a higher level of detail is present in his notes on the Sun Ra recording. (see figure 6.3) The Shaw recording features mainly tempo indications (M-MF, MS, MFF, etc.) and underlined titles. In the Ra recording, greater emphasis is placed on analysis of each track according to instrumentation, style, and type of improvisation, in addition to artist names and recording dates.
Figure 7.4. Liner notes from Artie Shaw and his Orchestra ‘1949’ MusicMasters (1990).

Noteworthy changes include a track-for-track renumbering (see figure 6.4: lower right), a common feature in his handwritten additions to liner notes.\textsuperscript{527} Others include underlined excerpts of the text intended for emphasis in Conover’s spoken introductions. In comparing the two examples, it is evident that Conover afforded similar amounts of handwritten detail to both recordings.

\textit{Impulse! Story}, a compilation recording of artists from the Impulse! label\textsuperscript{528} from 1960 to 1975, features marginalia including tempo and style indications, and a track-for-track renumbering (see figure 7.5).

\textsuperscript{527} Conover frequently included a track-for-track renumbering of musical selections, suggesting that he seldom favored the option of broadcasting selections according to album order.

\textsuperscript{528} \textit{Impulse! Story}, compact disc, GRP 88752 (Italy, Musica Jazz, 1995). Impulse! was a record label that produced mainstream and avant-garde recordings, and was notable for providing an outlet for New Thing artists in the mid-1960s including John Coltrane, Charles Mingus, Albert Ayler, Pharoah Sanders, and Archie Shepp. See Ashley Kahn, \textit{The House that Trane Built: The Story of Impulse! Records}, 2006.
Figure 7.5. Liner notes from *Impulse! Story* (1995).

For the *Music USA Jazz Hour*, Conover followed his own track renumbering in a broadcast on May 27, 1995, as evidenced from the *Music USA Recording Schedule* of 1995 (see figure 7.6).

Figure 7.6. Excerpt: *Music USA Recording Schedule*, May 27, 1995, Show No. 14,758B.

Logic dictates that it would have been simpler and quicker to follow the track order of the album, given that it already presented a chronologically arranged series of various jazz artists. However, Conover chose a different—nearly opposite—order. This choice informs Conover’s meticulous process of structuring each broadcast, even in circumstances in which the recording consisted of a predetermined mix of musical selections. Conover’s note in the upper right corner of the CD insert indicates his initial plan for broadcast. It reads: “Music USA (?) 14,758B = 11, 10, 5, 3, 2, 1, (4)” (see figure 7.5). Examination of the *Music USA Recording Schedule* from show number
14,758B reveals that it was broadcast on Saturday, May 27, 1995, and broadcast in an order corresponding to his handwritten plan.

The original track order of the recording is arranged chronologically, beginning with J.J. Johnson and Kai Winding’s *I Concentrate on You*, recorded in November 1960, and ending with Keith Jarrett’s *Southern Smiles*, recorded in November 1975. Conover’s order favors a stylistic arc rather than a chronological one. The following chart shows Conover’s order, including corresponding tempo, track length, style, and Conover’s notes for each track:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Track</th>
<th>Performer</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Style/Notes</th>
<th>Conover’s Shorthand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td><em>Southern Smiles</em></td>
<td>Jarrett</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>♩=190</td>
<td>7’42”</td>
<td>Mixed-meter, straight; Gospel-like</td>
<td>mix/M-MF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><em>Nunca Mas</em></td>
<td>Barbieri</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>♩=112</td>
<td>5’27”</td>
<td>Medium Tango</td>
<td>F / ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>Me and Some Drums</em></td>
<td>Manne</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>♩=104</td>
<td>6’03”</td>
<td>Piano/sax and drums duet</td>
<td>[ mix / F / (&gt;) ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>s/ms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><em>Mendacity</em></td>
<td>Roach</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>♩=50</td>
<td>8’56”</td>
<td>Vocal bop ballad, swing, ’out/free-form’ solos; political message in lyrics;</td>
<td>mix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>lengthy drum solo</td>
<td>s/ms (s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>Sunken Treasure</em></td>
<td>G. Evans</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>♩=48</td>
<td>4’19”</td>
<td>Nebulous rhythm/orchestrated</td>
<td>mix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>I Concentrate on You</em></td>
<td>Johnson</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>♩=112</td>
<td>4’06”</td>
<td>Up-tempo, standard, swing</td>
<td>[F]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>Softly, As in a Morning Sunrise</em></td>
<td>Coltrane</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>♩=104</td>
<td>6’32”</td>
<td>Medium-up, standard, swing</td>
<td>[F]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7.7. Conover’s selected order of tracks for broadcast on Music USA

Conover’s shorthand is not entirely legible, given that compact disc inserts contain little free space for handwritten notes. Nevertheless, significant patterns emerge. For example, the word “mix” denotes sections exhibiting avant-garde style or free form, i.e., imprecise tempo or free improvisation. I am tempted to assign the letters “F, s, ms” as tempo indications: Fast, slow, medium slow, etc. However, the shorthand “F”, considering selections 1 and 4, could also stand for *form* or *framework*. The tracks “*I Concentrate on You*” and “*Softly, As in a Morning*
Sunrise” are set apart from the rest in that they are standards, performed in a manner conforming to traditional style characteristics (i.e., symmetrical, head/solos/head form and traditional function of rhythm section). Both are marked with “F.” His shorthand notes for “Me and Some Drums,” for example, indicate that the work is in three sections, beginning with a free-form excursion, continuing with a section exhibiting form or framework, a measurable pulse, etc., ending with the following symbol: (>). This symbol indicates fading or diminishing, either in terms of volume or tempo. This indication is used also at the end of Archie Shepp’s “The Mac Man,” in which a similar, fade-out ending closes the work. When airing an entire album for a show, Conover often rearranged the track order to suit his own creative needs. He states,

> Record companies often begin an LP side with the track they feel has the strongest sales potential, knowing that record store customers often audition the first track on either side of the record and listen to the rest of the record, or buy it, only if that first track appeals to them; but I might want to put the strongest track at the end of the program, for a buildup to a climax. The sequence of tracks on the record may be ideal for the salesmen’s purposes; it might be precisely the reverse for my purposes.”\(^5\)\(^2\)\(^9\) (Emphasis added)

There are many ways of interpreting or finding a purpose in Conover’s rearrangement. One is to consider his method of arranging selections retrogressively from a climactic central point. The central piece in the arrangement, “Mendacity,” represents the most overtly political work.\(^5\)\(^3\)\(^0\) Also, it is the only track on the album to feature a vocalist. In these regards it is set apart from the rest and is thus suited as a climax. In this scenario it is logical to estimate that “Mendacity” constitutes a climactic moment in this show’s presentation. Given that Conover supported civil rights messages in jazz (see chapter 4 in regards to Alvin Batiste’s Southern University Jazz

\(^5\)\(^2\)\(^9\) Willis Conover, Document titled “Notes For Programming,” 8, Box 4, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.

