

VALIDATING THE VOICE IN THE MUSIC OF LAMBERT, HENDRICKS & ROSS

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Lambert, Hendricks & Ross was an unusual vocal jazz trio. Made up of Dave Lambert, Jon Hendricks, and Annie Ross, they were the only interracial and mixed gender vocal jazz group in the United States in the late 1950s. In the wake of the Montgomery bus boycott victory and President Eisenhower's consideration of the Equal Rights Act, the trio became one of the most popular vocal jazz groups of the day by singing lyricized arrangements of famous instrumental jazz recordings through a medium called vocalese.

Although they seemed to reflect a utopian ideal of an integrated American society, each member of the group faced unique challenges. Referred to as the Poet Laureate of Jazz, African American lyricist and singer Jon Hendricks considers himself "a person who plays the horn without the horn," and he is known for his gift with words. Hendricks struggled to find his voice between language and music through vocalese. Annie Ross, also a successful vocalese lyricist, quit writing once she joined the group. As a white woman in a predominantly African American, male musical idiom she engaged in a complex gender performativity. Dave Lambert navigated complex issues of race, since he was a white man arranging the music of iconic African American jazz composers. Together they acted as a microcosm for the most pressing socio-political issues of the day. Employing the voice as the foundation for this study, I address two main questions: What does it mean to have a voice in jazz? And, who is allowed to sing?

The voice is traditionally understood as either an expression of individuality or as the performance of a particular gendered, racial, or cultural identity. This dissertation examines the voice as an intersection between these two registers. In the words of Farah Jasmine Griffin, the voice is like “a hinge, a place where things can both come together and break apart.” In this intersection, Lambert, Hendricks, & Ross used their voices to engage with race and gender issues in jazz, issues that resonated broadly with the socio-political climate of the United States at that time.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In 1957, Dave Lambert, Jon Hendricks, and Annie Ross did something unthinkable in vocal jazz—they set words to Count Basie big band recordings and recreated the entire ensemble with three voices. The idea was initially Lambert’s, who suggested to Hendricks somewhat whimsically that they should do vocal arrangements of Basie repertoire. Hendricks remembers Lambert’s suggestion:

“We ought to do something to let people know that we were here, otherwise we’re going to die and be anonymous. Well, what do you think?” Lambert said, “You love Basie. I love Basie. You write ten Basie tunes and we’ll sing them.” I said, “Do you know how long it takes to lyricize one of those whole arrangements, all the horns and the piano, everything?” He said, “Well, you got anything better to do?”¹

With Lambert’s gentle prodding, Hendricks set to work on writing lyrics. Their first album *Sing a Song of Basie* (1957), was not only a hit, but is now considered the foundational group recording of vocalese—a style of singing in which lyrics are set to recorded instrumental melodies and improvisations.² While vocalese has existed since the 1920s, it was sung primarily by individual singers, and no one prior to Lambert, Hendricks & Ross had attempted to write lyrics to all of the solos and instrumental parts of the big band.

In addition to their unorthodox sound, they were a highly unusual looking group in 1950s

¹ Jon Hendricks, interviewed by Molly Murphy, <https://www.arts.gov/honors/jazz/jon-hendricks>, January 8, 2010

² Vocalese is a jazz practice in which lyrics are added to both melodic and improvised passages of instrumental recordings, whereas scat singing is an improvised style of singing that uses non-lexical syllables to imitate the sounds of instruments.

America. Lambert, Hendricks, & Ross was a racially integrated and mixed gender group comprised of a white vocal arranger from Boston (Lambert), an African-American vocalist and lyricist (Hendricks), and a Scottish born, former Hollywood child starlet (Ross). These three individuals came together to form the most popular vocal jazz group of the late 1950s, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. Together from 1957 to 1962, Dave Lambert, Jon Hendricks, and Annie Ross redefined vocal jazz while simultaneously reflecting changing social attitudes towards race integration.

Each member brought a unique background and set of experiences to the group. Dave Lambert (1917-1966), a former tree surgeon and drummer, was the primary arranger for the group. He began his career by writing scat vocal compositions for the Gene Krupa Big Band during the mid-1940s. Throughout the 1950s he worked as a freelance studio singer and arranger with some of the top jazz artists of the time, including Charlie Parker, Neal Hefti, and Al Hibbler. Jon Hendricks (b. 1921) is an African American vocalist, poet, and teacher and was the primary lyricist for the group. Growing up in Toledo, Ohio, Hendricks learned to sing in the Warren African Methodist Episcopal church where his father was minister and his mother directed the church choir. He was exposed to jazz from piano virtuoso Art Tatum, who happened to live down the street from his childhood home. Annie Ross (b. 1930) is a vocalist and actress who immigrated to the United States from Scotland when she was four years old to pursue a career in entertainment. She was raised by her aunt, Hollywood actress Ella Logan, and at the tender age of five Ross won a talent contest, which resulted in an appearance on a Paul Whiteman radio broadcast and a six-month contract with film studio Metro-Goldwyn Mayer

(MGM).³ Ross made her first film appearance in *Our Gang of Follies* (1935) when she was only six years old, and was eventually dubbed the “Scottish Shirley Temple.”⁴ With the creation of the group, Lambert introduced the aesthetic of using the vocal ensemble as an extension of the jazz band from his earlier scat compositions; Hendricks fused his poetic talents with his love of instrumental jazz; and Ross interwove vocal precision with the entertainment skills she developed during her years as a child star.

While Lambert, Hendricks & Ross seemingly reflected a utopian ideal of an integrated American society, in actuality each member of the group faced unique challenges. Often referred to as the Poet Laureate of Jazz, African American lyricist and singer Jon Hendricks considers himself “a person who plays the horn without the horn,”⁵ yet he is known for his gift with words. Hendricks continually struggled to find his voice between language and music through vocalese. Furthermore—as will be discussed in [Chapter 6](#)—Hendricks was restricted in the places he was allowed to stay when touring with the trio because of racial discrimination. Annie Ross, a successful vocalese lyricist, quit writing once she joined the trio. Due to the social pressures of being the only woman in the group, she felt the most restricted in terms of creative agency. Not only did she quit writing lyrics, but also she never improvised with Hendricks or Lambert onstage. Ross staged a complex gender performativity as a white woman in a predominantly

³ Ella Logan was a film actress and singer best known for her role as Glory Wood in the 1938 Hollywood film *The Goldwyn Follies*. Logan was also known for her work in musicals such as the successful 1947 production of *Finian's Rainbow*, in which she introduced such popular songs such as “Old Devil Moon” and “Look to the Rainbow.” During the 1950s she worked primarily as a nightclub performer in such venues as the Copacabana and the Waldorf-Astoria.

⁴ No author, “Scotland’s Shirley Temple,” *BBC News*, February 21, 2012, accessed September 4, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-17119361>.

⁵ Jon Hendricks, interview by James Zimmerman, *Smithsonian National Museum of American History Archives Center*, http://www.smithsonianjazz.org/documents/oral_histories/Hendricks_Jon_Transcript.pdf (accessed September 30, 2014), 82.

African American male musical idiom.⁶ As the primary arranger for the group, Dave Lambert was a forerunner in transitioning vocal jazz from swing to bebop. He drew from the improvisational techniques of bebop instrumentalists and wrote out arrangements for vocal group entirely on scat syllables. Though he was accepted by musicians such as Charlie Parker, he often struggled to make ends meet in the music industry because his arrangements were so unusual, and often overly complex. Lambert struggled to find a way to translate the bebop language into the format of a vocal group. Though the individual paths of Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross were not easy, they together changed the sound of vocal jazz. This dissertation examines how the group used vocalese to intersect roles of voice and instrument in jazz in an attempt to validate the voice as equal to the instrument, as well as how the trio negotiated race and gender through their collective and individual voices. In a manner similar to Farah Griffin’s vocal “hinge,” Lambert, Hendricks & Ross used the voice to navigate their individual subjectivities in jazz, and their collective voice to represent a changing American society.

1.1 DEFINING VOCALESE

Characterized by the addition of lyrics to composed melodies and improvised instrumental solos, vocalese is a distinctive subgenre of vocal jazz. As will be discussed in [Chapter 1](#), the style

⁶ For useful discussions of gender and race in jazz, see Nichole Rustin and Sherrie Tucker, *Big Ears: Listening For Gender in Jazz Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Ingrid Monson, “The Problem with White Hipness: Race, Gender, and Cultural Conceptions in Jazz Historical Discourse,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 48 (1995): 396–422; and Kristin McGee, *Some Liked it Hot: Jazz Women in Film and Television, 1928-1959* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2009).

emerged in the late 1920s with Bee Palmer's vocal rendition of Bix Beiderbecke's "Singin' the Blues." But the term vocalese did not materialize until the 1950s. Jazz critic Leonard Feather is credited with coining the term in the January 28, 1953, edition of *Downbeat*, when reviewing Annie Ross' recording of *Twisted*.

Twisted uses the same technique originated by King Pleasure and employed by him for *Moody's Mood For Love*, but it begins where the latter left off. As the first performance in this genre that is both expertly written and expertly performed, it shows that this new vocal offshoot of bop may be the most important new development in jazz since bop itself. For want of a better word let's christen it vocalese (from the French vocalise, a vocal exercise).⁷

Finnish jazz scholar Seppo Lemponen describes the etymology of the term in more detail, as a combination of the French term *vocalise* and the suffix *-ese* that implies a type of language.

Lemponen elaborates,

In writings about European music, the French term *vocalise* (pronounced the same as *vocalese*) denotes the exact opposite, i.e. wordless singing comparable to scat. The term *vocalese* is also a pun on the verb *vocalize* and combines the ideas of a jazz vocal and a private language, indicated by the suffix *-ese*.⁸

Vocalese not only inverts the meaning of the French term, but also implies a complex layering of meaning that intersects language, voice, and instrument. The voice fulfills its traditional role by contributing language through lyrics, but it simultaneously takes on the qualities of an instrument by performing entire instrumental melodies and improvisations.

It is worth noting that in the current literature scholars often omit important aspects of the genre. In the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, for example, J. Bradford Robinson defines *vocalese* as, "A term for the practice of jazz singing in which texts (newly invented) are set to recorded jazz improvisations. The word is a pun on the term 'vocalise', combining the

⁷ Leonard Feather, "Feather's Nest," *Down Beat*, January 28, 1953, 17.

⁸ Seppo Lemponen, *Swing to Bop-Hep to Hip: A Study in Jazz Parlance* (Jyvaskyla: University of Jyvaskyla, 2001), 109.

ideas of a jazz ‘vocal’ and a private language (indicated by the suffix ‘-ese’).”⁹ What Bradford neglects to mention in his definition is that vocalese was specifically a lyricized replication of instrumental recordings both of the melody (i.e., the “head”) as well as instrumental solos. Elizabeth Barkley’s characterization of vocalese as an “instrumental style of scat with words” is equally imprecise.¹⁰ After all, “scat with words” is essentially an oxymoron, and as such her characterization of vocalese is more perplexing than it is illuminating. Hence, in addition to presenting a rigorous history of the group Lambert, Hendricks, & Ross, this dissertation also attempts to clarify what is unique and innovative about vocalese as an art form.

While solo singers had performed vocalese, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross were one of the first groups to perform in the idiom. For example, the most popularly recognized practitioners of the genre Eddie Jefferson and King Pleasure wrote lyrics to the recordings of saxophonists James Moody and Charlie Parker. Prior to the formation of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, no attempt existed to write words to an entire big band recording that included all instrumental parts, solos, and that captured the coherent narrative thread of the full performance. The combination of the trio’s personal strengths was truly one of a kind. Lambert’s expertise in arranging, Hendricks’ poetic genius, and Ross’ vocal range and virtuosity set them apart from their contemporaries. They were the first group to perform large-scale instrumental jazz with vocalese.

Aside from their technical precision in vocalese and lyrical wit, they also improvised extensively through scat singing. Scatting is the vocal equivalent of instrumental improvisation and implies that the voice can use non-lexical vocables to imitate instrumental sounds.

⁹ J. Bradford Robinson. "Vocalese," *Grove Music Online*, Oxford University Press, ed. Deane Root, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/subscriber/article/grove/music/50592>. (Accessed September 28, 2015).

¹⁰ Elizabeth Barkley, *Crossroad: The Multicultural Roots of American Popular Music* (London: Routledge, 2006), 136.

Contrastingly vocalese refers to the creation of lyrics that fit (as closely as possible) the melodies and solos of instrumentalists. Jazz scholar Andrew Clark articulates the importance of this distinction.

“Scat,” as a vocal strategy is the sound of the voice approximating an instrument...in vocalese, newly invented texts (lyrics) are set to already recorded jazz improvisations, so that jazz solos are reproduced in melodic and linguistic terms.¹¹

Unlike scat singing, vocalese singers duplicate recorded instrumental improvisations note-for-note, which anchors the voice to a pre-existing recording. While instrumental melodies and improvised passages are reproduced, the significance of vocalese lies in its creation of lyrics. Language is added to the music, creating new significations that will be discussed in further detail in [Chapter 2](#).

I argue in this dissertation that vocalese allowed Lambert, Hendricks & Ross to expand the role of the voice in jazz beyond the purveyor of the melody. Vocalese validated the voice by revealing that it could function in much the same way as jazz instruments. And yet, this is only half of the story. Their success was not only triggered by their unusual sound, but also by the unique demographics of the group. One of the only mixed gender and integrated groups of the late 1950s, I argue that the voice was the site at which Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross validated their subjectivities in jazz as well as the American social world. That is to say, their vocalese did not develop in a social vacuum but reflected the complex and convulsive American social climate.

¹¹ Andrew Clark, "Reetie Vouties with a Little Hot Sauce: Jazz and Language (vernacular, argot, hipness)," *Riffs and Choruses: A New Jazz Anthology*, ed. Andrew Clark (London: Continuum International, 2001), 320.

1.2 VALIDATING THE VOICE

Lambert, Hendricks & Ross employed an unorthodox approach to vocal jazz. Through vocalese they challenged the presumption of the limitations of the human voice in jazz by intersecting roles of voice and instrument. Traditionally, singers were confined to singing the melody and because of this critics and scholars often relegated vocal jazz to a subordinate and separate position from instrumental jazz. As Lara Pelligrinelli observes, vocalists in jazz are often viewed as inferior non-musicians, and even as mere ornamental props.¹² Hendricks describes the antagonism that he often experienced as a singer in jazz.

The important thing, whether you use words or not, is to try to think like a horn, which I've always done. As you know, there's an age-old antipathy between musicians and singers. Musicians don't want to hang around with singers! So I tried to sound as much like an instrument as I could, in order to get the cats to accept me.¹³

In using the voice as an instrument and by making that instrument speak through the addition of lyrics, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross attempted to validate the human voice by demonstrating its versatility.

In addition to the perception of the voice as inferior in jazz, it is also gendered as feminine, whereas instrumental music is perceived as masculine. Gender, therefore, plays a major role in the discrimination of singers. As will be discussed in more detail in [Chapter 3](#), the association of the voice with femininity is largely based on its alleged direct connection to the body. The assumptions surrounding the Cartesian dualism of the separation of mind as masculine

¹² Lara Pellegrinelli, "The Song is Who? Locating Singers on the Jazz Scene" (PhD Diss., Harvard University, 2005).