\(^5\)\(^3\)\(^0\) The overtly political message in the lyrics of Mendacity capture the militant tone of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. The lyrics are as follows: “Mendacity, mendacity, it makes the world go round; A politician makes a speech and never hears the sound; The campaign trail winds on and on; In towns from coast to coast; The winner ain’t the one whose straight, but he who lies the most. Now voting rights in this fair land, we know are not denied, but if I tried in certain states, from treetops I’d be tied… But try and tell the truth; And most folks scream: Not fair.”
Ensemble recording), we can deduce that Conover would have favored this work and deemed it significant. The postulation that “Mendacity” is a work central to the overall scheme advances a degree of symmetry in the broadcast, which suggests that the remaining works must be placed, appropriately, around it. The first three selections present a development in terms of the presence of percussion and the use of rhythm, which reaches a peak with “Mendacity,” featuring an extended solo by Max Roach. “Southern Styles,” “Nunca Mas,” and “Me and Some Drums” represent a stylistic progression showcasing the role and function of percussion in a jazz work. In “Southern Styles,” the rhythm section fulfills its traditional function of undergirding the work in terms of harmony and rhythmic structure. This theme continues in “Nunca Mas,” although the percussion plays a more prominent role in the overall texture. “Me and Some Drums” advances the percussionist into the spotlight, as it features Shelly Manne’s drumming in a prominent role, and in duet with Coleman Hawkins on piano and tenor saxophone. “Mendacity” begins with Abbey Lincoln vocalizing the evocative first stanza, but the work most prominently features Roach on drums, in a solo comprising 4’11”, approximately half of the track’s length. As stated earlier, a broadcaster, according to Conover, must “decide which record is to be the program’s climactic number; then choose whichever records seem to lead most logically to the climactic one.”

Author and jazz deejay Ashley Kahn suggests equating broadcasts to live jazz sets, which commonly feature a mix of musical characteristics. Kahn proposes analysis of tempos, mood, and weight of the music, i.e., difference in textures and ensembles. Conover’s rearranged playlist for *Impulse! Story* offers an assortment of textures and ensemble forces that vary considerably. The order consists of a straight, gospel-like piece for quintet; a tango for quartet; a

532 Ashley Kahn, e-mail message to author, April 27, 2012. Kahn characterizes this scheme as “the old ‘a blues, a burner and a ballad’ idea.”
contemplative, free form duet between two players; a vocal ballad; an arranged, 14-piece jazz orchestra work; and two fast, swing standards.

Ultimately, both hypotheses are likely possibilities. His meticulously hand-written notes, abbreviations, shorthand ‘codes’, and renumbering bring to light questions regarding the reception of jazz overseas. In what ways did either the climax-oriented structure or the ‘musical mix’ structure offer a narrative? How did it affect the listeners’ jazz experience on a didactic level? Did his choices to omit works, i.e., tracks 6 through 9 of Impulse! Story, occur often enough to stifle the significance of certain artists? It is certain, however, that Conover’s broadcasts allowed for an array of musical styles, and a carefully determined balance of musical features and artists.

Supplements to Recordings in Conover’s Collection

In addition to marginalia, Conover often included typed or handwritten supplements to his recordings. These brief, one-page documents contain notes specifying, often in shorthand, information related to programming and accessibility. These notes are similar in every respect to the existing marginalia in that they contain much of the same information (track lengths, tempo indications, soloists), only they exist as a separate, supplemental source.

Conover’s creation of supplemental notes was a task he sometimes assigned to his assistants. Beginning in the 1980s, duties peripheral to the selection process became the responsibility of assistants, perhaps due to Conover’s age and busy schedule. On one of the documents accompanying an LP, Conover writes, “Steve: Please dub, time, leader, and de-pop a record for me” (see figure 7.8).
Figure 7.8. Supplemental notes from *Heart Song*, Black Hawk Records, 1986.

This note illustrates that Conover employed assistance in the process of providing timings.

Conover did not write the calculations and timings that correspond to the individual tracks. However, his handwriting is evident in the columns on the right, which include titles, along with his trademark, shorthand codes. For timesaving purposes, Conover relegated duties that did not involve creative decisions. The job of determining track length and leader was a technical necessity, which generally consisted of establishing timings and determining positions of tape on a reel.\(^{533}\) This shows that Conover, while he subcontracted some of his responsibilities, exercised complete creative control of his broadcasting agenda.

Other supplemental notes included explanations and introductions, intended to accompany the broadcast of a given record. These documents provide evidence of his carefully crafted commentary. In a typed and hand-edited supplement accompanying the LP, *Charles Mingus: Three or Four Shades of Blue*, Conover writes:

\(^{533}\) Leader is defined as “a short strip of nonfunctioning material at each end of a reel of film or recording tape for connection to the spool.” See *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2007.
For years a quarter of a century, the bassist and composer CHARLES MINGUS… has been one of the strongest forces in jazz. Mingus is often ANGRY in his music, as in his LIFE, Mingus is often ANGRY… and often MOURNFUL. Like MOST people, Mingus is sometimes ANGRY, sometimes MOURNFUL, sometimes LOVING, and sometimes JOYFUL. But with Mingus, UNLIKE most people, however, MINGUS is ALWAYS feels the way he feels… is CONSUMED by his emotions: whatever he feels, he feels COMPLETELY. And his feeling… is COMMUNICATED… in his MUSIC. Tonight we explore several areas of the emotional and musical territory of CHARLES MINGUS. 534

The judicious editing of this document not only provides evidence of Conover’s effort to personalize the jazz experience, but also exposes his decision-making process as one that strives for semantic clarity and objectivity in regard to the artist and the music (see figure 7.9). His edits expose the care he took in illustrating musicians as communicators of emotion. He describes Mingus’s music as a reflection of his mood, carefully avoiding the characterizations, “often ANGRY and MOURNFUL.” He finally settles on “sometimes angry and mournful,” and balances his description by adding: “sometimes LOVING, and sometimes JOYFUL.”