¹³ Feather, "Feather's Nest," 1953, 17.

and body as feminine are often at play in the perceptions of difference between voice and instrument in jazz. Since singing is created within the body, it is perceived as a natural and instinctive expression of femininity. Inversely, because instruments are external to the body, they are perceived as more technical and as bearing a closer connection to the mind. While this binary rests on a number of problematic assumptions, it is often reinforced in jazz through the differential treatment of singers and instrumentalists.¹⁴ It is assumed that singers are feminine, and they are expected to look pretty on stage in order to entertain the audience. Jazz scholar Sherrie Tucker succinctly describes this perception when she writes that singers are regarded as “trinkets to decorate the bandstand.”¹⁵ Certain jazz singers such as Anita O’Day often disassociated themselves from the stereotypes associated with women singers in jazz—what O’Day termed those “peaches-and-cream chicks”—by refusing to wear elaborate gowns, and by demonstrating their improvisatory capabilities through scat.¹⁶ By aligning herself with the perceived instrumental tradition of improvisation, O’Day attempted to move beyond the restrictive stereotype of the “chick” singer. Nonetheless, as Vickie Willis has argued, women are allowed to sing because they are still objectified by the male gaze. But if they play an instrument women begin to speak in the “man’s language” and therefore threaten his position of dominance.¹⁷

The complexities of gender and voice are acutely audible in the music of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross. Lambert and Hendricks attempted to validate themselves by aligning their voices as closely as possible with the male dominated instrumental idioms. The two men would

¹⁴ For examples of the perception of singers in jazz see common jokes that are posted on Phil Kelly’s jazz forum post. Phil Kelly, “Chick Singer Jokes,” January 27, 2004, <http://forums.allaboutjazz.com/showthread.php?3203-quot-chick-singer-quot-jokes>.

¹⁵ Sherrie Tucker, *Swing Shift: “All-Girl” Bands of the 1940s* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 57.

¹⁶ Larry Kart, *Jazz In Search of Itself* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 327.

¹⁷ Vickie Willis, “Be-in-tween the Space: The Location of Women and Subversion in Jazz,” *The Journal of American Culture* 31 (2008): 299.

often engage in lengthy scat battles to reveal their instrumental approach to singing, therefore distinguishing themselves from the more traditional and feminine stereotype of the singer. Annie Ross fit more closely within the traditional expectation of the voice, not only because she was a woman, but also because she frequently physically removed herself from the improvisatory space on stage. While the trio attempted to validate the voice as equal to the instrument in jazz, the gender dynamics of the group reveal that the process was not equal among all three members.

Despite these inequalities, the trio challenged the restrictive assumptions of the voice in jazz. Vocalese provided a compelling medium through which to challenge the perception of the voice as inferior by creating a line of intersection between instrumental music and language. The style demonstrated that the voice could not only sing the technically challenging melodies and improvisations of some of the top instrumentalists in jazz, but also that the voice had the unique capability of singing lyrics which told a coherent story. Language allows the voice to create new kinds of meaning that are not available to instrumentalists. One important aspect of vocalese is that when language is written to fit instrumental repertoire it connects audiences to the music in new ways. By telling a story through song, vocalese not only crosses musical and linguistic thresholds, but it also challenges the assumption of the inferiority of the voice by revealing its versatility. While instruments are capable of expressing meaning through improvisation—what Ingrid Monson calls “sayin’ something”—vocalese literally tells a story through adding lyrics to the music.¹⁸

By demonstrating that they could both sing the music of America’s most beloved jazz instrumentalists and improvise at a high level, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross repositioned the voice as an active and integral facet of the jazz ensemble. Jazz critic Ralph Gleason went as far as to

¹⁸ For a discussion of the communicative implications in jazz see Ingrid Monson’s famous work, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

suggest that the group's vocalese of Count Basie permanently altered the way one heard the Basie repertoire. Gleason proclaimed: "You can never hear the numbers they do again in the original version without mentally (or verbally!) singing the lyrics. The Basie band now sounds incomplete without the trio."¹⁹ Lyrics set to the iconic jazz repertoire connected audiences to music through language, while scatting added a new improvisatory texture to the sounds of the jazz ensemble. In situating the roles of the voice on a continuum between singing lyrics and improvising like an instrument, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross created a less restrictive space for singers in jazz and simultaneously demonstrated the unique strengths and capabilities of the voice.

1.3 INTERSECTIONS OF RACE AND GENDER

As one of the only integrated and mixed gender groups at the time, the vocal experimentations of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross can only be understood against the backdrop of the Civil Rights movement, in which all three members actively participated. As one of the most popular vocal jazz groups of the late 1950s, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross used their popularity to promote Civil Rights activism. They performed at several Civil Rights fundraisers (including the NAACP's Harlem Jazz Festival and banquets for the Urban League), and they donated their time to *Jet* magazine's telethon, which raised funds for the freedom riders that risked their lives to desegregate public buses throughout the Southern United States.

¹⁹ Ralph Gleason, Liner Notes, *The Swingers*, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, Pacific Jazz Records WP-1264, 1959, LP.

While Lambert, Hendricks & Ross were involved in Civil Rights activism, and on the surface appeared to represent the integrationist ideal, each member had to carefully navigate social expectations of race and gender. As the primary lyricist of the group, Hendricks blended the vernacular language of bebop musicians, while simultaneously quoting Shakespeare and other notable European writers. He used language to code switch between expectations of racialized language, and in doing so demonstrated the hybridity of his art form. While the press now describes Hendricks as a poetic genius, in early reviews of the group his name was routinely left out entirely—undoubtedly because he is black. Lambert and Ross—the two white members of the group—were effectively granted all the credit for the success of the group. As will be discussed in the reception chapter, against the backdrop of heightened racial tensions in the United States, the erasure of Hendricks’ name from early reviews of the trio, reveals the anxieties surrounding racial integration at the time. By leaving out Hendricks’ name, reviewers chose not to address the fact that the group was integrated because it was such a contentious topic at the time. Jon Hendricks experienced both subtle and overt discrimination as an African American man in a predominantly white music industry, even though he was a member of the hottest new group in jazz.

As a white female jazz singer, Annie Ross had to contend with issues of sexism. Having chosen a career in jazz during the 1950s and 60s, her situation was doubly complicated because of the intersection of race and gender expectations in the United States at the time. White women in jazz, according to Tucker, were perceived as overly sexual and a threat to the race and gender status quo.²⁰ As a white woman who performed with an integrated trio, Ross contended with the stereotypes surrounding the interaction between white women and black men. Jazz scholar Eric

²⁰ Sherrie Tucker, “‘But This Music is Mine Already!’ ‘White Woman’ as Jazz Collector in the Film *New Orleans* (1947),” *Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies*, 241.

Porter describes it as a sex taboo. He writes that the American perception of interaction between black men and white women was, “usually perceived in sexual terms, and this perception led to trouble.”²¹ Miscegenation was an ever-present social anxiety, and for segregationists fearful of miscegenation, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross was their worst nightmare.

While Lambert represented the dominant social position as a white male, he did not fit within the mainstream ideal. For one thing, he lived most of his life in poverty, and associated himself with the bebop movement in the 1940s. Lambert continually moved between social circles. Because he was a white man, he gained access to the music industry more easily, and worked as a studio arranger and session singer before joining forces with Hendricks and Ross. Yet, he was not very successful because he self-identified with bebop— a genre of music that scholars such as Ingrid Monson and Guthrie Ramsey refer to as an expression of afro-modernism.²² Bebop is generally understood as an art form created by African American artists as an alternative form of music that could not be coopted by the mainstream, white owned music industry in the 1940s.²³ The contentious position of the voice in jazz also complicated Lambert’s position. Because he wrote for the voice, he always remained somewhat on the outskirts of bebop’s instrument-oriented inner circle. Yet the voice is also precisely what distinguished Lambert since there were few people writing bebop for vocal ensembles at the time. Though Lambert was a studio musician, his experimentations in bebop navigated expectations of what

²¹ Eric Porter, *What is this Thing Called Jazz? African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 88.

²² See Guy Ramsey, *Race Music: Black Culture From Bebop to Hip-Hop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 96-130; Ingrid Monson, “The Problem with White Hipness: Race, Gender, and Cultural Conceptions in Jazz Historical Discourse,” *Journal of American Musicological Society* 48, no. 3. (1995): 396-422; and Amiri Baraka’s famous chapter, “The Modern Scene” in *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Morrow Press, 1963), 175-236.

²³ Alphonso McClendon astutely summarized the aspiration of African American jazz musicians who created bebop so that “it could not be copied by inferior white bands, which had benefited financially during the 1930s.” Alphonso McClendon, *Fashion and Jazz: Dress, Identity and Subcultural Improvisation* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 31.

the voice should sound like in jazz, and also what it meant for a white man to engage in the afro-modernist movement that was bebop.

As individuals, Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross each faced their own unique challenges. But as a trio they represented an important confrontation to segregationists. Having a white woman onstage next to a black man instigated fears of miscegenation, and for some the threat of retaliatory violence—bringing to mind the tragic murder of Emmett Till. Due to the controversial nature of the group— particularly among Southern audiences who continued to uphold anti-miscegenation laws until 1967— Lambert, Hendricks & Ross never felt safe enough to perform in the South. They were also restricted in the types of media platforms on which they were able to perform. In an interview that I conducted with the trio’s former drummer Jimmy Wormworth, he revealed that Lambert, Hendricks & Ross was only allowed to appear on syndicated television shows filmed for public broadcasting channels in predominantly northern cities.²⁴ His interview illustrated the social anxieties of race and gender integration at the time. America was not yet comfortable with having a black man and a white woman on TV together, nor onstage in the south.²⁵

Though they faced discrimination that limited where they could perform and on what platform, I argue that their demographics were also one of the reasons for their success. They won numerous Downbeat poll awards, and often placed high in popularity polls such as the Billboard Disk Jockey favorites.²⁶ They represented changing American social attitudes and

²⁴ Jimmy Wormworth, interview by Lee Martin, New York, NY, June 21, 2014.

²⁵ Phoebe Bronstein’s dissertation focuses entirely on television and restrictions of race in the United States during the 1950s. For an insightful discussion of southern segregationists and the impact on the television careers of African American artists such as Nat King Cole and Harry Belafonte see Phoebe Bronstein, “Televising the South: Race, Gender, and Region in Primetime, 1955–1980” (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 2013).

²⁶ No author, “Plum for Col. In Dave Lambert Group,” *Billboard*, August 10, 1959, 6.

served as an emblem of progressivity for audiences who supported integration.²⁷ In the wake of the Montgomery bus boycott victory and President Eisenhower's formal request that Congress pass the Equal Rights Amendment for women in the workplace, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross symbolized a new racial and gender horizon. The trio used its newfound success as a platform to promote integration by actively participating in Civil Rights fundraising events.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

Since two of the three original members of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross are still alive, oral histories make up a major portion this project.²⁸ Annie Ross and Jon Hendricks are walking jazz histories of the group. Between 2009 and 2015 I conducted several interviews with Jon Hendricks, which began as part of the research that I conducted for my master's thesis—an oral history of Jon Hendricks's formative years in Toledo, Ohio.²⁹ Having worked with Hendricks at the University of Toledo while completing my master's degree in vocal jazz performance, I developed a close relationship with him and his family. I have performed with him several times and have conducted many interviews with him, his wife Judith Hendricks, his daughters Aria and Michele Hendricks, and his sister Bonny Hopkins.

²⁷ The Hottest New Group In Jazz was the name of their fourth studio album, which was recorded in 1960 for the Columbia label. Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, *The Hottest New Group In Jazz*, Columbia CL1403, 1960, LP.

²⁸ Oral history has been excluded from IRB oversight at the University of Pittsburgh.

²⁹ Lee Martin, "Jon Hendricks, Father of Vocalese: A Toledo Story" (Master's Thesis, University of Toledo, 2010).

In the summer of 2014, I traveled to New York City to interview Kevin Burke (a member of Hendricks' singing group Jon Hendricks and Company), Tad Hershorn (archivist at the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University, who is currently assisting Annie Ross in writing her memoir), and I attempted to interview Ross. Unfortunately Ross declined my interview requests. However, while in New York I was able to consult her lengthy unpublished memoir, which is a part of the Annie Ross Collection, held at the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University. I also conducted interviews with Dave Lambert's daughter Dee Lambert, and his friend Bill Crow. My close connection with Hendricks has given me access to many of these individuals and put me in a unique position to undertake this study.

In order to examine the specifics of how the trio heard the instrumental recordings, and also how the lyrics were chosen for particular recordings, transcription and lyric analysis form an important part of this dissertation. Lyric analysis—which I employ primarily in the Hendricks chapter—reveals the particularities of culturally coded language hybridization. I pay special attention to the integration of bebop vernacular and American English, in order to examine how Hendricks fluctuates between the vernacular of jazz musicians and his interest in literary figures such as Shakespeare. I also examine how he uses lyrics to embed socio-political messages in his work, primarily focusing on issues of racism. In the Ross chapter I examine how Hendricks' lyrics imply expectations of gender, and how Ross either conforms or subverts these expectations with her voice.

Archival research and reception analysis are employed to reveal how audiences and the press viewed the group. By examining the media reception of the group from the late 1950s to mid 1960s, I uncover how the trio was ascribed value related to their demographics, and how this reflected changing views of race and gender. I investigated industry publications such as

Billboard, *Down Beat*, *Jazz Hot*, *Metronome*, and *Jazz Podium*, along with magazines marketed to primarily African American audiences such as *Ebony* and *Jet*. Many of these publications were consulted at the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University in the summer of 2014. Newspapers such as *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The New York Times*, and African American newspapers like the *Pittsburgh Courier*, *The Daily Defender*, *Chicago Daily Defender* and *The New York Amsterdam News* were also consulted. The reviews revealed the trio's political activism through their involvement with Civil Rights fundraising events and concerts. In the reception chapter I also discuss which publications chose to emphasize the demographics of the trio and which ones chose to avoid it entirely, in order to show who was talking about race at the time.

1. 5 OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation has a straightforward structure. The first chapter provides a historical account of the development of vocalese. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 offer case studies of each of the three members of the group—Hendricks, Ross, and Lambert—respectively. A final chapter examines the reception of the group as a whole. The concluding section of the dissertation examines the legacy of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross on vocal jazz groups today, and discusses possible avenues of future research. In what follows, I provide more detail on the content of each chapter.

In order to situate the significance of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, [Chapter 1](#) discusses the development of vocalese and traces its progression from the 1920s up to the formation of the

trio. By employing transcription and reception analysis, this chapter investigates the musical and social contributions of the early blues singers Bee Palmer and Marion Harris, two of the first vocalists to record vocalese. For both Palmer and Harris, vocalese created a unique position of agency for the white, female voice in jazz within a male dominated instrumental tradition. The chapter then transitions into a discussion of swing era vocal groups such as the Modernaires—who experimented with group arrangements of Bix Beiderbecke recordings on scat syllables—and the all-male African American group the Delta Rhythm Boys that lyricized famous instrumental jazz compositions such as “Take the A Train.” The chapter concludes with a discussion of the 1950s, the most popular decade for vocalese and examines the most prominent performers Eddie Jefferson and King Pleasure. This chapter illustrates that through vocalese the voice was never separate from the instrument in jazz but developed in an ongoing dialogue with new jazz trends.

The second chapter focuses on Jon Hendricks’ process of writing vocalese lyrics. The primary methodology consists of interviews with Hendricks and lyric analysis of his work. I applied these methods in order to examine how he affixes lyrics to music, and also what types of language he employs depending on the repertoire. Referred to as the “Poet Laureate of Jazz” or the “James Joyce of Jive,” Hendricks uses multiple linguistic frameworks and creates what Phil Ford describes as “hip intellectualism.”³⁰ A linguistic framework tied closely to music, Hendricks’ hip intellectualism creates language that is accepted within the jazz community (hence validating his voice as an insider), while simultaneously engaging those outside of jazz’s

³⁰ Phil Ford coined the term hip intellectualism as a subculture that rejects the mainstream. Hipness though effusive and transitory is an expression of self-awareness and individual alienation from the mainstream, which is expressed primarily through sound. Performed through dress, speech, and music, hip intellectualism in the context of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross was their blend of jazz vernacular language and virtuosic singing. In the context of the Hendricks chapter I use the term hip intellectualism specifically to discuss the use of vernacular and Standard English as markers of his hipness of language. For further discussion on post war American Hipness see Phil Ford, *Dig: Sound and Music of Hip Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

inner-circle. The importance of language for Hendricks is its appeal to a wide variety of audiences and also its communicative nature. He explains: “Anybody can go bla bla bla but lyrics build a bridge, they build a house, a structure with words.”³¹ Musical sound is given meaning through storytelling, which connects performers and audiences to jazz recordings on multiple levels. For Hendricks, the act of translating instrumental music into lyricized vocals is important because it adds a new dimension of meaning through language. His lyrics are an inclusive form of expression and the means by which he validates his voice as an active member of the jazz community.