Figure 7.9. Conover's notes to Mingus: Three or Four Shades of Blues (1977)

534 Willis Conover, notes accompanying: Charles Mingus: Three or Four Shades of Blues, Atlantic (1977), 33½ rpm, Willis Conover Collection, University of North Texas Music Library.
In his comments he does not mention Mingus’s views on racial discrimination or his overtly political motivation behind some of his works. Mingus was an enthusiastic, outspoken defender of African American rights and other political movements that manifested in many of his works from this period. Instead, Conover focuses his comments on Mingus’s emotions in general, tasking the listeners to interpret the music. Ultimately, Conover’s description tells more about the communicative aspects of jazz, rather than describing a single viewpoint.

Conover chooses not to rely on the notes on the jacket of the LP, which, as with previous examples, may have been simpler and easier. Producer İlhan Mimaroğlu penned the original liner notes, in which he described the situations and events surrounding the production of the recording. There is little information that would suit an introduction to the music of Charles Mingus to an overseas audience. A segment of Mimaroğlu’s note reads,

Credit to [project coordinator] Raymond Silva (our east coast a&r) whose grand illusion was to get all the solar systems jamming together, and if we can’t get them, superstars will do. It’s then a matter of taking over the dream and, by making sure never to wake up, carrying it into reality.

This information would be inappropriate for programming because of its esoteric quality, especially for Music USA audiences for whom English is unfamiliar. Instead, Conover produced an alternative introduction better suited to an audience for whom a universal understanding must be achieved.

Delineating Popular Music and Jazz

The term ‘de-pop’ is a shorthand term denoting the process of separating popular music

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535 Eric Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 136. Porter cites Mingus’s “Once There Was a Holding Corporation Called Old America” (1965) and “They Trespass the Land of the Sacred Sioux” (1965) among his politically oriented compositions. Additionally, Porter notes, “Just as jazz worked for [Mingus] as a symbol of black resistance and African American affirmation, it remained a signifier of racial stereotypes and the strictures that the music industry and the broader society placed on black musicians.”

536 İlhan Mimaroğlu, liner notes to the LP: *Charles Mingus: Three or Four Shades of Blue*, Atlantic (1977).
tracks from jazz tracks. On the liner notes accompanying the Paul Desmond LP *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, Conover offers the following succinct comment: “All good pops,” indicating that the tracks are appropriate for *Music USA Jazz Hour, Part A – Popular Music*. Following this, Conover writes “☐ for jazz.” The checked tracks, comprising five of the ten, are deemed as jazz, and therefore suitable for *Music USA Jazz Hour, Part B – Jazz*.

Indications of Conover’s compartmentalization of music are important when considering that his audience was receiving this music according to his principles. Ordinarily, listeners follow an album’s track order from beginning to end, or favor their own selections. Through Conover’s show, the audience received the music in his order, according to his plan. Recordings featuring both pop and jazz were separated, placed in different shows, and were, thus, received and evaluated differently by the listeners.

It is important to note, however, that these documents were intended as personal notes, and were not intended for public view. Such information served a purpose in succinctly conveying information necessary for the fast pace of daily broadcasting. Given that Conover programmed and hosted a six-days-a-week show, brevity was paramount. In light of this, careful consideration must be afforded in the analysis of such documentation. In his notes for the LP *The Swing Machine*, by Gerard Badini, Conover writes, “DRUM SOLO TOO DAMN LONG!” next to the first track of side B, “Circeo.” It is undetermined whether Conover decided to leave this track off the playlist, or whether he edited out the drum solo from the track. Nevertheless, it provides insight into some of the parameters from which we ascertain information about his programming style and procedure.

Conover’s notes and marginalia serve as a means of quantifying and assessing conclusive evidence about his process. They provide clues that reveal his priorities, preferences, and his
broadcasting persona. Ultimately, Conover’s many edits comprise his interpretation of a compositional process through music programming. It is for this reason that he abhorred the simplicity and triteness associated with the title of deejay to which he was sometimes referred in articles distributed in the United States. His programming process, amplified through his radio persona, served to influence fans around the world. The impact of a radio persona has, since the 1930s, been studied in terms of its effectiveness and influence on a populace.

The Radio Persona and the Crowd

In a seminal study of the effects of radio on a crowd in 1935, social psychologists Hadley Cantril and Gordon Willard Allport began their observations with the example of an evangelist speaking to a congregation. In this experiment the reactions of two separate audiences were compared—an audience listening in a live, face-to-face setting, and another (an overflow audience), listening via microphone from a separate room. They could hear the evangelist speaking as well as the live audience. From this experiment the authors found that the lower audience (listening via microphone) were more resistant to react to the service. The live audience, however, were noticeably more taken with the experience. All reactions, including laughter, physical movement, or shaking the hand of the evangelist after the service, were significantly less enthusiastic in the lower audience than in the live group. The authors describe the noteworthy contrast and depolarization of the groups wherein the major congregation benefitted from the evangelist’s efforts, while the radio congregation did not. In explaining the comparison, the authors draw attention to the specific mental setting of radio, indicating that the occasion and technique of addressing an audience via radio is entirely different from speaking to

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an unseen crowd. When speaking to an unseen audience the radio personality uses a different voice from his usual, face-to-face speaking voice—one that “directed his attention to the invisible audience.”538 This adopted persona was aimed specifically at making distant listeners feel like welcomed members of the group. Also, the speaker speaks more slowly and deliberately in radio discourse. To the live congregation, the evangelist “spoke rapidly, more rapidly than is customary in radio discourse…his speech was impromptu and therefore not well organized, and his manner was abrupt, compulsive, and startling. He worked for immediate rather than long-run results, for emotional fervor rather than for future action.”539 Second, the authors note that the physical space was not typical of a radio audience. Rather than individual homes, the listeners in the lower audience were standing together in a hall. Lastly, the overflow audience was aware that they were not being addressed specifically, but were subjugated to the upper level of the congregation as the more immediate audience. The authors point to specific factors that identify the qualities of a radio voice. The speaker must speak deliberately and sincerely, address the listener in a way that invites him into his world, thoroughly organize his comments, and avoid impromptu speeches.

Conover’s adopted persona, characterized the qualities inherent in what Cantril and Allport describe as a convincing radio personality. Moreover, in addition to quality of voice, the manner of constructing a broadcast, for Conover, added to the overall impact. His well organized, meticulously structured broadcast weeks constitute a manner befitting the authors’ radio persona. Conover’s Music USA broadcasts were free of impromptu sentiments and vocal abruptness.

538 Ibid., 7.
539 Ibid.
Also, the listening space of Conover’s radio audience contributed greatly to the impact of *Music USA*. While he strove to connect his fans through a worldwide jazz fan network, they remained a physically separated collective. Consequentially, each listener engaged in a one-on-one relationship with Conover. In this relationship the listeners were not, as a group, subjugated, but were liberated. Addressing them with consistent conviction and clarity, Conover invited them into his world with consistent grace and sincerity.

*The Impact of the Deejay*

Despite Conover’s distaste for the title of deejay, he nevertheless fulfilled an influential role for his listeners and embodied a personality that corresponds to modern discussions of the radio deejay. Bill Brewster describes the deejay’s personality, in a general sense, as one that is obsessive, fetishistic, and, in a sense, unhealthy. He writes, “to become a good DJ you have to develop the hunger. You have to search for new records with the insane zeal of a goldrush prospector digging in a blizzard… an excitement for vinyl that verges on a fetish.”540 And that, “People will find you boring…but you will find solace in long, impenetrable conversations with fellow junkies.”541 Brewster’s description of the DJ bears similarity to Conover, given his proclivities toward appealing to out-groups. The magnitude of Conover’s collection of recordings, totaling 22,000 in the Willis Conover Collection at UNT, clearly illustrates “excitement for vinyl that verges on a fetish.”

Conover’s listeners addressed his voice and radio persona in letters that he subsequently published in the newsletter. The following series of quotations indicates that his voice was a popular thread of conversation among fans—one that Conover shared with the listeners. The

540 Ibid., 9.
541 Ibid.
thread begins as follows: “Unlike the music he plays, [Conover] does not swing, he is not a
bopper in any sense of the term, he is, in short, a dud. His sepulchered solemnity may be
appropriate in a funeral parlor, but it jibes poorly with the American jazz.”542 To this Conover
replied, “My way of speaking on Music USA is tailored, first, to the vagaries of short-wave
reception and, second, to many listeners’ lack of familiarity with the English language. I’m glad
you like my choice of records.”543 In a subsequent issue a listener comes to Conover’s defense,
stating, “We have one complaint about a listener’s letter sent to you. . . about your voice in
introducing Music USA. We in our club would like to state that your voice is the perfect type for
the. . . programmes you introduce. It is a revelation to hear such clear English at the proper
speed, after listening to the tripe we hear from DJs in England, who are supposed to be
English.”544 In the same issue another listener comments, “we think your speaking voice is
superb. Too many DJs gab on and on. There is no time left for music.”545 A listener in India,
commenting on having returned from the Newport jazz festival, at which Conover was emcee,
writes, “For the first time we got to see the famous artists and that beautiful island of Newport.
What we enjoyed most was that wonderful voice announcing the several programmes.”546
Completing the thread, a listener writes, “We want to reassure you that you have the world’s best
radio announcing voice. You pronounce and articulate your words very clearly. Your talks and
whatever announcements you make over the air are devoid of bombastic and flowery language.
So this was just to confirm what some Friends of Music USA have mentioned about the clarity
and quality of your voice.”547 Given that the voice constituted such a lengthy sequence of

responses from fans, it is a significant element in his perception among listeners. Equally evident is the determination of Conover to provide a self-supportive final word to this sequence of letters addressing the voice. This could serve as an example of Conover’s formulation of a positive image through correspondence in the newsletter.

Conover informed the listeners about the process he underwent in arriving at his present radio style and persona, stating, “When I was 18, announcing on commercial radio, I had the world’s most pompous delivery. At that time, I thought a radio announcer was an important man, so I tried to sound important. Since then I’ve grown up—and commercial radio has grown down. I hope the pomp is all gone, thought I do tend to speak more slowly and distinctly for short-wave transmission, thereby unintentionally suggesting a degree of pompousness which I hope is countered by my occasional fatuousness in the newsletter.”548 Here Conover admits to a “degree of pompousness” in his broadcasts, and “occasional fatuousness” in the newsletter. The sense of pretension that Conover indicates was observed in some accounts. James Lester discusses the culmination of Conover’s radio voice as one that one listener described as, “unnatural for normal conversation” and possessing an “apocalyptic tone,” which indicated arrogance, “as if he believed himself the ultimate authority on jazz.” However, non-English speakers, who, incidentally, characterized the majority of his listeners, did not interpret Conover in this way. Lester states, “Such subtleties of interpretation, right or wrong, are usually lost on non-native speakers of English, and most foreigners found in Conover's speech patterns the tones of a friendly professor or a beloved preacher.”549 This perception, common among non-English speaking listeners, remains evidence of the deification of not only his voice, but also his persona. In a letter to Conover, a young fan in Russia poignantly writes, “You are a source of strength


273
when I am overwhelmed by pessimism, my dear idol.”

Conover’s eventual reputation as a deified voice informs an additional characteristic common to deejays. Brewster and Broughton describe the deejay as a successor to the ancient shaman. The authors describe the DJ as an otherwise simple man who, when presiding over musical events, or festivals of transcendence, becomes god-like—a spiritual leader with the power to affect the state of mind of vast communities. Of the deejay Brewster writes, “when he wipes away our everyday lives with holy drums and sanctified bass-lines, we are quite prepared to think of him as a god, or at the very least a sacred intermediary.” The perception of Conover as a religious savior emerges frequently in listener correspondence. Several accounts of the Music USA listening experience echo the following sentiment from a listener in South Africa:

When I was growing up in South Africa in the 1950s, Willis Conover was GOD to me. My interest in jazz was formed by his broadcasts, and my own broadcasting style, for what is it worth, was based upon his cool, carefully enunciated delivery, which seemed both personal and informative. He was speaking to me, and I learned an enormous amount from him. There are literally millions of people who are jazz fans today because of him.