The third chapter examines how Annie Ross performed gender by conforming to visual cues such as makeup and dress, on the one hand, and on the other using her voice to create a more expansive position for a woman in jazz. Ross demonstrated that the female voice could sing the solos of some of the top male instrumentalists of the time. For example, in the recording of “Down for Double” Ross sings all of the trumpet section. Even though she sings in the upper register of her voice, sonically situating her gender in traditionally ascribed registers of the female voice in jazz, she contradicts her performative gender by imitating a trumpet solo of a male instrumentalist.³² Depending on repertoire, Ross manipulates her timbre to create different vocal effects, and by demonstrating the fluidity of her voice also complicates essentialized notions of what a white, Scottish born, female jazz voice was supposed to sing and sound like.

The fourth chapter focuses on Dave Lambert as the primary arranger for the group. Beginning with his early experimentations of writing bebop for the vocal ensemble, this chapter examines the unique position of Lambert as a white studio musician who wrote in the afro-

³¹ Jon Hendricks, interview by Lee Martin, Toledo, Ohio, February 27, 2014.

³² For a discussion of the hyper masculinity of the trumpet in jazz see Krin Gabbard “Signifyin(g) the Phallus: ‘Mo’ Better Blues’ and Representations of the Jazz Trumpet,” in *Cinema Journal* 32, no.1 (1992): 43-62.

modernist aesthetic of bebop during the 1940s and 50s. Lambert was one of the first arrangers to write bebop for a vocal group, and in doing so reflected not only changes in jazz, but also challenged the perception of the white studio musician. As one of the first vocal bebop composers, Lambert's race and gender allowed him greater access to the white male dominated music industry. However, many of his recordings were never released because he wrote bebop, an idiom that the industry initially rejected. While on the surface he appeared as a traditional white studio musician, by choosing to sing and write bebop for the voice, Lambert moved beyond the limitations of white respectability through sonic and visual cues. He not only toured with an integrated trio that often performed extensive scat singing in the bebop idiom, but he also looked the part with his signature bebop goatee. Through his arrangement of bebop for the voice Lambert created an alternative subjectivity that challenged racial binaries.

The next chapter investigates the media reception of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross from 1957 to 1962, and argues that the expeditious success of the integrated group coincides with the rising prominence of the Civil Rights movement. According to Ingrid Monson this time period is critically important in understanding the connections between audiences, vocal jazz, race and gender in the United States.³³ Monson mentions concert performances for Civil Rights Fundraisers that Lambert, Hendricks & Ross participated in and demonstrates the advocacy of the group in attempting to fight for desegregation of schools in the South. Analysis of professional reviews as well as photos of the trio trace the reception of the group's demographics. For example, in early *Billboard* reviews of the group Jon Hendricks' name was consistently left out, while Annie Ross' gender was encoded by the press who frequently discussed her physical beauty instead of her vocal talent. Lambert, Hendricks & Ross attained

³³ Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call out to Jazz and Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

success despite the constrictive racial stratifications and social norms of gender ascribed to them by professional reviews. I argue that Lambert, Hendricks & Ross openly engaged in Civil Rights activism through the concerts that they chose to perform at, and their popularity created a platform for the group to visually and sonically represent integration.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE

By examining the vocalese of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, the uniqueness and social function of their music reveal the virtuosity and versatility of an art form that overlaps, sonic, social and linguistic boundaries. Vocalese is an understudied but important genre of vocal jazz that demonstrates how vocalists challenge their marginal status among instrumentalists as performers of melody. While this cannot undo centuries of prejudice, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross proved that in fact the voice could perform in the same way as the instrument. They challenged a widely held view of vocalists in jazz as inferior to instrumentalists.

In order to study the intersections between race and gender, and voice and instrument in the work of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, I draw from voice studies as well as from jazz scholarship. Studies of voice either tend to focus on the uniqueness and singularity of each voice—what Roland Barthes famously described as the “grain of the voice”—or else on the performance of a particular gender, racial, or cultural identity—for example Laurie Stras’ work

on vocal blackness.³⁴ However I am interested in the intersection between these two points. Along the lines of Farah Griffin's discussions of voice as, "a hinge, a place where things can both come together and break apart," this dissertation investigates the voice as a point of intersection between the individual and shared cultural expression.³⁵ In a similar vein, Mladen Dolar explains that "it is precisely the voice that holds bodies and languages together," that is to say, the voice is the site at which individuality and culture overlap.³⁶ Specific to jazz, I engage Lara Pellegrinelli's work on the marginalization of jazz singers vis-à-vis the instrumental tradition.³⁷ I argue that the trio employed the voice along an axis by moving flexibly from validating the voice as equal to an instrument to engaging race and gender issues in the United States at the time. Following Griffin, Dolar, and Pellegrinelli, I investigate how Lambert, Hendricks & Ross sang at the intersection of voice and instrument, and how they came to represent a new pluralized national landscape at a particularly significant historical conjuncture.

Lambert, Hendricks & Ross' influence as a group continues to be felt today. Their music inspired not only contemporary Grammy award winning jazz artists such as Kurt Elling, Al Jarreau, Manhattan Transfer, and the New York Voices, but their influence also extends to most university vocal jazz programs. I first discovered the music of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross while

³⁴ For a discussion of the particularities of individual voices see Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang) 1977; Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005); Will Friedwald, *Jazz Singing: America's Great Voices from Bessie Smith to Bebop and Beyond* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1992). Sources that discuss the voice as a performance of a cultural identity include Laurie Stras, "White Face, Black Voice: Race, Gender, and Region in the Music of the Boswell Sisters," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 1 (2007): 207-255; Grant Olwage, "The Class and Color of Tone: An Essay on the Social History of Vocal Timbre," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 13 (2004): 203-226; Nina Eidsheim, "Voice as a Technology of Selfhood: Towards an Analysis of Racialized Timbre and Vocal Performance" (PhD Diss., University of California San Diego, 2008); Lara Pellegrinelli, "The Song is Who? Locating Singers on the Jazz Scene" (PhD Diss., Harvard University, 2005).

³⁵ Farah Jasmine Griffin, "When Malindy Sings: A Meditation on Black Women's Vocality" in *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies*, ed. Robert O'Meally, et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 104.

³⁶ Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 60.

³⁷ Pellegrinelli, "The Song is Who?."

completing my Bachelor's degree in vocal performance at McGill University. As a singer I was attracted to their music due to its musical complexity and lyric wit. Lambert, Hendricks & Ross' arrangements taught me the skills as a young singer to communicate within the instrumental jazz language. My experience was not unique. As I have learned from attending several of Jazz Educators Network conferences and hearing numerous university vocal jazz groups perform the music of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, the group's music remains very influential in the professional and educational vocal jazz community.

The distinctiveness of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross on a broader social level came to represent integration and hope for modern American society in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Consider for example the trio's February 13, 1960 appearance on Hugh Hefner's syndicated television show, *Playboy's Penthouse*, during which they sang "Everyday I've Got the Blues" with African American jazz singer Joe Williams. Despite the taboo of a black man touching a white woman on television, Annie Ross put her arm around Joe Williams and by the end of the song the whole group had their arms threaded together.³⁸ Together they demonstrated that black and white men and women could not only perform together, but also that they could embrace on national television. This project asks the perennial question of who is allowed a voice, and offers a unique opportunity to study the political agency and plurality of these voices at a moment in time when the very question of whose voice matters—indeed, of whose life matters—is particularly critical in the United States.

³⁸ *Ebony* featured an article on Annie Ross' and Joe Williams' controversial embrace onstage at the Playboy Jazz Festival in Chicago. See John H. Johnson, "Photo-Editorial: Untouchables" *Ebony* 15 (December 1959), 90. For further discussion of the controversial nature of physical interaction between black men and white women on television refer to Dr. Phoebe M. Bronstein's analysis of Harry Belafonte and Petula Clark in her, "Televising the South: Race, Gender, and Region in Primetime, 1955–1980" (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 2013), 22–47.

2.0 THE DEVELOPMENT OF VOCALESE: A HISTORY OF THE VOCAL/INSTRUMENTAL INTERSECTION

Vocalese is often considered a subgenre of vocal jazz that emerged with King Pleasure's 1954 rendition of "Moody's Mood For Love" and peaked with Lambert, Hendricks & Ross during the late 1950s. However, the form actually has a much longer history. The voice from the beginning of jazz has been important in the development of the music, from Gene Greene's scat filled "King of the Bungaloes" recorded in 1911, to Louis Armstrong's well-known 1920s recording "Heebie Jeebies." While rarely discussed in the jazz canon today, vocalists were integral to the developments of jazz throughout each decade. Vocalists of such stature as Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan often took lengthy scat choruses demonstrating not only their ability to hold their own with instrumentalists but also the virtuosic capabilities of the human voice. As bebop emerged, arrangers such as Dave Lambert began writing bebop for the vocal ensemble and even recorded with Charlie Parker, while other artists such as Leo Watson, Slim Gaillard, and Babs Gonzales fused bebop vernacular and scat in compositions such as "Oop-Pop-A-Da" (composed by Gonzales and recorded by Dizzy Gillespie). Though numerous other vocalists employed their voices to sound like instruments, this chapter focuses specifically on the development of vocalese, in order to reveal that the form was not a 1950s flash in the pan but a genre with a rich history.

Beginning with a discussion of the earliest vocalese by blues singers of the late 1920s such as Bee Palmer and Marion Harris, I trace the beginnings of vocalese to the setting of lyrics to recordings by trumpeter Bix Beiderbecke. These early examples provided not only a space for the voice in an instrumental idiom, but also a unique position of agency for the female voice in a male dominated industry. Shifting to the emergence of swing and the vocal group as a popular genre, I trace the expansion of vocalese to groups such as the Modernaires, who sang entire choruses of Beiderbecke's improvisations with the Glenn Miller Orchestra. The Mills Brothers and the Delta Rhythm Boys helped usher in the vocal sounds of the swing era and were the first groups to emulate the sound of the big band with the voice. The chapter concludes with a discussion of vocalese's most popularly recognized period of the 1950s by tracing the contributions of Eddie Jefferson and King Pleasure. Both developed the commemorative trend of paying tribute to the instrumentalists within their lyrics. The history of vocalese reveals that vocalists in jazz were not merely melody singers, but equally capable of fulfilling instrumental roles, and that the voice and instruments were not separate but reciprocally influential to one another. In tracing the rich history of this genre, vocalese illustrates that vocal jazz developed in congruence with the changes in instrumental jazz, and that Lambert, Hendricks & Ross were an important facet of this complex history.

2.1 THE JAZZ AGE AND THE BEIDERBECKE CONNECTION

From the very beginning of jazz, the voice has been a flexible instrument, at times emphasizing lyrical content, while at other moments jettisoning ordinary language in favor of scat singing. The voice, as singers such as Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald have long shown is capable of perfectly executing jazz standards with lyrics as well as virtuosic improvisation. The voice, in short, has the ability to crisscross the line between Lindon Barrett's concept of the singing (the voice as abstract sound) and the signing voice (the voice as a source of language).³⁹ Drawing from Louis Armstrong's rich legacy of using the voice as an instrument in his famous recording of "Heebie Jeebies," to Gene Greene's scat filled scat-filled 1911 recording of "King of the Bungaloos," the voice was an integral part of the development of jazz.

It was within this context of vocal mutability and experimentation that an unlikely figure performed what we would today call vocalese. One of the first people to record vocalese was Bee Palmer (1894- 1967). She was a dancer and not a singer, and did not even consider herself a jazz artist. In fact she disliked the term jazz altogether. As the self-proclaimed inventor of the shimmy, Bee the "Shimmy Queen" Palmer's shoulders became even more famous than her singing voice in the 1920s. The shimmy, a dance that was characterized by rapid gyrations of the shoulders was made famous by Palmer, along with other vaudevillian entertainers of the 1920s such as Mae West and Gild Gray. The dance was immensely popular among younger generations

³⁹ Lindon Barret's concept will be discussed in more detail in [Chapter 2](#).

and came to represent an act of social rebellion against the repressive moral regimes of the Victorian era. Though Palmer disliked the term jazz, it became the soundtrack of the shimmy.⁴⁰

Known by the moniker of “The World’s Most Famous Shoulders,” Bee Palmer was an immensely successful vaudeville dancer and entertainer in the 1920s. Palmer appeared in the 1919 production of *Ziegfeld Follies* alongside premier entertainers of the time, such as Bert Williams and Eddie Cantor. In the show, her shimmy became immensely popular, so much so that *New York Times* columnist and poet Franklin Pierce Adams memorialized her with the piece, “On First Looking into Bee Palmer’s Shoulders.” Adams captured both the sensation and sensuousness surrounding Palmer’s career.

Bee Palmer has taken the raw, human—all too human—stuff of the underworld, with its sighs of sadness and regret, its mad merriment, its swift blaze of passion, its turbulent dances, its outlaw music, its songs of the social bandit, and made a new art product of the theater. She is to the sources of jazz and the blues what François Villon was to the wild life of Paris. Both have found exquisite blossoms of art in the sector of life most removed from the concert room and the boudoir, and their harvest has the vigor, the resolute life, the stimulating quality, the indelible impress of daredevil, care-free, do-as-you-please lives of the picturesque men and women who defy convention.⁴¹

Depicting Palmer as a hero of the underworld, and comparing her to Villon, a notorious French poet, Adams presents Palmer as a source of liberation from social convention. He reveals his perceptions of class surrounding jazz, by depicting Palmer as savior of jazz. Adams portrays Palmer as a woman who defies convention by appropriating and redefining jazz as a less primitive and lower class art form.

⁴⁰ For a more in depth information on the socio-cultural impact of the Shimmy in American popular culture see Rebecca A. Bryant, “Shaking Things Up: Popularizing the Shimmy in America,” *American Music* 20 (2002): 168-187.

⁴¹ Franklin Pierce Adams, “On First Looking into Bee Palmer’s Shoulders,” *Something Else Again* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1920), 41. Ralph Berton’s candid description Bee Palmer summarizes the perception of Palmer, by audiences and musicians of the late 1920s. Berton describes her as the “inventor of the shimmy, vaudeville headliner, a real blues singer...the Marilyn Monroe of her time, dazzling cream-white hair, incredible bosom, sexy sway and all, clad in a skin-tight silver gown that showed more than it covered...Bee’s reputation as a nymphomaniac was as big as her star billing.” Ralph Berton, *Remembering Bix: A Memoir of the Jazz Age* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000), 261.

Though Adam's depiction of Palmer was troubling due to its racist implications that jazz was in need of saving by a white woman, she did create a unique position of agency for herself in the male dominated entertainment industry dominated by men. Palmer's act challenged the very notions of femininity, and through jazz defied social conventions. Though Palmer was considered scandalous, she was one of the highest paid artists of the 1920s. *Billboard* reported that Palmer's wages exceeded "that of the President of the United States."⁴² Though she was highly popular for her form of jazz dance, she also broke new ground in vocal jazz.

Throughout the late 1920s Palmer was featured as a singer with the Paul Whiteman Orchestra, one of the most popular jazz orchestras of the decade, and due to their success on the road Paul Whiteman propositioned Palmer to do some recordings. Whiteman hired Ted Koehler to write lyrics, and Bill Challis to write a big band arrangement of Bix Beiderbecke and Frankie Trumbauer's 1927 recording "Singin' the Blues," for Palmer to sing. This tune was chosen because of its immense popularity. According to historian Steve Sullivan, Beiderbecke's "Singin' The Blues" was "the most-imitated solo of the 1920s, save for Armstrong's 'West End Blues.'"⁴³ Lester Young even mentioned the influence of the song on the development of his sound. Singing Koehler's lyrics, Bee Palmer became the first person to record vocalese.⁴⁴ She unknowingly started a trend of not only singing vocalese, but also singing Bix Beiderbecke recordings in particular.