This account illustrates the listening experience as a religious ritual. Lester states that Conover fully embraced the role of spiritual leader, particularly, “in the ‘godless’ world behind the Iron Curtain,” to which listeners often responded, “It was almost a religious experience to listen,” or, “He was like the preacher.” Brewster and Broughton correlate the radio programmer with the practice of music as ritual, and its impact on an audience. Much like the practice of a religious

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550 Unknown listener in Russia, quoted in Lester, “Willis of Oz.”
551 Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, Last Night a DJ Saved My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey (Grove Press: New York 2000). The type of DJ the authors describe refers to one that “uses records as building blocks, stringing them together in an improvised narrative to create a ‘set—performance’—of his own,” see p. 8.
552 Ibid., 5.
leader stirring the emotions of a congregation, Conover, as the sole facilitator of the music experience, engendered a similar relationship with his listening audience. Brewster states, “most older forms of worship are centered around music and dance, their rituals usually focused on some special person who links heaven and earth.” Whether or not Conover anticipated or invited this deification, Conover was such a person. Regardless of language-barrier, listeners often deified Conover’s voice.

Andrew Ross discusses the 21st century, club DJ as an interlocutor of a profound cultural institution, and one whose role profoundly affects not only musical progress and performance, but other cultural aspects like fashion, courtship, and sexual display. The club DJ, a selector and player of music for live venues such as nightclubs or raves, is distantly related to Conover’s music programmer. Nevertheless, while the two roles deviate functionally, the two share the commonality of purpose in which a sole facilitator disseminates music to a large audience who shares a collective veneration of the DJ. In both contexts, the DJ is solely responsible. The focus on the accountability of ‘the one’ is, according to Ross, what tempts many scholars to consider the cult of the DJ as highly influential in the dissemination of music, but one that is, moreover, easily neglected as characterizing a musical product or performance. Lastly, both roles share defining characteristics in terms of interfacing with an audience. For example, in both contexts, the DJ is considered by the audience as advantaged, enlightened, and possessive of a heightened appreciation of the music. Moby states,

DJs are like glorified consumers. They have some sort of Gnostic appreciation of things that the average person doesn’t have; they’re better consumers than someone else. The best DJs have access to records unavailable to other people, and they seem to be part of an elite consumer club that you couldn’t belong to because you don’t have that hidden knowledge…As for spirituality, the DJ’s job is like that of the traditional notion of a

555 Brewster and Broughton, 6.
shaman, because the DJ goes off and brings knowledge, collects knowledge subjectively, and then shares it with his tribe, as it were.\textsuperscript{556}

Like followers of a cult, Ross asserts, listeners derive an image of the broadcaster that transcends reality—through the potency of technology and the phenomenon of the deified radio persona.

Radio personalities often rely on the “strength in numbers” rule when captivating a faithful crowd. Cantril and Allport draw attention to the requirement on the part of the radio orator to create the impression of universal cohesion among the listeners. For maximum effectiveness, individual listeners must believe that others are thinking as he does—that each member is sharing in a universal emotional state. The authors cite Father Charles Edward Coughlin, whose controversial broadcasts to over 30 million listeners in the 1930s were immensely successful in building and maintaining a collective spirit. One of Coughlin’s emphatic points was to underscore the sheer numbers of supporters. Individuals were one among a strong, cohesive group, made increasingly stronger by its sheer numbers. This technique, according to the authors, was successful at bolstering the feelings of the group and forming a universal consensus. They write, “the prestige of multitudes allays our misgivings and supports our vacillating decision. Eight million people can’t be wrong, and eight million follow this leader, so, too, with impunity may I.”\textsuperscript{557} Similarly, Conover referred often to the abundance of listeners when addressing his Friends of Music USA (FOMUSA). In addition to on-air occasions, the \textit{FOMUSA Newsletter} remained a reliable platform to emphasize to the listeners the prestige of multitudes among the friends groups. In the first issue of the newsletter the


headline on page one reads, in boldface: “YOU HAVE FRIENDS IN 81 COUNTRIES.” The article begins by stating, “Friends of Music USA listening groups now number more than 1000.” In a later volume, under the headline, “Where friends are,” Conover states: “About 18,000 people have formed more than 1250 chapters of Friends of Music USA in 86 countries.” The audience was reminded both in broadcasts and in print of their immense and ever increasing listenership.

Radio speakers work with the fact that they are invisible, consciously inviting the listeners’ participation. Speakers will often allow the audience (invite them) as co-conspirators to the event. Susan J. Douglas recalls the example of Huey Long, who opened a radio address with: “I have some important revelations to make, but before I make them I want you to go to the phone and call up five of your friends and tell them to listen in.” Long’s speeches illustrated a technique common in the medium of radio when addressing an audience limited to hearing and not seeing, which involved maintaining an informal tone and that invited the listener into a comfortable environment. Deprived of the visual element, listeners are obligated to find meaning through the listening experience. When the speaker does away with formal allusions and maintains a tone identifiable to the audience, the result is that the listener is elevated to a position of equality. Additionally, the limits of radio encourage stimulation of the imagination that evokes a childlike wonder—a reawakening. Allport and Cantril surmised that the power of radio engaged vast groups in a process of a shared consciousness that served to unify. The relationship between the speaker and listener is one that acknowledges this unified network of

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which each individual, regardless of degree of physical separation from one another, is a crucial part.

Conclusions

The Music USA Jazz Hour, designed specifically as an international broadcast, served to limit Conover’s recognition domestically. This limitation is partly responsible for the dearth of noteworthy scholarship and substantive biography on Conover and his influence on the world. This is an unfortunate omission, in light of his extensive impact on many followers, and on the course of the dissemination of jazz overseas. However, his musical contributions enlightened listeners and encouraged them to transcend the limits of their immediate environment.