As will be discussed later, Marion Harris, Bing Crosby, and the Modernaires would all record vocalese renditions of Beiderbecke's recordings. The choice of Beiderbecke as a popular

⁴² Edward Haffel, "Vaudeville: Bee Palmer," *Billboard*, October 21, 1921, 8.

⁴³ Steve Sullivan, *Encyclopedia of Great Popular Song Recordings* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 272.

⁴⁴ She was accompanied by Bill Rank on trombone, Frankie Trumbauer on c-melody sax, Chet Hazlett on Alto sax, Irving Friedman on clarinet, and tenor sax, Lennie Hayton on piano, Snoozer Quinn on guitar, Min Leibbrook on bass sax, and George Marsh on drums. For further information on the personnel, and other recording details see, Albert Haim, "Bix Beiderbecke Discography," The Bix Beiderbecke Memorial Society, accessed July 9, 2015, <http://www.bixsociety.org/discography/bixdisco1929.pdf>.

source of early vocalese further complicates the gender politics of the form. Though he was considered one of the most popular cornetists of the 1920s, bandleader Eddie Condon famously described Beiderbecke's sound as "a girl saying yes."⁴⁵ Writings about Beiderbecke often describe him as having a feminine sound, which complicates the argument that the trumpet was considered a hyper-masculine instrument. Krin Gabbard makes the point that the trumpet expresses "phallic masculinity along with a great deal of sexual innuendo."⁴⁶ What, then, are the implications of a woman singing the music of a man that sounds like a woman in sexual ecstasy? In singing the music of Beiderbecke, Palmer in a sense takes ownership of sexuality because she reveals that she does not need a man to create the sounds of the female orgasm. Instead of the sounds of Beiderbecke's trumpet representing masculine virility, Palmer's vocal recreation of his solo flips expectations of sexual dominance from the masculine realm and positions them within the feminine. Early vocalese reveals that performances of gender were not rigidly set between instrumentalists and vocalists but in a constant state of flux.

Drawing on a common theme found in blues lyrics of the 1920s, Koehler's lyrics to "Singin' the Blues" center on the theme of unrequited love. In an interesting display of gender reversal, Palmer sings the instrumental solos of Trumbauer and Beiderbecke but from a female perspective.

How can he stay away so long?
When he knows I never did him wrong
If he would only come back to his Bee-Bee
I'd hug him and kiss him,
I'd squeeze him and tease him,
And that's not all, that's not all I'd do
God only knows how much he means to me

⁴⁵ As quoted by Dennis McNally, *On Highway 61: Music, Race, and the Evolution of Cultural Freedom* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2014), 175.

⁴⁶ Krin Gabbard, "Signifying the Phallus: Representations of the Jazz Trumpet," *Representing Jazz*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 139.

My man I love him so,
Still I'm all alone
Now you know
And I want you to know I do
Guess I'll get myself a forty-four
Go boom, boom boom
(Scats eight bars)⁴⁷

Palmer improvises by paraphrasing the lyric and mentioning herself by name, creating agency in a space otherwise controlled entirely by men. Similar to the torch singer, Palmer implies in the lyric that she will take charge of the situation by arming herself with a forty-four caliber gun, to end her own suffering caused by her lover leaving. Yet it remains unclear as to whether she implies that she will do harm to herself, or to the person who is the subject of the lyrics. While on the surface the lyric seemingly fits within the prototypical blues ethos of lost love, by naming herself she not only adapts the original lyric but also personalizes them. Furthermore, she configures herself in a position of power by ending the stanza with herself in charge of the gun. In singing these lyrics, Palmer not only revealed the voice's capacity to function within an instrumental role, but also that instrumental repertoire could be translated into lyrics that create a position of agency for the female voice in jazz.

Though Palmer was the first to record vocalese, the recording was never released. The song was recorded on January 10, 1929, and was supposed to be part of the album entitled *Paul Whiteman Presents Bee Palmer with the Frank Trumbauer Orchestra*. The recording was deemed a failure and remained as a test pressing.⁴⁸ While some speculate that Palmer's "Singin' the Blues" was never released due to Palmer's inferior singing, I argue it had more to do with the unorthodoxy of a female vocalist, singing an entire instrumental solo of one of the most

⁴⁷ bsgs98, "Bee Palmer, Frank Trumbauer 'Singin' The Blues,'" *YouTube* video, 3:08, April 27, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8H4gY8hQgEs&ab_channel=bsgs98

⁴⁸ Richard Sudhalter and Philip Evans, *Bix: Man & Legend* (London: Quartet Books, 1974), 462.

influential male instrumentalists in jazz at that time. A recreation on an instrumental recording with lyrics was unheard of in the late 1920s, and a woman singing a lyric with a message of female agency was even more controversial.⁴⁹

The added complexity of her innovative contribution to vocal jazz is that she did not consider herself a jazz artist; in fact, she strongly disliked the term. In an interview with Jane Dixon —humorously titled “Take it From Bee, Jazzopate Yourself”— Palmer categorizes herself as someone who syncopates. “I’ve syncopated since I was a wee kiddie,” she told interviewer Jane Dixon. Palmer then continued:

There is a vast difference between syncopation and just jazz. Jazz is a lot of noise. It is a sort of an all-over-the-place affair brassy and loud. Syncopation is rhythm, moving the body in perfect harmony with the tones of the music. My specialty is syncopation. Jazz doesn’t appeal to me at all.⁵⁰

Even though she had a reputation as a provocateur onstage, she purposefully disassociated herself from the label of jazz due to the stigma surrounding the term. Scholars such as Alan P. Merriam and Bradley H. Garner have discussed in detail the different theories of the etymology of the word jazz, and one of the most prevalent theories is that the term described vulgar acts of sexual intercourse.⁵¹ Though she toured with some of the biggest names of jazz at the time and was even hired to accompany the Original Dixieland Jazz Band on a tour in England, Palmer considered jazz as nothing more than noise.⁵²

While Palmer was certainly an unorthodox and socially rebellious woman, she attempted to

⁴⁹ For a discussion of why the recording was not released see Richard Sudhalter, *Lost Chords: White Musicians and Their Contributions to Jazz 1915-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 456-457.

⁵⁰ Bee Palmer as quoted by Jane Dixon, “Take it From Bee Palmer Jazzopate Yourself” *Los Angeles Sunday Times*, November 2, 1919, 42.

⁵¹ Alan P. Merriam and Bradley H. Garner, “Jazz—The Word,” *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, ed. Robert G. O’Meally (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 21.

⁵² Palmer fell ill at the last moment and was not able to accompany the Original Dixieland Jazz Band on the tour. For further reference on the popularity of Palmer see Rebecca A. Bryant, “Shaking Things Up: Popularizing the Shimmy in America,” *American Music* 20 (2002): 168-187.

legitimate her rendition of the “Shimmy” as more respectable than other dancers, and she did so by disassociating herself from the term jazz altogether. The press reinforced Palmer’s claims, by categorizing her dancing as a more respectable iteration of the shimmy. *Variety* described Palmer’s dancing as a “refined shimmie act,” which was, “less vulgar than many other such turns: The undulating oscillations and nerve control of the involuntary muscles, particularly the pectoralis, major and minor are...remarkable.”⁵³ By disassociating her from the term jazz and evading the sexual reference of the breasts by referring to them as exceptionally dexterous pectoral muscles, the press veiled the physicality of Palmer’s performance in terms of her athleticism instead of sexuality, and purposely disassociated her dance from the jazz connotations.

Palmer’s self-distancing from the term jazz reveals what George Lipsitz has famously termed “the possessive investment in whiteness.”⁵⁴ By separating herself from the category of jazz and its cultural legacy as an African American art form, Palmer attempted to legitimate her art by distancing herself from social categories of blackness. She invested in her whiteness in order to maintain her position of social dominance. By distinguishing herself as separate from markers of African American culture she attempted to protect her position of privilege as a white woman. The irony of her self-exclusion from categories of blackness associated with jazz, and the shimmy dance, was that that these were the very categories for which she became famous.

Audiences were drawn to Palmer because of the fact that her art moved between categories of high and low social circles. She even described her own work as a folk art form.

The shimmy is not a shaking of shoulders as so many think. The real dance, as done by colored dancers, is a movement mostly of the hips. The word originated with the title of a

⁵³ As quoted in William Howland Kenney, *Chicago Jazz: A Cultural History, 1904-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 69.

⁵⁴ George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998)

colored ragtime tune popular about two years ago. It is really a folk dance, and is very funny as executed by the colored dancers at one of their typical shakedowns. Under native conditions it loses all of its vulgarity.⁵⁵

What is fascinating about her description of the Shimmy is the way she reverses social binaries. She prioritizes the shimmy as a “native dance,” implying in this case that a folk tradition often considered low class art in actuality is more respectable than institutionalized high society dancing, or the modernized, entertainment version of the dance. Yet she contradicts herself because she problematizes blackness. By describing the dance as performed by colored dancers as funny she reveals her racist position. She separates herself once again from the colored dancers, and presents herself as a white, albeit folk alternative, dancer who moves without vulgarity. She reveals her perspective that the dance only loses its vulgarity when performed by a white woman. While Palmer’s investment in whiteness was successful for her dance career, unfortunately she was not as lucky with her vocalese career. Palmer’s recording of “Singin’ the Blues” was not released, and her legacy as the first woman to record vocalese went for the most part unnoticed. While her vocalese was unsuccessful, she unknowingly started a trend among early jazz singers to experiment with singing Bix Beiderbecke’s music.

A few years later another white blues singer by the name of Marion Harris (1896-1944) recorded a different vocalese version of “Singin’ the Blues” on August 2, 1934. According to vocal jazz historian Will Friedwald, Harris recorded “Singin’ The Blues” in London, and attained more popularity for the song than Palmer.⁵⁶ Harris was considered one of the first popular white, female blues and jazz singers of the 1920s. She was a tremendously popular vaudeville performer and blues singer who was often mistaken as African American in early recordings due to her adeptness at singing in the blues idiom. Abbe Niles wrote of Harris that she

⁵⁵ Dixon, “Take it From Bee Palmer Jazzopate Yourself,” 42.

⁵⁶ Friedwald, *Jazz Singing*, 233.

sang the blues with such authority, “that thousands of Negroes make a point of buying her records, under the impression that she is one of them.”⁵⁷ Although she was born in Indiana the press often printed that she was born in Kentucky, and used this story as a means of validating her sound as black. For example, *The Washington Post* printed a story on the origins behind the development of Harris’ sound. “Like most Southern children she had a colored mammy, from whom she learned how to sing darky melodies. While at school in Rockford, Illinois, it was discovered that she possessed talent for singing Southern songs, and later went to Chicago to sing in motion pictures.”⁵⁸ Unlike Palmer, who purposefully disassociated herself from African American culture, the press often used race as a way to market Marion Harris as an authentic blues singer, by connecting her with African American vocal traditions.

By singing blues and jazz, Harris not only found a means to create a successful career for herself, but she also became a role model to many young women. According to historian William Kenney her work, “gave voice to the young socially progressive female in many of her popular recordings... Harris’s jaunty urbane manner captured for repeated listening new social possibilities awaiting single women working in the big cities.”⁵⁹ Harris became a popular voice of the 1920s, appearing on records and even in film shorts for MGM in 1928 where she was labeled the “Song Bird of Jazz.”

While she was considered the songbird of jazz, her vocalese lyrics to “Singin’ the Blues” were anything but an example of bird-like delicateness. Drawing on the theme of violence inspired by infidelity, Harris’ lyric to “Singin’ the Blues” is much more overt in its theme of

⁵⁷ Abbe Niles, “The Blues,” *Frontiers of Jazz*, ed. Ralph de Toledano (Bretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1962), 55.

⁵⁸ No author, “Marion Harris,” *The Washington Post*, January 16, 1921, 57.

⁵⁹ William Howland Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 103-104.

violence than Palmer's. According to feminist historian, Hazel Carby, "The rage of women against male infidelity and desertion" is a common theme that is found in many blues lyrics, and Harris' lyric is certainly no exception.⁶⁰ Harris' "Singin' The Blues" has both an overt theme of violence and an assertion of power.

...I'm gonna go and get myself a great big gatlin' gun
And I'm gonna shoot you, dead, dead, dead
I'm gonna send a lot a bullets through you' head
And if they send seventy detectives after me
All they're gonna' hear is bad ol' news
'Cause they won't give a hoot
After they've heard the reason why
I was compelled to shoot
Oh me, oh my your mama's
Got those can't refuse
Shootin' blues.⁶¹

Similar to Palmer's lyrics, Harris references weaponry, however she up's the stakes. Instead of Palmer's reference to a forty-four, Harris sings that she will get a Gatling gun, a rapid-fire predecessor of the machine gun. Unlike Palmer, who implied violence with the word "boom," Harris outwardly states that she will shoot her lover dead—and even describes the gruesome physicality of the act when she sings about putting bullets in his head. Compared to Palmer, Harris is much more overt and visceral in her depiction of violence.

Though her lyric is violent, Harris constructs an unusual position for herself within the lyric. As a woman, she not only depicts herself as attaining an extremely large weapon, but also openly speaks about drinking just after prohibition ended in 1933, both considered taboo topics for a white women to sing about at the time.

⁶⁰ Hazel Carby, "It Just Be's Dat Way Sometime: The Sexual Politics of Women's Blues," *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, ed. by Robert G. O'Meally (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 478.

⁶¹ Transcribed from Marion Harris, "Singin' The Blues," *Marion Harris Complete Collection 1925-1934*, Decca F-5160. To listen to the piece visit, "Marion Harris Collection 1925-1934 Complete," Internet Archive, accessed June 14, 2015, <https://archive.org/details/MarionHarrisCollection1925-1934Complete>.

I'm singin' the blues
Because I just can't be gay since you've gone
I drank a whole ocean of gin
Ou what a sin!
But couldn't drown the sorrows
By drinkin' that bad ol' gin
Ain't nobody can do, do,
Anything that'll bring peace of mind
You're the oneliest man I know
That can love a gal and leave
You're the hit and run kind...⁶²

Comparable to the excessive violence of her lyrics, she also describes excessive drinking. She does not just drink gin, but an ocean of it. The theme of this stanza also has interesting implications when applied to the original soloist, Bix Beiderbecke. A notorious alcoholic himself, Beiderbecke died at the age of 28 in 1931, and many speculate that alcoholism played a significant role in his early demise.⁶³ Since Harris wrote these lyrics four years after his death, she eerily reflects on the personal torments of Beiderbecke. She translates the literal suffering of Beiderbecke and reconfigures it as a source of empowerment against the repressive moral regimes of feminine respectability of the time.

Through vocalese lyrics, both Palmer and Harris broke out of the role of female, domestic respectability, and instead revealed their assertiveness in a public arena. These initial examples of vocalese drew on the themes of classic blues lyrics and were examples of female empowerment, often found in the blues.⁶⁴ Palmer and Harris' lyrics performed an alternative display of 1920s and 30s femininity, in which women were capable of exacting revenge. Early vocalese revealed that women could not only sing the music of male instrumentalists, but that

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ See Jean Pierre Lion, *Bix: The Definitive Biography of a Jazz Legend (1903-1931)* (New York, Continuum, 2005).

⁶⁴ Angela Davis argues that, "the blues woman challenges in their own way the imposition of gender-based inferiority. When she paints blues portraits of tough women, she offers psychic defenses and interrupts and discredits the routine internalization of male dominance." As quoted in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Random House, 1998), 36.

they could use the music as a space to create agency for themselves through lyrics.