While efforts involving artistic creation in the traditional sense eluded him, Conover imparted to his listeners, and to overseas jazz artists in particular, a body of work that amounted to an artfully arranged synthesis of his experiences and involvement in a musical life. He considered himself an improviser in the sense that his process enabled him to form creative works through improvisation. As posited by Benjamin Piekut, improvisation was part of a trend in 1960s avant-garde experimentalism as a manifestation of a struggle between liberalism and fundamentalism. He asserts that contemporaneous developments in music in the 1960s operated on an aesthetic determined by an “openness to whatever might arise [operating] in tandem with an equally strong commitment to personal histories and an embodied, disciplined approach to musical tradition.” Conover’s broadcasts align with this trend and operated on this aesthetic. He programmed shows as an avant-gardist uses creative space: in manipulating sound resources to convey a narrative arc. He compared his programming process to the search for


\[562\] Ibid., 61.
order in a chaotic universe, one that, ultimately, provided a sense of framework. I argue that his broadcasts represent expressive, goal-driven works similar to avant-garde musical contributions of the 1960s. Quantifiable aspects of his broadcasting method such as musical selection, editing, vocal style, and choice of spoken content demonstrate technical and practical characteristics of musicality.

Understanding Conover’s role as containing elements of creativity, and moreover, creating through a process of improvisation provides a deeper understanding of the dissemination of jazz outside of America, and brings into sharper focus his process and the impetus that compelled him. Conover claimed that *Music USA* provided a long-awaited opportunity for him to improvise creatively. It is therefore necessary to interpret Conover’s achievements as such. While traditional music making largely eluded him, improvisation through radio became central in his occupational life. Moreover, his achievements exist on par with the avant-garde artists he revered—whose achievements originated from an inner passion or striving for inner peace. Conover’s position involved personal creativity, insistence on creative license at any cost, and the cultivation of a marginalized fan base, characteristics also shared by the 1960s avant-garde. Ultimately, I argue that as the new avant-garde style emerged as one that challenged the mainstream ideas, expectations, and practices of jazz, Conover adopted this mindset as the basis for his creative process in broadcasting.

Of the power of radio, Marc Fisher conclusively states, “When radio works, it grabs hold of one person at a time and creates a bond between the unseen voice and the listener. And as that one-on-one relationship grows more intimate, the listener gains a sense of belonging to
something larger." Conover’s success depended on bonds formed throughout the world that persisted for decades, and flourished most resonantly in the 1960s with the FOMUSA Newsletter.

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Chapter members in Accra, Ghana: The members of the clubs have fully empowered me to announce to the Voice of America Jazz Club the liberation of Ghana and in no small way our club. They wish me to proclaim our faith in Afro-American friendship which painfully the deposed Kwame Nkrumah sought to destroy. We are aware of threats to which we were subjected in the past and now know the price of freedom. We have in the past defended the American Course of Freedom. We proclaim that there is no alternative to Democracy, having seen what show the Dictator put up. It was a poor show indeed.

Airforce Sergeant in Vietnam: Last night March 5, 1966, we in hut number 356 got the treat of our lives, you sent us Woody Herman on both programs and we had our tape recorder handy and we are playing it back now. We have fellows in the hut now listening to it and others asking me how do we get such good music, so I have a little class on when and where on the dial to pick your program up...Willis your program is a hit here in Vietnam. There is one thing I can promise you, every one living in hearing distance of hut 356 and 358 will know the name, Willis Conover, when they leave Vietnam.

Dublin, Ireland: Firstly, I want to congratulate you on your excellent programme Voice of America Jazz Hour. The programme has an excellently high standard with a good variety and an apparent progressive policy towards the "avant-garde". I'm sure it is the life blood of many a jazz enthusiast.

Walsall Staffs, England: I feel that I must write and congratulate you on some of the excellent material you have used on your "Music USA, part II - Jazz Hour" programmes. I recently particularly enjoyed excerpts from the Monterey Jazz Festival featuring Dizzy Gillespie. I hope you continue for a long time with these programmes as our own radio (BBC) only broadcasts one jazz programme per week which is very mediocre.

In Down Beat magazine, March 24, 1966, issue, page 8: Congratulations to Conover: from Attila Marton, Budapest, Hungary..."after reading the report of Willis Conover, on the Prague Jazz Festival and jazz in Eastern Europe, I can say that it is without a doubt, the best documentary on a big jazz event I have ever read. I would like to express the thanks of Hungarians to Conover for his nice comments on our jazz life."

Also comments by D. A. Rodrigues, Bombay, India..."I Congratulate Willis Conover for his two lively and interesting articles on the International Festival of Jazz. Both articles gave a true on-the-spot account as well of jazz activity in Prague, Warsaw, and Budapest."
APPENDIX B

FRIENDS OF MUSIC USA NEWSLETTER, VOL. 1, NO. 1, P. 1 (1964) AND FRIENDS OF MUSIC USA NEWSLETTER, VOL. 3, NO. 1, P. 5 (1966).
YOU HAVE FRIENDS IN 81 COUNTRIES

Friends of MUSIC USA listening groups now number more than 1000. As a
condition of official recognition is a minimum of 12 members, at least 12,000
members will receive Friends lapel pins and membership cards. Actually, the
number is even bigger; some chapters have as many as 30 and 40 members.

The first application came from Korea, three days after our first announce-
ment was broadcast; and so the Chunan, Korea chapter of Friends of MUSIC
USA is Chapter Number One. The others are on every continent in the world.

So many personal letters were received that none can be answered personally
at this time. Your letter, however, was read carefully and with appreciation
of the friendly interest shown. You will notice that we have not filled in the
membership cards. Please fill in the blank spaces yourself. This way, there
will be no error in spelling your name. On the first line of your membership
card, next to the word Chapter, write your Friends of MUSIC USA chapter's
number. On the second line of your membership card, print the name of your
city and your country. On the third line, under the words, This is to certify
That, print your name. And on the last line, above the words Member's Signature,
sign your name.

On the first line of your chapter's certificate of membership, after the words
This Certifies That the, print the name of your club chapter -- that is, whatever
name you and your fellow members decide you would like your chapter to be called.
For example: The Ellington Fan Club, or The London Swing Society, or The
Warsaw Hybrydy Club, or any other name you choose for your chapter. (If your
club submitted a group name when you first sent your application, we have printed
the name in this space for you.)

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WILLIS CONOVER: An Introduction

How do you do?

When broadcasting, I use as few words as possible. The music speaks for
itself; and the less time I take for talk, the more time there is for music. In
this newsletter, however, I can say what I do not say in my programs. It would
be improper to talk about myself on the radio, for example. But here, I can
answer many listeners' questions.
K.G. Jacob, Chapter 277, Kerala, India: The listener from Monrovia, Liberia, complains like a "Jack of all trade and master of none". Music USA is for listeners all over the world, not for my friend in Monrovia alone. Mr. Conover is talking to listeners all over the world who speak different languages.

D.A. Rodrigues, Angela Music Centre, Chapter 273, Bombay, India: I would like Mr. Peter Salds who wrote the article "Conover's Top Twenty" in the April 1965 issue of "True Note" to read "Willis Conover Interview" by Pauline Rivelli which appeared in the September 1965 issue of Jazz Magazine and I would like to know what is his reaction on the same.

Pete Julian, Chapter 282, London, England: The news of various clubs is of great interest to us. And it is obvious that the clubs from schools and universities have a large membership. But no doubt the small clubs contain a greater percentage of members with a deep interest in jazz.

On 23 January Mr. Charles Fox gave a most enjoyable evening at the Balham Public Library entitled "The Jazz Scene of the Thirties". Members have also managed to see between them a good selection of the visitors from USA, namely Marian Montgomery, Erroll Garner, Al Cohn and Zoot Sims, and Wes Montgomery.

Dr. Cavanna Marie, Club 105, Torino, Italy: Under the title "Children, Jazz Is Fun" three times a month, we invite some children to our club, treat them with candies and let them listen to jazz records, carefully chosen, in order to induce in them a liking for our music since the beginning. Of course, they are allowed to play and to dance and they enjoy it.

J.A. Wellington, Chapter 786, Cape Coast, Ghana: In view of a suggestion published in the last newsletter, I have received a letter from a member in Czechoslovakia suggesting to exchange letters, jazz records or magnetophone tapes, and pictures of jazz musicians with us. I will bring the contents of the letter to our meeting for our general discussions. (We meet every Sunday for general discussions.)

The Good Music Lovers' Club, Chapter 384, Srbi, Lika, Yugoslavia: Is it not funny that Chapters 102 and 123 discovered that they are only three minutes walk from each other? Though Yugoslavia is not a big country, we don't know how many clubs there are in it and where they are.

D.A. Assamoah, The Kennedy Club, Chapter 182, Elmina, Ghana: It may interest you to know that this club, which is mainly composed of policemen, has long been named after your late President John F. Kennedy in recognition of his services to Africa in particular and mankind in general.

J.J. Khala, Chapter 1023, Bombay, India: Our club got one more chance to probe into the world of jazz. The knowledge and our know-how is now increasing through some of your wonderful broadcasts and through that wonderful magazine you send. That chance that we had was that picturesque movie, 'Jazz on a Summer's Day'. For the first time we got to see the famous artists of that beautiful island of Newport. What we enjoyed most was that wonderful voice announcing the several programmes. We all had smiles on our faces and enjoyed seeing you joke with 'King Satch'. What we liked best in the movie and we all agree in one voice was the singing of Sweet Georgia Brown by Anita O'Day and of course we agreed in toto when you announced the queen of gospel music the one and only Mahalia Jackson. We also enjoyed Thelonious Monk and Gerry Mulligan and Bob Brookmeyer.
APPENDIX C

PHOTO BY ROMAN DYLAG
"THE WRECKERS" of POLAND visiting USA in 1962; here at the "BIRDLAND", NEW YORK during "JOHN COLTRANE QUARTET" 2 weeks stay at the club, in June '62.

From left to right: Willy Conover, Roman Waschko (journ.), Ben Webster, Adam Jędrzejowski, dr., Andrzej Trzaskowski, p., John Coltrane, Zbigniew Namysłowski, alto s., Michał Urbaniak, tenor s., Roman Dylag, bass, Ryszard Horowitz (friend). On the bandstand: Kay Winding & his Four Trombones (opposite band to John Coltrane Quartet).
APPENDIX D

ROMAN DYLAG AND WILLIS CONOVER CA. 1962 IN NEW YORK
APPENDIX E

USIA EFFECTIVENESS REPORT: “MUSIC EXAMPLES,” CA. 1965
This is the briefest possible sampling to show the influence of VOK's "Music USA" broadcasts on other cultures.

All but three recordings were given to Willis Conover by the performers themselves.

With few exceptions—none, in Eastern Europe and the USSR—all the performers credited Conover's broadcasts with the birth and growth of their own music.

1 of 2: a few selections from outside the Soviet orbit.

2 of 2: a few selections from Eastern Europe and the USSR.
1. CANADA: a trombonist
2. CANADA: a big band
3. BRAZIL: a guitarist
4. ARGENTINA: a big band
5. MEXICO: a choir
6. CHILE (birth)/MEXICO (residence): a singer
7. SPAIN: a combo, with Flamenco guitar
8. ITALY: a saxophone orchestra
9. ITALY: a ragtime ensemble
10. HOLLAND: a singer
11. SWITZERLAND: a baroque ensemble
12. WEST GERMANY: a radio-TV big band
13. TURKEY: a combo and singers
14. THE PHILIPPINES: a big band
15. JAPAN: a songwriter-pianist-singer
16. JAPAN: a composer-saxophonist and combo
17. FRANCE: a choir
18. NORTH AFRICA/WESTERN EUROPE: Bedouin singers and musicians, with Western European jazz musicians: a 400-year-old song
19. GHANA: a high-life group with jazz musicians
1. YUGOSLAVIA: a chamber ensemble with jazz musicians
2. YUGOSLAVIA: a radio-TV big band
3. YUGOSLAVIA: a big band, with Yugoslavian folk-ensemble
4. BULGARIA: a composer-flutist and combo
5. EAST GERMANY: a "small big-band" using traditional Bulgarian rhythm
6. HUNGARY: a gypsy bassist, in concert
7. HUNGARY: a non-gypsy violinist and violist, with combo
8. ROMANIA: a gypsy scat-singer
9. ROMANIA: a large ensemble playing original bossa nova
10. ROMANIA: a pianist
11. CZECHOSLOVAKIA: a traditional-jazz combo and singer
12. CZECHOSLOVAKIA: a radio-TV big band, with composer-trumpeter, in concert
13. CZECHOSLOVAKIA: a self-taught (and, like the others, VOA-taught) composer-flutist, with piano, strings, vocal group
14. USSR: a traditional jazz combo
15. USSR: an avant-garde "free-jazz" combo
16. USSR: a big band, playing Glenn Miller
17. USSR: a pianist, with bass and guitar, playing Gershwin
18. USSR: an arranger-conductor, playing Ellington and Strayhorn
19. POLAND: a young classical violinist, playing piano and singing, in concert
20. POLAND: a composer-saxophonist with combo, using traditional Polish rhythm
21. POLAND: a singer, a Polish song, "Dzień Dobry (Good Day), Mister Blues"
22. POLAND: a symphonic ensemble and a pianist, playing Ellington
APPENDIX F