But blues women were not the only people who wrote vocalese to Beiderbecke's playing—in the 1920s, a young crooner by the name of Bing Crosby (1903- 1977) also briefly experimented with adding vocalese into some of his repertoire. A personal friend of Beiderbecke and Trumbauer, Crosby studied their music and learned to use his voice as an instrument through imitation. According to Crosby biographer Richard Grudens, “Crosby, Beiderbecke, and Bill Challis would practice singing and playing around the piano in a speakeasy,” and “they would work out musical concepts and suggest vocalizing strategies to Bing, which, he absorbed, then subsequently used later.”⁶⁵ From his interactions with Beiderbecke and Trumbauer, he phrased melodies like an instrumentalist, and through the microphone created a more dynamic and expressive form of singing than the previous vaudevillian singers of his generation. According to Gary Giddins, what distinguished Bing Crosby was how he used the microphone like an instrument. Crosby understood the technology and the possibilities of subtlety, dynamics, and tone color of the microphone, which made him one of the most distinctive singers of the 1930s. The microphone allowed Crosby to create what Tony Bennett described as “the art of intimacy,” where Crosby's singing felt more like a private conversation with the audience than a loud and declamatory performance.⁶⁶

In 1925 Bing Crosby along with Al Rinkler and Harry Barris formed a vocal trio called the Rhythm Boys that toured with the Paul Whiteman orchestra, which became immensely popular for its instrumental approach to the vocal ensemble. Due to his unique sound, Crosby was the lead singer of the trio. Their recording of “Mississippi Mud” became one of their biggest

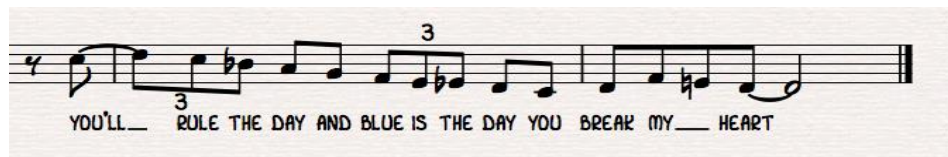
⁶⁵ Richard Grudens, *Bing Crosby: Crooner of the Century* (Stony Brook, NY: Celebrity Profiles Publishing Company, 2003), 106.

⁶⁶ “Tony Bennett's Art of Intimacy,” Narrated by Scott Simon, Weekend Edition Saturday, *NPR*, October 28, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/2011/10/29/141798505/tony-bennetts-art-of-intimacy>.

hits and was considered a novelty because of its blend of language, scat, and harmony. The piece not only begins with scatting, but at one point in the song they sing the lyric, “they don’t need no band they keep time by clappin’ their hands.”⁶⁷ Their sound and their lyrics implied that the voice could take the place of the instruments. The Rhythm Boys were popularly recognized for their instrumental approach to the voice.

Crosby eventually experimented with vocalese as a solo artist in the early 1930s. His 1934 Decca recording of popular song “Someday Sweetheart” composed by John and Benjamin Spikes, features a lyricized quote of Bix Beiderbecke’s solo from “Way Down Yonder In New Orleans.” Crosby sang,

[Figure 2.1](#) Bing Crosby, “Someday Sweetheart”⁶⁸



This phrase was directly inspired by Bix Beiderbecke’s ending phrase that is pictured below.

[Figure 2.2](#) Bix Beiderbecke, “Way Down Yonder in New Orleans”⁶⁹



⁶⁷ The lyrics were first recorded on Harry Barris, *Mississippi Mud/ From Monday On*, Paul Whiteman and his Orchestra, Victor, 21274, 1928, Shellac.

⁶⁸ Bing Crosby “Someday Sweetheart,” Originally recorded August 8, 1934. In *Bing Crosby and Some Friends*, Decca Jazz. Grd-603, 1991, CD.

⁶⁹ Bix Beiderbecke, “Way Down Yonder in New Orleans,” Originally recorded May 13, 1927. In *Bix & Tram*, Parlophone. Pmc-7064, 1929, LP.

As can be seen in the above examples, Crosby takes liberties with the second note of the triplet pattern, and he also alters the last bar to include more chromaticism. However the phrase is distinctly a vocalese of Beiderbecke's phrase with minor variation. Both songs end the same way, with a high F on vibraphone. While Crosby only quoted the last two measures of Beiderbecke's solo, by writing lyrics to the phrase he contributed to the early development of the genre.

One of the first vocal groups to more overtly experiment with early permutations of vocalese was the Modernaires. Though they sang primarily on scat syllables, they were one of the first vocal groups to recreate entire choruses of popular instrumental recordings. They helped to modernize this type of signing by not only replicating instrumental solos more precisely than the previous examples, but also by harmonizing solos for four voices. Initially a trio formed of Hal Dickinson (1913- 1970) who sang lead and second tenor, Bill Conway (1914- 1991) who sang the baritone, and Chuck Goldstein (1915- 1973) who sang first tenor, the group had many names before settling on "The Modernaires." Originally known as the "The Three Weary Willies" in 1935, they changed their name to the "Don Juan, Two and Three" during their early performances around New York, and when working with the Ozzie Nelson band in 1936, they were known as "The Three Wizards of Ozzie." By the end of 1936 they recruited Fred Waring (1900- 1984) to add a fourth voice to the group. According to journalist Daniel Foster, that is when they settled on the final name for the group after Hal Dickinson saw a "Modernaire Heating and Air Conditioning" advertisement in a New York subway car. The name was a fitting descriptor for a group that helped to formulate the sound of big band vocal harmony. Foster writes,

Perhaps the new name, “The Modernaires” helped the group land a 10-year contract with the Glenn Miller Band in 1939. But undoubtedly it was the tight, inside chords the group introduced, a sound that caused listeners to tilt their heads in wonder like the beagle in the RCA gramophone trademark “His Master’s Voice.”...The astounding harmonies were arranged by Modernaire singer Bill Conway who had a musical mind that was just out on cloud nine someplace.... he came up with sounds that were just not done by other groups.⁷⁰

Drawing on the popularity of other vocal groups such as The Mills Brothers during the early 1930s—who are discussed in more detail below—the Modernaires experimented with vocal harmony as a means to recreate the instrumental sounds of the big band. By listening to recordings repeatedly the group worked out that each voice could sing an instrument section of the big band and create a more modern sound through close voicings. Jazz singer Mel Tormé described The Modernaires arrangements as “bordering on genius.”⁷¹ Using a vocal ensemble to recreate big band harmony was extremely novel in the early 1930s. The Modernaires’ use of vocal harmony was unprecedented at the time.

The Modernaires discovered that they could use their instrumental background to their advantage when forming a vocal group. Ralph Brewster sang first tenor and played trumpet, and Bill Conway sang bass and played guitar. Chuck Goldstein recalled: “Hal was the lead singer, but could only sing the melody. I could sing both upper and lower harmony. Bill would sit with his guitar and we would learn our songs working together in our own special harmony.”⁷² Paul Whiteman eventually hired them to record and perform on his weekly radio show as the vocal ensemble of his orchestra in 1938. The group was popular on the radio, as well as in theater and club shows, and became known for their high male vocal lead and modern voice leading that was

⁷⁰ Daniel Foster, “The Singers Change, but the Harmony of ‘The Modernaires’ Still Resounds,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1988, R22.

⁷¹ As quoted by Ian Carr, *The Rough Guide to Jazz*, (London: Penguin Random House, 2004), 552.

⁷² Richard Grudens, *Chattanooga Choo Choo: The Life and Times of the World Famous Glenn Miller* (Stony brook: Celebrity Profiles Publishing, 2004), 166.

primarily arranged by Bill Conway.

In 1938—the same year that the Modernaires joined the Paul Whiteman orchestra—they recorded a wordless scat arrangement of Bix Beiderbecke’s solo from the song “I’m Coming Virginia.” Though they sang the entire solo on scat syllables, this was an important development in vocalese, because they recreated Beiderbecke’s solo almost exactly. This was one of the most vocally accurate renditions of an instrumental solo recorded up until this point, and was the first harmonized vocal arrangement of an instrumental solo. Though they only harmonized Beiderbecke’s solo, their work foreshadowed what Lambert, Hendricks & Ross would become famous for in the late 1950s, mainly group singing of instrumental music.

The song, “I’m Coming Virginia” was first made popular by blues and vaudeville singer, Ethel Waters in the Broadway production of *Miss Calico* that premiered in 1927. Donald Heywood composed the music and Will Marion Cook wrote the lyrics. According to David Jansen, “I’m Coming Virginia” was a source of success for several artists including Ethel Waters, as well as Paul Whiteman and the Rhythm Boys. However, Jansen writes that, “The jazz favorite was by Frankie Trumbauer and His Orchestra, featuring cornetist Bix Beiderbecke (Okeh 40843)... It remains a Dixieland Standard.”⁷³ Beiderbecke biographer Jean Pierre Lion revealed that Beiderbecke decided to record the song because of his interest in Ethel Waters’ recording.⁷⁴ The Modernaires memorialized Beiderbecke’s solo by recreating the first chorus with their voices.

In Beiderbecke’s original recording, he begins with an eight bar introduction performed by a guitar, clarinet trio and muted trumpet, followed by Jack Teagarden’s trombone cadenza which leads into the statement of the melody. The form of the song is 24 bars plus a pickup in an

⁷³ David A. Jassen, *A Century of American Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 96.

⁷⁴ Lion, *Bix: The Definitive Biography*, 144.

AAB form. Each phrase of the melody is eight bars long. Teagarden states the melody in the key of A major followed by a key change to F major, where he then improvises for a chorus. Bix Beiderbecke then takes the third chorus, and he leads the fourth and final chorus out with melodic and rhythmic embellishment.

The Modernaires recording begins with a four bar introduction performed by a clarinet trio of the Paul Whiteman orchestra, and is in a much more pronounced swing style than the original Beiderbecke and Trumbauer recording. The introduction concludes with a lengthy trombone cadenza played by Jack Teagarden, at which point the melody is stated in A major and performed on trombone with a steady four beat backing by piano, bass, and drums. The full big band then plays a four bar key change transition to set up the Modernaires entrance in F major. The vocal group begins singing Beiderbecke's solo almost verbatim, except for a few rhythmic variations and the harmonized aspect of their rendition. While the group sings Beiderbecke's solo, Teagarden plays elaborate background fills. As can be seen from the transcription below in [Figure 2.3](#), the Modernaires used primarily closed voicings to create the sound of tight vocal harmonies, and they particularly liked to employ six chord voicings and dominant seventh chords. Their choice of "r" and "l" based syllables was somewhat unusual for the 1930s, but it was a part of their modern sound.

Figure 2.3 The Modernaires, “I’m Coming Virginia”⁷⁵

I'M COMING VIRGINIA
THE MODERNAIRES

RA DAH DOO DAT DAH LAH LOO LAH LOH LAH DAH DAH BOH DOO DAH AH

5 OU RA DL A DOH LAH DAH DAH WAH DOO WAH LAH DAH DAH DAH DOH DOH DAH

9 LAH DAH DAT DOO DAT DAT DAH LAH DAH DAH DAH DOH DOO DAT DOH DAH DAH

13 DAH DL DAH DL DAH DOO DAT DAT DAT DAH RAH DL DAH DL DAH DOO DOH RAHT DOH DOH

17 RAHT DOO DAT DAT DAH RAH DL OH DL DAH DL DAH DL DAT DAT DAH

21 LAH DAH DAH DAH DOH DAH DAH LAH DL DAT DOH DOO DL DAH DAH DAH LAH DL LAH DL LAH

The Modernaires rendition of “I’m Coming Virginia” was the most advanced vocalese of the late

⁷⁵ Transcribed from The Modernaires, “I’m Coming Virginia,” In *Paul Whiteman’s Swing Wing*, Decca 2145, 1938, LP.

1930s and they became leading figures in vocal jazz of the swing era. The group would go on to record some of the most famous songs of the 1930s with Glenn Miller orchestra, including “‘Chattanooga Choo Choo,’ ‘Don’t Sit Under the Apple Tree,’ and ‘I’ve Got a Gal in Kalamazoo.’”⁷⁶ Together they helped foster the development of group vocal recreations of instrumental recordings.

2.2 SWING VOCAL GROUPS, JIVESTERS, AND ELLINGTONIA

Big band vocal groups became so popular during the swing era that they began taking off on their own. The Mills Brothers was one such popular group that garnered significant acclaim for its recreation of famous instrumental recordings. All born between 1911 and 1915, the four brothers in the group grew up imitating instruments with their voices as a novelty act in their hometown of Piqua, Ohio. Their father was also in a barbershop group with his brothers called “The Kings of Harmony,” the Mills Brothers consisted of John C. Jr., (1912-1989) who sang bass and played guitar, Harry Flood (1913-1982) who sang baritone, Herbert (1912-1989) who sang tenor, and Donald (1915-1999) who sang lead tenor. According to historian James Maher, the Mills Brothers were not only immensely popular but they, “turned everything upside down. Before the Mills’, no one imagined that a vocal group could fit in so well with the jazz and hot dance music of the early thirties...it wasn’t only the kids that loved them, it was everybody’s

⁷⁶ Grudens, *Chattanooga Choo Choo*, 166.

entire family.”⁷⁷ The Mills Brothers were the first vocal group to come up with the idea of using multiple voices to mimic an entire jazz ensemble, and the novelty of their act was an intergenerational success.

They created their signature sound by arranging large ensemble instrumental jazz for four voices. The bassist John Jr. played the role of a four-piece rhythm section all by himself by playing guitar and humming bass notes. Herbert imitated the saxophone section, and Harry Mills created his signature muted trumpet sound by cupping his hands over his mouth. Donald most often sang lead and would imitate either brass or reed instruments as needed. They were first recognized nationally when they were offered a regular spot on Cincinnati’s WLIW radio station. According to Will Friedwald they sang scat arrangements of instrumental hits, which sounded so much like the originals that audiences often assumed they were listening to instrumentalists.⁷⁸ They were so proficient at vocal imitation of instruments that many of their recordings included the statement: “No musical instruments used on this recording other than one guitar.”⁷⁹ They were soon offered a CBS radio show in 1930, and became the first African Americans to have their own network radio show.

Their first hit record was their vocal rendition of the New Orleans Dixieland fixture, “Tiger Rag,” which featured scat syllables as well as lyrics. The song was a number one hit for four weeks by the end of 1931.⁸⁰ According to the *New Journal and Guide* their song, “became one of the first phonograph records to sell over a million copies.” The article described the Mills

⁷⁷ James Maher as quoted in Will Friedwald, *A Biographical Guide to the Great Jazz and Pop Singers* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 336.

⁷⁸ Friedwald, *A Biographical Guide to the Great Jazz and Pop Singers*, 337

⁷⁹ “The Mills Brothers: The Anthology 1931-1968,” narrated by A.B. Spellman and Murray Horwitz, *NPR*, August 1, 2001, <http://www.npr.org/artists/15404424/the-mills-brothers>.

⁸⁰ For further details on the success of the recording see William Ruhlmann, *Breaking Records: 100 Years of Hits* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 64.

brothers as “the nation’s favorite quartette.”⁸¹ “Tiger Rag” was the group’s most successful recording. Baritone Harry Mills recalled the development of their arrangement of “Tiger Rag,” telling the *New York Times* that they heard the song performed by a brass band in Piqua, Ohio. He recalled, ““They used to play this fast little tune that didn’t have words. We found out it was called ‘Tiger Rag.’ That’s how we got the idea of trying to sound like a band.””⁸² Using their signature muted brass sound, The Mills Brothers’ arrangement begins with lyrics loosely based on the title, and then transitions into harmonized scat. They sing the lines “hold that tiger,” and “where’s that tiger?” repeatedly, before Harry scats a chorus of muted trumpet. The group then reintroduces the opening them to end the piece. While the recording only lasts a little over ninety seconds, it was the first of its kind.

Following the success of “Tiger Rag” they continued to record mostly jazz repertoire, and even when they performed spirituals or popular songs, they often quoted popular instrumental repertoire within their recordings. For example in the middle of their rendition of “Lazy Bones,” the Mills Brothers directly quote Jimmy Noone’s “Apex Blues,” which is illustrated in the transcription below.

⁸¹ No author, “Mills Brothers Due in Norfolk With ‘Caravan,’” *New Journal and Guide*, November 8, 1952, 23.

⁸² As quoted in Friedwald, *Jazz Singing*, 175.

Figure 2.4 The Mills Brothers, “Lazy Bones.”⁸³

The image shows a musical score for the song "Lazy Bones" by The Mills Brothers. The score is titled "Full Score" and "As Performed by the Mills Brothers". It features four vocal parts: TENOR 1, TENOR 2, BASS 1, and BASS 2. The music is in 4/4 time and G major. The lyrics are "ba da da da da da dah" and "ba bah bah...". The score includes a "Muted trumpet sound" and various musical notations such as triplets and rests.

The first tenor (Donald) sings the exact melody played by Noone and the bass (John Jr.) doubles the melody down two octaves, while the second tenor (Herbert) sings the original countermelody, which was originally played by Joe Poston on the alto saxophone. Singing Noone’s melody and harmonizing it for four voices, the Mills Brothers quote of “Apex Blues” in “Lazy River” revealed that they were not only well versed in jazz repertoire, but that they could also successfully incorporate the instrumental jazz sound into genres such as spirituals, the blues and other popular music.

Aside from quoting instrumental repertoire they also recreated entire instrumental jazz recordings and adapted them for voice. In particular, they recorded several vocal renditions of Duke Ellington popular compositions, including “It Don’t Mean a Thing if It Ain’t Got that

⁸³ Transcribed from The Mills Brothers, “Lazy Bones/Nagasaki” Brunswick, TB 1298, Shellac, 1933.

Swing,” “Caravan,” and “Doin’ the New Low Down.”⁸⁴ The Mills Brothers’ rendition of Ellington’s “Caravan” recreates the vocal qualities of Ellington’s use of muted brass, with four voices. Originally composed by Juan Tizol, “Caravan” was recorded in 1936 by Barney Bigard and His Jazzopaters and was considered an emblem of Ellington’s Jungle sound. Characterized by Sam Nanton’s muted trombone and Bubber Miley’s wah-wah muted trumpet, Ellington’s jungle sound was recreated by the Mills Brothers in their 1938 recording of “Caravan.” They sing entirely on scat syllables, with John Jr. singing a walking bass line and the rest of the brothers recreating the muted brass sound by singing plosive scat syllables. Though they do not add lyrics, when one hears the recording one can hear the lineage of influence that led up to Lambert, Hendricks & Ross.⁸⁵ The attention to recreating not only the notes played by the instrumentalists but their timbre is astonishing, and at the time helped to expand the role of the voice beyond the purveyor of the melody.

Drawing on the success of the Mills Brothers, another vocal quartet that was popularly known for singing instrumental jazz repertoire during the late 1930s was the Delta Rhythm Boys. Described by vocal scholar Tony Fletcher as, “Less overtly pop than the Mills Brothers and Ink Spots, less obviously gospel than the Charioteers of the Golden Gate Jubilee Quartet, and celebrated as pioneers of the early forties form of African American swing known as jive,” the Delta Rhythm Boys were an important group in the development of vocalese because of their

⁸⁴ They also recorded a Broadway number from the revue *Blackbirds* that was “Diga, Diga Doo,” with the Ellington orchestra. Ellington did not write the song, but performed the piece regularly during his tenure at the Cotton Club. For more information on the history of “Diga Diga Doo” see Don Tyler, “I Can’t Give You anything But Love (Baby) and Diga Diga Doo,” *Hit Songs 1900-1955: American Popular Music of the Pre-Rock Era* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2007), 155.

⁸⁵ Lambert, Hendricks & Ross also recorded a rendition of *Caravan* with lyrics by Jon Hendricks in 1960. See Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, “Caravan,” *Lambert, Hendricks & Ross Sing Ellington*, Columbia, CS 8310, 1960, LP.

addition of jazz vernacular lyrics into their vocal renditions of instrumental repertoire.⁸⁶ Because they were a vocal group that added lyrics to instrumental recordings, the Delta Rhythm Boys were the closest iteration of vocalese to that of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross.

Directed by bassist and lyricist Lee Gaines, the Delta Rhythm Boys became known for their lyricized arrangements of Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn compositions, as well as blues and Negro Spiritual recordings. A versatile act, they appeared in more motion pictures than any other vocal group in history. According to Jay Warner they were featured in 15 films from the early 1940s until 1956.⁸⁷ While they were not as widely popular as groups like the Ink Spots or the Mills Brothers, what distinguished the Delta Rhythm Boys was that they experimented with lyricized group arrangements of vocalese.

Originally formed at Langston University in 1934 and moved to Dillard University in 1936, the Delta Rhythm Boys became one of the most popular vocal groups of the swing era. Lee Gaines (1914-1987) created a quartet with Carl Jones (1919-2010) who sang tenor, Traverse Crawford (1916-1975) who sang second tenor, and Kelsey Pharr (1917-1961) who sang baritone.⁸⁸ As the director and bass singer of the group Lee Gaines not only wrote many of the arrangements, but he often sang lead. Gaines was known for his expansive lower range, so much

⁸⁶ Tony Fletcher, *All Hopped Up and Ready to Go: Music from the Streets of New York 1927-1977* (New York: Norton & Company, 2009), 48.

⁸⁷ Jay Warner, "The Delta Rhythm Boys," *American Singing Groups: A History from 1940s to Today*, (New York: Hal Leonard, 2006), 24.

⁸⁸ The Delta Rhythm Boys then transferred to Dillard University in New Orleans because of their interest in working with Dr. Frederick Douglas Hall (1898-1982), a nationally recognized choral director and organist. Quickly gaining recognition around New Orleans, they were offered a three-month—which was extended to seven months—contract with Argentinian Radio Splendid after the host of the show Adolpho Avaliz heard them perform at Dillard. When they returned from their tour, according to the *Los Angeles Sentinel* the quartet, "broke into the record market in 1939, after appearing in the Broadway musical 'Sing Out the News,' with the help of composer and pianist Eubie Blake."⁸⁸ Working with Blake—one of the most widely recognized African American composers of jazz and musical theater—the Delta Rhythm Boys soon performed in Broadway productions such as *Hellzapoppin'* and *The Hot Mikado*. By 1942 they were the house vocal group for the "Amos and Andy" radio show.

so that the *Los Angeles Sentinel* described his voice as “having no bottom.”⁸⁹ Like the Mills Brothers, the Delta Rhythm Boys used no instruments and relied entirely on the vocal quartet to create their distinctive instrumental sound. The Delta Rhythm sound was characterized by Gaines’ voice on lead in an extremely low register, with the remaining members singing backgrounds on a combination of scat syllables and lyrics.

The most important contribution to the development of vocalese that the group contributed was the writing of lyrics to entire instrumental recordings, with arrangements for the vocal group. The Delta Rhythm Boys were one of the first groups to combine these two approaches in vocal jazz. Lee Gaines wrote the majority of the lyrics, and as a lyricist often described his affinity for writing lyrics to Duke Ellington’s music. Gaines felt that he could “catch the Duke’s mood more quickly.”⁹⁰ Similar to later vocalese lyricists such as Jon Hendricks and Eddie Jefferson, Gaines described the importance of choosing music that spoke to him when writing lyrics. For Gaines, Ellington’s music already had lyrics embedded within it and was thus easily decipherable.

An example of Gaines’ lyrics to one of Ellington’s most popular recordings of all time, “Take the A Train,” reveals not only his skill in arranging instrumental music for voice, but also his clever use of the jazz vernacular of the time period. Recorded in 1941 for Decca Records, the Delta Rhythm Boys recordings of “Take the A Train” was the first example of group vocalese, what Lambert, Hendricks & Ross would become famous for sixteen years later.⁹¹ As can be seen in the following transcription, the piece begins with Gaines singing melody in his signature low register.

⁸⁹ No author, “Delta Rhythm Boys-Come Home,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 26, 1980, B10.

⁹⁰ No author, “‘Just Squeeze Me’ Zooms Lee Gaines To Top As Writer,” *New York Amsterdam News*, January 18, 1947, 21.

⁹¹ Delta Rhythm Boys, “Take the A Train,” Decca 8578, 1941, Shellac.

Figure 2.5 Delta Rhythm Boys, “Take the A Train”⁹²

The image shows a musical score for the song "Take the A Train" by Billy Strayhorn, performed by the Delta Rhythm Boys. The score is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 130. It features four vocal parts: TENOR 1, TENOR 2, BASS 1, and BASS 2. The lyrics are "You must take the A train to" and "choo choo choo" repeated in various patterns. The score includes chord markings: C⁶, D⁹(#11), and Dm⁷. The bass part includes the lyrics "You must take the A train to" and "choo choo choo" repeated in various patterns.

In a clever play off of the title of the piece, the opening vocal backgrounds feature the syllable “choo,” to imitate the sounds of a train. Typical of many of their recordings, the group breaks into two textures with Gaines on melody, and the rest of the group on scat backgrounds. Another texture often used in juxtaposition to Gaines on melody with backgrounds, is either unison or harmonized statements of the melody by the entire ensemble.

One of the most dynamic instances of ensemble statement of the melody in their recording of “Take the A Train” occurs on the bridge of the song when they harmonize the melody with Gaines on an extremely low ostinato figure.

⁹² Transcribed from Ibid.

Figure 2.6 Delta Rhythm Boys, “Take the A Train”⁹³

The image shows a musical score for the song "Take the A Train" by the Delta Rhythm Boys. It is a "Full Score" for measures 17 through 20. The score is written for four staves: a vocal line for the first tenor (top), a vocal line for the second tenor (second), a vocal line for the bass (third), and a piano accompaniment line (bottom). The lyrics are: "Hur ry_ get on board its com in'_ lis- ten_ to those rails a thrum min_ all a". Above the first tenor staff, the chords are indicated as Fmaj7, D9, Dm9, G9, and G7(b9). The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes.

At this point, the melody is transferred to the first tenor, and Gaines fulfills the more traditional role of singing chord tones. Gaines sings the root of the F major 7 chord and then moves up chromatically to the third of the D chord four measures later. Due to the extremely low register of Gaines' part, the vocal harmony sounds expansive—particularly when compared to other vocal groups such as the Modernaires—and is one of the more dramatic moments within the piece.

True to the practice of vocalese, the Delta Rhythm Boys also lyricized and sang Ray Nance's trumpet solo from the original Duke Ellington Orchestra recording of the song, which lasts a total of 24 bars. They sing the solo in unison with octave displacements between the bass and the tenor. Gaines' lyrics reinforce the imagery of not only riding the A train, but also describe the pleasures that await the rider in Harlem, the cultural mecca of jazz.

You take your baby to Harlem,
You're bound to find a hall
Up on Sugar hill

⁹³ Ibid.

Where everyone's havin' a solid ball.
You board daddy train
And then you ride till you dig this number,
One Forty Five Street,
Where all the Cats meet
Posin' on the stroll
Pops are really in there.
Ba du dl ba du dl ba du dl day
That's the riff that the bands all play.
'Tis Groovy the hep cats say
Then you know that you're in Harlem.⁹⁴

Typical of the vernacular jive of the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Delta Rhythm Boys describe the joy and exuberance of the music scene in Harlem. They describe the intellectualism of the jazz culture in Harlem when they sing, "tis groovy, the hep cats say," meaning those knowledgeable of the jazz scene in Harlem will find enjoyment. Towards the end of the solo, in a play off of the boundaries between music and language they finish the solo with the scat phrase "Ba du dl ba du dl ba du dl day," and in the next line rhyme their scat syllables with actual words singing, "that's the riff that the bands all play." In this fusion of language and scat, they reveal that the boundary between music and language is almost non-existent in vocalese.

Where they differ from the original instrumental recording is in their concluding chorus. The Delta Rhythm Boys modulate to E flat for dramatic effect and end on a descending chord suspension that is not in the original recording. The Delta Rhythm Boys sing the following ending.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Figure 2.7 Delta Rhythm Boys, “Take the A Train”⁹⁵

12
101 Fm7 Bb13 Bb7(b13) Eb6
hur - ry get a - board that train
hur - ry get a - board that train
hur - ry get a - board that train
hur-ry get a - board that train

Compared to the tag ending of the main melody used by the Ellington orchestra, the Delta Rhythm boys use a sequence of widely voiced chord suspensions— sung at a loud volume— to signal the end. Though there are variations between the original instrumental recording and the vocal rendition, this was one of the first lyricized and harmonized arrangements of not only a popular instrumental melody, but also an improvised solo.

Aside from “Take the A Train,” Gaines also wrote lyrics to other Duke Ellington repertoire. According to the *New York Amsterdam News*,

Their initial success came from their teaming on ‘Take the A Train,’ previously an Ellington favorite as an instrument number. Next came ‘Just a-Sittin’ and a-Rockin’, another Ellington instrumental to which Gaines applied the lyrics months after it originally was written.⁹⁶

Their 1945 rendition of Ellington’s “Just A-Sittin’ and A-Rockin’” was, according to the *Afro-American*, “one of the nation’s most popular numbers.”⁹⁷ Two years later they had another hit recording of Ellington’s “‘Just Squeeze Me, But Don’t Tease Me,” with lyrics written by Gaines. Soon recognized not only for his seemingly bottomless range, but also for his lyric writing,

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ No author, “‘Just Squeeze Me’ Zooms Lee Gaines To Top As Writer,” January 18, 1947, 21.

⁹⁷ No author, “‘Sittin’ Pretty, Too,” *Afro-American*, June 29, 1946, 8.

Gaines was featured in a *New York Amsterdam News* article that described his lyric writing process for “Just Squeeze Me, But Don’t Tease Me.”

Lee Gaines, baritone with the famous Delta Rhythm Boys sat alone in his hotel room one evening last spring listening to a rather ancient recording by the incomparable Duke Ellington. It was titled ‘Subtle Slough’—one of the lesser known numbers in the Duke’s musical ‘Jump for Joy,’ staged here several years ago. The versatile Gaines got one of his sudden inspirations. The slow haunting rhythm of the tune reminded Gaines of a capricious lass, who in a flirtatious mood amused herself by teasing her harassed lover. As is his custom, Gaines played the number over and over—meanwhile jotting down lyrics as they popped into his mind. On this case, he revised a passage here and there, working all night on his new inspiration. The following day he sent his completed work to his friend Duke Ellington for official sanction...The song was published and immediately became a distinct hit. Thus was born ‘Just Squeeze Me, But Don’t Tease Me,’ the third Ellington-Gaines hit song.⁹⁸

Originally entitled “Subtle Slough” from Ellington’s musical “Jump For Joy,” Gaines composed a lyric in a rather unorthodox manner. He began by changing the title of the piece and then constructing a theme around the new title. Most vocalese lyricists discuss the importance of the title as an inspiration to the theme of their lyrics, however Gaines constructed his own title. Centered on the theme of a lover’s unwanted provocation, Gaines interprets the sentiment of the original title “Subtly Slough” which according to Ellington meant an understated brush off, and embeds it in his own title and lyric content by centering the theme of his lyric on a teasing relationship.⁹⁹

Guitar, piano, bass and drums play the introduction, and then the quartet states a close voiced harmonized arrangement of the melody on the following lyric.

Treat me sweet and gentle
When you say goodnight,
Just Squeeze me

⁹⁸ No author, “‘Just Squeeze Me’ Zooms Lee Gaines To Top As Writer,” 21.

⁹⁹ For further information on Ellington’s composition and the meaning behind “Subtly Slough” see Eddie Lambert, *Duke Ellington: A Listener’s Guide* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1999), 102.

But Please don't tease me¹⁰⁰

Aside from the difference in title, the timbre that the vocal group uses is much different than the instrumental recording. Unlike the Mills Brothers that attempted to recreate the sound of the ensemble by manipulating the timbre of their voices to sound like instruments, the Delta Rhythm Boys used a more traditional vocal timbre when singing Ellington's music through the addition of lyrics. Singing Rex Stewart's muted trumpet solo on the bridge, Lee Gaines does not recreate the aggressive wah wah texture of the trumpet mute with his voice, but clearly enunciates his lyrics, and uses a warm tone with vibrato at the end of phrases. The Delta Rhythm Boys transformed Ellington's music through lyrics, and the use of more traditional vocal timbres that clearly delivered the words, whereas the Mills Brothers used their voices to recreate the instrumental timbre by singing primarily on scat syllables. Another major difference from the instrumental to the vocal rendition of "Just Squeeze Me, But Don't Tease Me," is the tempo. The Delta Rhythm Boys sing the song much slower, in order for the listener to be able to understand the lyrics.