GUY WARREN: I HAVE A STORY TO TELL, ACCRA, GHANA, 1962

(PRIVATELY PUBLISHED)
THE THIRD PHASE

BEETHOVEN

SIDE BY SIDE WITH GHANA’S POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT, CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IS NEVER LEFT BEHIND. IT’S GROWING STEADILY

AFRICA - THE HOME OF THE DRUM

I HAVE A STORY TO TELL...

to willis forever from guyana.

AUGUST 1963
APPENDIX G

CHART OF EXCERPTS PER COUNTRY IN FOMUSA NEWSLETTERS 1962-69
APPENDIX H

ARTICLE IN TEMPO (CA. 1960)
The radio speaker crackled and then cleared as the sound of Duke Ellington's "Take the 'A' Train" came over the airwaves. "The Voice of America Jazz Hour," said the announcer. "This is Willis Conover, speaking from Washington, D.C."

Just then, four people in different parts of the world steadied the dial and leaned closer to their sets. An engineering student in Iran, a cattle rancher in Argentina, a young secretary in Germany and a store clerk in Communist Czechoslovakia were at that moment united by a common factor: their appreciation of America's most treasured export—jazz.

The show, initiated in December, 1954, by the United States Information Agency, has rapidly become the most popular disc jockey program in the world. Response to the hour-long presentation has been unprecedented, a
... COLD WAR

Voice of America spokesman reported. Letters by the tens of thousands have poured into the office from 80 countries, Conover has been so swamped by mail that he is still trying to catch up with replies.

The VOA Jazz Hour, rather significantly, draws an even bigger response than the other half of the USIA's Music USA program, which schedules popular music. This would seem to confirm a point made in literature by William Faulkner and F. Scott Fitzgerald—that American contributions to the arts are more appreciated by foreigners than by Americans.

Another important element in the resounding success of the Jazz Hour has been Conover himself. A disc jockey who is thoroughly and devotedly versed in the ways of jazz, Willis handles the show in a manner calculated to attract and hold wide audiences. He includes a commentary on his records that tells not only about the origin and evolution of American jazz, but subtly imparts bits of information about the American way of life, through casual anecdotes about the music.

For example, in a recent Voice of America broadcast covered by Tassro, Conover interviewed bandleader Ray McKinley, director of the newly reorganized Glenn Miller Orchestra. Willis kicked off the show by playing one of Ray's earlier records, Beat Me, Daddy, Eight to the Bar, made while McKinley was a drummer and vocalist with the 1940 Will Bradley band. Ray explained that the honky-tonk pianist described in the lyrics of the tune was a legendary Texas jazz musician named Peck Kelly. So many people admired Peck's style that he was continually being asked to make records.

"But he was content to stay where he was," McKinley recalled. "In fact, some people even tried to conceal tape recorders near the bandstand while he was playing. But Peck—well, he could smell a taping device a mile away, and he'd just refuse to play until it was taken out. So we made Beat Me, Daddy to tell his story—and it became a big success."

Ray went on to reminisce about other jazz immortals.

In control room, engineer types McKinley interview. Conover has supplemented record show with tapes of Newport Jazz Festival.
... COLD WAR

like Bix Beiderbecke, Bunny Berigan and Glenn Miller, with whose band he reached fame as a drummer in the early forties. It was exactly the type of commentary which has given the Jazz Hour its informal and informative character and has accounted for the enthusiastic response from its world-wide audience.

Conover obviously conceives of the Jazz Hour as a music program rather than a deejay spot. He does not attempt to joke around with his material, nor does he take off on long philosophical wanderings. The style is always straightforward and dignified.

Conover comes by his knowledge of radio naturally. Since 1942, he’s been broadcasting jazz to Washington audiences, first over Mutual's Station WWDC and more recently over WEAM, a small independent outlet in nearby Arlington, Virginia.

A letter from Red-dominated Czechoslovakia summed up the significance of the Jazz Hour neatly: “You are doing a really good job, not only that you do our evenings more pleasant and unforgettable, but there is a much deeper meaning of it—to become acquainted of the development of the art and spirit of American nation with all its optimistic roots of thinking.”
APPENDIX I

LETTER FROM GUY WARREN (GHANABA), MAY 11, 1982

Dec 11, 1969

willis conover,
voice of america jazz hour,
new york city, n.y.

I am sending you this peace stool as a token of my deep appreciation for your lifelong dedication to our world of jazz. i also want to thank you deeply for your copies of his excellency, duke ellington. unfortunately, due to some freak accidents, i was unable to tape the historic funeral service at st. john, the divine's, new york city. i will be grateful if you will send me cassette copies of this funeral, or tell me where i can get this material, i.e., if it has been released commercially. my library cries out for this tape. my soul does too. i will pay for this material if it's so wished.

for the past twelve years, i have been compiling a book on my own life titled "odumankoma eyrama-the divine drummer." i already have about two thousand pages. as a very detailed book which i want to leave behind when i pass on. it will be the reference book on my personal life and my career. you are one of the personalities to whom i am dedicating this book. i need a concise but complete biography of you to go along with the dedication. will you please send me this info as soon as possible. also will you think about coming here in august 1969, on a few weeks holiday as my guest. there is much of ghana and africa that would interest someone like you. the jazz roots are here.

maybe you may consider doing a series of the ellington type on other jazz immortals who have served god well on this earth through their music. it would be worth all the effort.

again, willis, thank you for your invaluable contribution to our world.

very sincerely,

ghanaba


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