As an early vocalese lyricist Lee Gaines' writing process is described in almost the same way that Jon Hendricks would describe ten years later.

His method is simple. He locks himself in his room, pulls out his portable record player and proceeds to steep himself in the music of instrumental numbers until one song strikes his fancy. He plays that particular number over and over, calling upon his naturally poetic mind for suitable words until, hours later, free flowing lyrics result. Thus operates one promising young lyricist who has just arrived!¹⁰¹

Discussed in more detail in [Chapter 2](#), a common description of Jon Hendricks' writing process is the free flowing of lyrics that occurs only after the music is listened to repeatedly. For Gaines

¹⁰⁰ Transcribed from Delta Rhythm Boys, "Just Squeeze Me, But Please Don't Tease Me," Decca 23771, 1941, Shellac.

¹⁰¹ No author, "Just Squeeze Me' Zooms Lee Gaines To Top As Writer," 21.

and other lyricists lyrics were already embedded within the music. The process of listening to a recording over and over again until one hears the words emerge from the instrumental is a common description of the most distinguished vocalese lyricists. Yet, the term vocalese would not emerge until the early 1950s.

2.3 BEBOP AND THE NAMING OF A VOCAL GENRE

From the ‘scat singing of Louis Armstrong through the ‘stream of consciousness’ jive of Leo Watson, the inanities of Slim Gaillard, the later ‘scat’ of Dizzy Gillespie, Babs Gonzales and Dave Lambert, jazz singing has evolved to the particular brand of King Pleasure, a style which has produced and influenced others such as Annie Ross and Eddie Jefferson.¹⁰²

Vocalese was certainly not new in vocal jazz, however there was not yet a name for the technique. Ira Gitler referred to it as the “King Pleasure brand” of signing. In *Metronome* magazine Pleasure described his approach to singing as blowing. “I’ve been blowing all my life. They call my singing every kind of thing, but to me it’s blowing. Almost all musicians try to sing through their instruments and I do the same thing. Only my instrument is a voice to start off with.”¹⁰³ According to jazz critic Liam Keating vocalese as a term and a genre was not recognized until the 1950s. Keating writes,

Throughout the ‘forties Eddie Jefferson had experimented with this medium, but purely on a non-commercial basis, and the general public were unaware of this form of singing (known as vocalese) until 1951 when King Pleasure (Clarence Beeks) won a contest at the Apollo Theatre, Harlem, with a version of *I’m in the Mood for Love*, in which he portrayed James Moody’s tenor solo with his own lyrics.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Ira Gitler, Liner Notes to *Pleasure Sings: Annie Ross Sings*, King Pleasure and Annie Ross, Prestige 7128, 1952, LP.

¹⁰³ King Pleasure as quoted by Bill Coss, “Your Pleasure: King Pleasure Profile,” *Metronome* (July 1954), 12.

¹⁰⁴ Liam Keating, “The Dave Lambert Singers,” *Jazz Journal* 15, (1962): 1-2.

As discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, it was not until 1953 that jazz critic Leonard Feather coined the term vocalese. While King Pleasure was popularly recognized as the inventor of vocalese, his words to “I’m In The Mood For Love” were actually written by jazz vocalist and dancer, Eddie Jefferson. According to jazz scholar, Bill Milkowski, Pleasure heard Eddie Jefferson “sing his vocalese version of Moody’s masterpiece at the Cotton Club in Cincinnati,” and quickly committed the entire piece to memory.¹⁰⁵ To make matters worse, Pleasure claimed the lyrics as his own creation. Pleasure’s hit record ushered in the seemingly new trend of vocalese in jazz.

While Pleasure was popularly recognized as the inventor of vocalese, a tap dancer and singer from Pittsburgh named Eddie Jefferson (1919-1979) had already experimented with writing words to bebop recordings in the 1940s. Touring in vaudeville circuits and later singing on a local radio show with his brother in Pittsburgh, Jefferson recalled that in the late 1930s he, along with his dance partner Irv Taylor experimented with adding lyrics to instrumental solos. They began improvising on scat syllables but as Jefferson recalled, scat singer Leo Watson suggested that Jefferson sing lyrics. “He had taken (scat) about as far as it could go and he advised me to sing lyrics. You know, like you could still improvise but do it with lyrics.”¹⁰⁶ While Jefferson claimed that he invented vocalese, earlier recordings reveal that he was not first to experiment with the form, yet he was certainly prolific in the genre.

According to saxophonist Richie Cole— who worked with Eddie Jefferson in Detroit— Jefferson had an incredible ability to find words in the music.

He just had such a great ear that he would memorize—especially off the records that he would hear, over and over—he’d memorize a solo... He would memorize the solo and put

¹⁰⁵Bill Milkowski, “James Moody: Playing with the Changes,” *Jazz Times* (2004): 58.

¹⁰⁶ Milkowski, *Swing It: An Annotated History of Jive* (Collingdale, PA: Diane Publishing Co., 2001), 121.

in words to every note of the solo, which is very difficult. He could rap that thing out real fast. Every note would have a word, you know. He would just spit that stuff out.¹⁰⁷

Similar to Lee Gaines, Jefferson's lyrics emerged with repeated listening to a recording, and once he knew the solo from memory the words—according to Cole—emerged from Jefferson incredibly fast.

For Jefferson, the reason that he was capable of writing lyrics so quickly was because he heard stories embedded in the music. All he had to do was write them down. If he did not fully understand or could not decipher the entire story, when possible, he would ask the musicians directly about the concept behind their recordings.

I conceive of the whole story first. I mean, if I get a chance to talk to the person, like particularly Charlie Parker, I ask him when he recorded that tune, or about what was happening with his domestic life, then I write the words from there. But usually the music tells a story of its own, you know what I mean? There's got to be something where I can hear the story or I don't write. Bird was always melodic to me, and Moody, I would hear stories from them.¹⁰⁸

Jefferson wrote lyrics to recordings that spoke to him. Similar to a historian, Jefferson researched the background of the instrumentalist and the particularities of their lives that impacted their recordings, before he created a lyric.

While other singers had written vocalese prior to Jefferson, he was responsible for developing the commemorative trend of the form that emerged in the 1950s with other lyricists such as Bob Dorough.¹⁰⁹ Some of his early experimentations with vocalese that revealed his

¹⁰⁷ Richie Cole, interview with Aaron Hill in Trenton, NJ, Wednesday December 6, 2000.

¹⁰⁸ Carol Crawford, "Eddie Jefferson, Vocalese Giant," *Jazz Magazine* (1978): 46-47.

¹⁰⁹ Bob Dorough (1923-) is a pianist, vocalist, vocalese lyricist, and composer. In the early 1950s he worked with vocalese lyricist and singer Blossom Dearie. His debut album *Devil May Care* recorded in 1956 features his most well known vocalese of Charlie Parker's "Yarbird Suite." His lyric discusses biographical information about Parker and describes Parker as one of the most influential figures in jazz history. He is most famously known for his work on the children's educational animation program *School House Rock* from 1972-1986. Dorough continues to perform and record. In 2013 he released *Bob Dorough Duets*, which was part of a fundraising project for COTA, the Celebration of the Arts Jazz Festival in Pennsylvania, which sponsors a jazz camp and youth big band. The album featured the New York Voices Phil Woods, Heather Masse, Janis Siegel and others. Dorough was most recently

tendency to pay tribute to musicians by naming them directly within his lyrics included a lyric to Lester Young's solo on Count Basie's "Taxi War Dance" in 1939. While the lyrics were never recorded Jefferson claimed that he set lyrics to "the Lester Young and Herschel Evans solos. I sang it for friends but nothing ever came of it and I don't know what became of the lyrics."¹¹⁰ In the same year he also wrote lyrics to Leon Brown "Chu" Berry's solo on Cab Calloway's recording of "Ghost of a Chance," however they were never recorded. Part of the reason why he was not successful with his vocalese sooner was because of his career. He argues, "I was a dancer during those days and I did those things strictly for kicks."¹¹¹ It was not until the early 1950s that Jefferson pursued a career in vocal jazz more seriously and that he became known for his vocalese. After meeting James Moody at the Apollo Theater in 1953, Jefferson joined Moody's band as the featured vocalist and remained with Moody until 1962. Throughout the 1960s until his death he frequently worked with saxophonist Richie Cole. Though his vocal range was limited and he did not have the strongest articulation when he sang his lyrics, he created the trend of praising the jazz masters in vocalese.

Another distinctive characteristic of Jefferson's lyrics that separated him from earlier lyricists was his affinity towards lyricizing saxophone solos.

I heard the saxophone, that sound was in my ear. It seemed like I could hear more stories. It was very easy for me to write lyrics to players like Lester Young and Herschel Evans because they only did short solos, never over sixteen bars, maybe Basie would let them have a chorus. Bird's things were harder to do, so were Flip Phillips... It was more complicated but it was more of a challenge.¹¹²

featured on the 2015 *Royal Bopsters Project*, a vocalese tribute album recorded by Darmon Meader, Amy London, Holli Ross, and Dylan Pramuk. For further information on Bob Dorough see Garry Giddins, "Hipper Than Though (Bob Dorough)," *Weather Bird: Jazz at the Dawn of its Second Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 248-250. See also, Friedwald, *Jazz Singing*, 237-38. For a brief Dorough discography see Scott Albin, "The Dozens: Essential Bob Dorough," accessed February 6, 2016, <http://www.jazz.com/dozens/the-dozens-essential-bob-dorough>.

¹¹⁰ Eddie Jefferson as quoted by Milkowski, *Swing It*, 121.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Eddie Jefferson as quoted in Kirk Sillsbee, "An Interview with Eddie Jefferson," *Coda*, 174 (1980): 10-11.

Referring to the more expansive and virtuosic soloists of the bebop era, Jefferson describes the increased challenge of writing lyrics to Charlie Parker and Flip Phillips solos. While Parker was more difficult to write lyrics to, he was one of Jefferson’s biggest sources of inspiration. Jefferson recalled the impact that Charlie Parker had on him as an artist. “So I heard Charlie Parker and I said, ‘uh oh this is it!’ He inspired me very much...so like “Now’s the Time” I hurried up and put lyrics to that.”¹¹³ Lyrics to Jefferson functioned to not only capture the essence or feeling of a recording, but they also historicized and canonized the jazz instrumentalists that he deemed important.

Eddie Jefferson’s lyric to “Now’s the Time” is an example of his memorialization technique. Recorded in 1958 Jefferson’s lyric is paeon to Parker.

[Figure 2.8](#) Eddie Jefferson, “Now’s The Time”¹¹⁴



¹¹³ Eddie Jefferson, “Interview with Gallery 41,” accessed June 15, 2015, <http://www.gallery41.com/JazzArtists/EddieJefferson.htm>.

¹¹⁴ Transcribed from, Eddie Jefferson, “Now’s the Time,” *The Jazz Singer*, Inner City Records IC 1016, 1968, LP.

Jefferson accurately recreated the melody played by Parker and then lyricized his entire solo, as an homage to his excellence. His lyrics to Parker's solo are more overt in their praise of the artist.

When I heard the Bird
He was certainly makin' history down on 52nd Street
The musicians were scratchin' their heads an' goin' on
You should o' dug 'em
They were wonderin' how you goin' on so fast and all the time really swingin'
Oh Yes Siree!...
When he start to play
Charlie Parker had a whole lot a soul...¹¹⁵

He portrays the misunderstanding that surrounded Parker during his lifetime, and attempts to canonize Parker, through praising his playing. Written after Parker's death, Jefferson describes Parker's impact in radicalizing jazz when he sings, "The musicians were scratchin' their heads and goin' on." He alludes to the awe that other musicians felt upon hearing Parker perform. In the final chorus he describes Parker's contribution as "a different kind of sound." Jefferson's memorialization of instrumentalists in his lyrics tends to come across as a reference list of who's who in jazz, and he idolizes musicians in an extremely positive light.

Jefferson idolizes not only people but also places. In the first chorus of "Now's the Time" he situates Parker on 52nd Street, and in the second chorus references Parker's debut in New York in 1942. Known as "The Swing Street," 52nd Street was where some of the greatest jazz musicians performed regularly. Important clubs such as the Onyx Club, The Three Deuces, and the Hickory House were all located on 52nd Street and became the incubators for modern jazz in

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

the 1930s and 40s.¹¹⁶ In the 1940s one often heard Charlie Parker, along with Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, and Billie Holiday perform on 52nd.

An example of the important of place in Jefferson's lyrics is most apparent in his vocalese lyric to Coleman Hawkins' "Body and Soul."

Dixieland or jazz it made no difference
Everyone in Europe really loved him
In Germany, in gay Paris
Ach ja, and oui, oui
All his fans in Sweden love him
Place no one above him
Here in the USA
I've heard 'em say
Ol' Hawk is still the man!
He had his own band of folks
In all lands...
And in New Zealand music lovers are still talking
About Coleman Hawkins¹¹⁷

True to Jefferson's lyrical style, "Body and Soul" depicts Coleman Hawkins as an international legend. He legitimates Hawkins based on his European prestige and his popularity in places as far flung as New Zealand. Many of Jefferson's lyrics idolized instrumentalists he deemed as American cultural icons because he felt that jazz music and the musicians were not as well known in the United States, and he felt that it was his duty to preserve what he considered was America's cultural contribution to the world.

Language was the means through which Jefferson preserved the music. For Jefferson lyrics preserved the music of instrumentalists, because they helped audiences to remember the music.

I felt that with the lyrics maybe, they would stay alive a little longer because you can forget real quick. With lyrics people remember it a little because they might learn some

¹¹⁶ For a fascinating discussion of the cultural legacy of 52nd street see Patrick Burke, *Come in and Hear the Truth: Jazz and Race on 52nd Street* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

¹¹⁷ Transcribed from, Eddie Jefferson, "Body and Soul," *The Jazz Singer*.

of the lyrics and then they'll sing the song. But with just instrumental, even if they are a good instrumental, they will forget after a few years and the guys are gone. I'm hoping with my things that I can keep something alive in this American experience.¹¹⁸

Jefferson believed that his mission as a lyricist was to preserve the legacy of jazz instrumentalists and did so by depicting them as heroic icons of American culture.

Written in the vernacular of the jazz musicians, Jefferson preserved not only the music but also the language of the jazz culture. Jazz critic Ira Steingroot described the importance of Jefferson's distinctive lyrics and sound,

He welded the disparate elements of black speech—jive talk, slang, musical diction, story-telling, rhythmic genius— into a powerful instrument for musical poetry. He was one of the great scat singers with a thick, reedy intonation that matched the sax sounds he loved and an unerring sense of pitch.¹¹⁹

Similar to Jefferson's lyrics, Steingroot depicts Jefferson in a hagiographic light. While Jefferson was integral to the development of vocalese, his singing was not a paragon of perfect intonation. He had a limited vocal range. Despite his limited vocal ability, Jefferson was an important figure because he was one of the first vocalists to translate the stories of the instrumentalists that he heard in the music and make them accessible to audiences through their shared language.

While Eddie Jefferson was responsible for writing the lyrics to the first hit vocalese record, he was never an immensely popular figure in the public eye. The biggest name in vocalese during the early 1950s was King Pleasure. Born Clarence Beeks (1922- 1981) and known by the stage name King Pleasure, he became a popular figure after his landmark vocalese recording entitled "Moody's Mood For Love." Singing Eddie Jefferson's lyrics to alto saxophonist James Moody's entire recording of "I'm In the Mood for Love," Pleasure perfectly mirrored the soft, subtle tones of Moody's playing. Jefferson's lyrics not only won Pleasure the

¹¹⁸ Eddie Jefferson, "Interview with Gallery 41."

¹¹⁹ Ira Steingroot as quoted in Milkowski, *Swing it*, 122.

talent competition at the Apollo's Amateur Hour, but also garnered him a hit record. According to Friedwald, "Moody's Mood For Love," besides from the work of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross was "the only indisputable masterpiece record in the entire genre that became known as vocalese."¹²⁰ Offered to record the song as single by Prestige records, Pleasure released "Moody's Mood For Love" at the end of 1952, and by 1953 it won record of the year in *Down Beat* magazine. The single was also a cross over hit, when it won the best R&B record of the year in 1953. Now considered a standard of the vocalese repertoire, the lyrics were an ode to love.

There I go, There I go, There I go, There I go.
Pretty baby you are the soul that snaps my control
Such a funny thing, but every time you're near me
I never can behave
You give me a smile, and then I'm wrapped up in your magic
There's music all around me, crazy music
Music that keeps calling me so, very close to you...¹²¹

The song not only made Pleasure popular, but the lyrics also became a trademark of James Moody's performances as well. Moody would often sing the lyrics himself, when performing.

The lyric depicts not only the romantic theme of the title, but also alludes to the profound connection between language and music that lies at the center of vocalese. As can be seen in the excerpt below, music is a central theme that is cleverly employed in this recording. In measure 8, Pleasure word paints chromaticism with the word crazy.

¹²⁰ Friedwald, *Jazz Singing*, 691

¹²¹ Transcribed from King Pleasure, "Moody's Mood for Love," *Prestige* 45-744, 1952, LP.

Figure 2.9 King Pleasure, “Moody’s Mood For Love”¹²²



In measure 8 of [Figure 2.9](#), he plays off of the melodic structure of ascending and minor thirds and pairs them with the lyric “music all around me,” which creates the sound of musical encirclement. The most notable accomplishment of Pleasure’s performance is the sound of ease that he creates over Moody’s complex rhythmic phrasing. The majority of the solo is played on the sixteenth and thirty-second note pulse.

Staying true to the original recording, Pleasure hired vocalist Blossom Dearie to sing pianist Thore Swanerud’s original solo from Moody’s 1949 recording.

What is all this talk about love me, my sweet?
I am not afraid, not anymore, not like before
Don’t you understand me?
Now baby please pull yourself together
Do it soon!
My soul’s on fire, come on and take me
I’ll be what you make me, my darling, my dear.¹²³

Though uncredited on the Pleasure recording, Blossom Dearie was an important figure in the development of vocalese and its international dispersion.¹²⁴ She went on to establish a career in

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ After this experience Blossom Dearie moved to Paris and formed her own vocalese group known as the Blue Stars who had their first hit record in 1954 with their French lyric to “Lullaby of Birdland.” Members of the Blues Stars, Michel Legrand and Mimi Perrin would later form the most popular French vocalese group of the late 1950s known as Les Doubles Six. For more information on Les Doubles Six see Benjamin Givan, “Vocalese à la Française: The Translational Aesthetics of Mimi Perrin” (paper presented at the annual meeting for the Society For American Music, Lancaster, PA, March 8, 2014)

vocalese in Paris during the early 1950s. Though Dearie only appeared briefly on the recording she provided an accurate recreation of Swanerud's piano solo, and a fitting counterpoint to Pleasure's performance.¹²⁵ After Dearie's solo Pleasure finished the song and closed with a tribute to the instrumentalists who recorded the original solo.

James Moody you can come on in man
And you can blow now if you want to
We're through.¹²⁶

Naming instrumentalists directly within vocalese lyrics reveals Eddie Jefferson's signature vocalese technique.

Due to the success of his single, Pleasure went on to record other vocalese for which he wrote his own lyrics.¹²⁷ Similar to Lee Gaines of the Delta Rhythm Boys description of how he wrote lyrics, King Pleasure also discussed the importance of hearing the words embedded within the music. He described his ambition behind his lyrics as, "I believe that where there is a sound, there is a mood which can be interpreted into words—at least in a general way. And it is my ambition to interpret a full band arrangement into words, with individual voices replacing individual instruments, expressing into words what the instruments expressed in mood."¹²⁸ Like Gaines, Pleasure emphasized recreating the feeling of the music and doing so through lyrics. Jazz critic Ira Gitler described Pleasure's diligence and attention to detail when writing lyrics. "

Pleasure feels that each musician is telling a story or, at least, suggesting one. When he comes upon a particular solo that moves him, the King gets the urge to translate what he hears. His creations are not done in a night or two either; Pleasure is not satisfied until he has captured both the sound and mood of the solo, replete with all the nuances and

¹²⁵ Annie Ross as well as Betty Carter later recorded the same lyrics original performed by Dearie.

¹²⁶ Transcribed from Pleasure's, "Moody's Mood for Love."

¹²⁷ Most of Pleasure's successful recordings were from 1952 to 1953 and include, "Red Top" which he recorded with Betty Carter, Lester Young's "Jumpin with Symphony Sid" and "D.B. Blues."

¹²⁸ King Pleasure, as quoted in Friedwald, *Jazz Singing*, 223.

inflections. His are compositions of pathos, passion and humor. Pleasure is monarch, jester and minstrel at his own court.¹²⁹

Similar to a playwright, Pleasure's method of writing lyrics encompassed the feeling and nuances of each instrumental recording, while also drawing on the legacy of previous jazz recordings. His lyrics revealed that he was fluent in the jazz repertoire and language.

An example of Pleasure capturing the feeling of an individual soloist while simultaneously drawing from the larger framework of jazz repertoire was his 1953 recording of Charlie Parker's, "Parker's Mood." Pleasure's lyrics not only pay homage to traditional blues songs, but he also manages to capture the sentiment of Parker as an individual.

Come with me
If you want to go to Kansas City
I'm feeling low down and blue
My heart is full of sorrow
Don't hardly know what to do
Where will I be tomorrow?
Going to Kansas City
Want to go to
No, you can't make it with me
Going to Kansas City
Sorry but I can't take you.¹³⁰

Referencing Charlie Parker's birthplace of Kansas City three times within the first forty-five seconds of the recording, Pleasure not only captures the mood of Charlie Parker's sound but also paints a picture of who he was as a person. Pleasure draws on Parker's background as a blues musician in Kansas City, and creates a blues lyric with the common theme of lost love. To capture Parker's musical sentiment, Pleasure mirrored the blues patterns played by Parker, and

¹²⁹ Ira Gitler, Liner Notes *King Pleasure Sings: Annie Ross Sings*, Prestige 7128, 1952, LP.

¹³⁰ Transcribed from, King Pleasure, "Parker's Mood/Jumpin' With Symphony Sid," Prestige, 45-182, 1952, Vinyl. Eddie Jefferson also recorded his own rendition of "Parker's Mood" which he renamed "Bless My Soul" on the album *Letter From Home*. Interestingly Jefferson's lyric does not memorialize Parker, but is a more traditional blues lyric theme of unrequited love, in which Jefferson pleads for his woman to return. See Eddie Jefferson, "Parker's Mood," *Letter From Home*, Riverside Records RLP 9411, 1962, LP.

chooses lyrics that accurately fit the style of his playing. Similar to “Moody’s Mood For Love,” Pleasure also directly references Parker when he sings, “On up until the end, Parker’s been your friend.”¹³¹ He then eerily foretells Parker’s near future.

Don’t hang your head
When you see, when you see those six pretty horses pulling me
Put a twenty dollar silver-piece on my watch chain,
Look at the smile on my face,
And sing a little song
To let the world know I’m really free.
Don’t cry for me,
‘Cause I’m going to Kansas City.¹³²

In an ironic depiction of a funeral procession, Pleasure’s lyric unknowingly foreshadowed Parker’s actual death in 1955. Pleasure draws on images of a jazz funeral with the horse drawn carriage. He also references the Louis Armstrong’s famous 1928 recording of “St. James Infirmary.” Pleasure sings the words “put a twenty dollar silver-piece on my watch chain,” that are taken from “The Gambler’s Blues” most famously associated with Louis Armstrong lyric embellishment, “Put a Twenty-dollar gold piece on my watch chain.”¹³³ Pleasure not only memorializes Parker by referencing him by name as well as his birthplace of Kansas City, but he also embeds an homage to Armstrong considered a founding father in jazz within his lyric.

Though Pleasure proved that he could successfully write his own vocalese lyrics, just as quickly as he rose in popularity, he faded into relative obscurity by the late 1950s. According to Will Friedwald, by 1956 Beeks had recorded a few singles for Aladdin and Jubilee records to limited success. In an interview with Bill Coss for *Metronome*, Pleasure revealed that, “he ‘didn’t do too well with audiences...’ and that he wasn’t ready ‘artistically and emotionally’ for

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Transcribed from “St. James Infirmary,” Louis Armstrong, *The Best of Hot 5 & Hot 7 Recordings*, MP3 file, downloaded July 16, 2015, *iTunes*.

the success that was nearly his.”¹³⁴ Though purely speculation, Friedwald contends that Pleasure’s lack of more permanent success was due to Pleasure’s eccentricities. He bases this assumption on Pleasure’s liner notes to his LP *Golden Days* in which Pleasure professes himself the savior of humanity.¹³⁵ Speculations aside, by 1960 Pleasure no longer sang vocalese and disappeared from the music industry entirely.

Vocalese was popular in the early 1950s but by 1955 the form was considered antiquated. The man who revived the form with his 1957 lyric to “Four Brothers” was Jon Hendricks. Considered the gold standard in vocalese writing, Hendricks far outshone other lyricists with his poetic wit and virtuosic articulations of instrumental phrasing. Studying the great English-language poets, such as Shakespeare, Keats, and Porter, Jon Hendricks is one of the most articulate voices of vocalese. Together with vocal arranger and scat singer Dave Lambert, and fellow vocalese lyricist and singer Annie Ross, they formed the most successful vocalese group in the history of the idiom.

While previous groups such as the Modernaires had sung scat arrangements of Beiderbecke’s solo, and the Delta Rhythm Boys featured a few selections of lyricized arrangements of Duke Ellington’s music, no group had ever dedicated their entire repertoire to the recreation of large scale instrumental jazz recordings before Lambert, Hendricks & Ross. They fused the vocal group tradition of the Mills Brothers, with the vocalese legacy that traced back to Bee Palmer. When *Sing a Song of Basie* was released in 1957, the perception of the role of the human voice in jazz was forever altered. This chapter has provided the lineage from which Lambert, Hendricks & Ross emerged, and it is to them that I turn next.

¹³⁴ Friedwald, *Jazz Singing*, 236.

¹³⁵ See King Pleasure, liner notes to *Golden Days*, King Pleasure, Hifi Jazz J 425, 1960, LP.

3.0 THE JAMES JOYCE OF JIVE: JON HENDRICKS' HIP INTELLECTUALISM

“I wrote the shortest jazz poem ever heard.
Nothin’ about huggin’, kissin’
One word, Listen!”¹³⁶

Hailed as the poet laureate of jazz, Jon Hendricks is considered the most prolific vocalese lyric writer in the history of the genre.¹³⁷ While historians often describe vocalese as lyricized the imposition of lyrics onto recorded music, it would be more accurate to say that Hendricks hears words embedded in the music itself. Listening is his cipher from which words are decrypted from within instrumental recordings. I have had the honor and the privilege to watch Hendricks write lyrics, and what struck me most was the realization that he never struggles to find the words. Hendricks has often told me that if he listens long enough, he hears what the music is trying to say. Instrumental music is the wellspring from which he draws inspiration.

This chapter examines how Jon Hendricks writes vocalese lyrics in attempt to bridge the separation between voice and instrument. In jazz discourse, the voice is often understood as inferior to instruments because it is perceived as a natural talent that everyone has within the

¹³⁶ Jon Hendricks, “Manhattan,” *New York, N.Y.* composed by George Russell, Decca DL 9116, 1959, LP.

¹³⁷ Leonard Feather claimed that Dizzy Gillespie was responsible for naming Jon Hendricks the “poet laureate of jazz. He wrote, “When Jon Hendricks sings wordlessly, in the idiom traditionally known as scat singing, he becomes a human horn. When he sings words, specifically words he has set to improvised jazz solos, he is a walking dictionary...A man who wrote the lyrics for Miles Davis’ ‘[Four](#),’ about 30 songs out of the Count Basie library, tunes by [Antonio Carlos Jobim](#), [Charlie Parker](#), Cannonball Adderley, [Horace Silver](#)... not for nothing did Dizzy Gillespie dub Jon Hendricks ‘the Poet Laureate of Jazz.’” See Leonard Feather, “Hendricks-Evolution Of A Poet Laureate,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 4, 1985, 50.

body, and that does not require the same amount of technical skill as playing an instrument. As Lara Pellegrinelli posits, “despite public enthusiasm for singers ...the place of singing within jazz is highly contested. Singers may number among the music’s lionized elders and the most popular performers today, yet jazz insiders constantly cast them as outsiders to a predominantly instrumental tradition.”¹³⁸ In using his voice as an instrument through scat, and by composing lyrics to instrumental repertoire, Hendricks attempts to combat the marginalization of the voice. Inevitably, his efforts must take place within the dominant framework of instrumental jazz—this leads to a series of paradoxes. He asserts:

I never regard myself as one of the singers in any lineage, because I never really regard myself as a singer. I’m a person who uses his voice to express the feelings of the horns. I’m really a person who plays the horn without the horn. That’s the way I look at myself...I think of myself as someone who uses what voice he has to express instrumental thoughts, or to express his heart through the medium of the voice. But even if I’m singing a ballad, I’m always thinking that I’m playing something, that I’m playing saxophone or trombone or something.¹³⁹

In this statement Hendricks reveals his belief that the voice cannot fall within the traditional role of the singer, but must instead inhabit a space of instrumental imitation in order for the voice to be accepted. He most blatantly stated this in an interview with Leonard Feather:

The important thing is to try to think like a horn... there’s an age-old antipathy between musicians and singers. Musicians don’t want to hang around with singers! So I tried to sound as much like an instrument as I could, in order to get the cats to accept me.¹⁴⁰

Hendricks positions his voice within the instrumental framework in order to find validation. Yet by positioning the voice within the instrumental realm, he also reinforces the perception of the voice as technically inferior to the instrument.¹⁴¹ For Hendricks the voice can never just be the

¹³⁸ Pellegrinelli, “The Song is Who?,” 2.

¹³⁹ Jon Hendricks, interview by James Zimmerman, “Jon Hendricks: NEA Jazz Masters (1993),” *Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Program*, accessed October 21, 2014, http://smithsonianjazz.org/oral_histories/pdf/Hendricks.pdf, 92.

¹⁴⁰ Leonard Feather, “Feather’s Nest,” 17.

¹⁴¹ Pellegrinelli, “The Song is Who?” 2.

voice, but it must always try to embody the instrument. In scatting and singing primarily instrumental music, Hendricks illustrates his technical and improvisatory skills as a way to align his voice within the instrumental paradigm.

He complicates his perception of the voice and its role in jazz by describing it as the original instrument. He argues that everything begins and ends with the voice, “the horns try to sing like the voice. In fact the process of arranging horns is called voicing. You voice the horns, because the orchestra is an instrumental version of the choir.”¹⁴² Hendricks is not alone in identifying an inherent vocality in jazz. Amiri Baraka often discusses the speech-inflected qualities of instrumental jazz, which arose out of the blues, claiming that African American music is based in vocal inflection.¹⁴³ Drawing on the legacy of vocal music as an African American tradition, the voice is understood as foundational and limited to the early development of jazz.¹⁴⁴ Hendricks acknowledges this paradox of the voice and it motivates his art.

While Hendricks views his voice as distinct from that of a singer, he is most well known for his gift for words. As a unique feature that distinguishes the voice from the instrument, language is highly characteristic of his music. His lyrics are stories that he finds embedded in the music, and once he writes them down he creates new meanings of iconic jazz repertoire. He devised a four-step process to write vocalese lyrics. The first step for Hendricks in creating a lyric is to listen deeply. Second, he draws thematic inspiration for the subject of his lyrics from the title of the piece. Third, he translates what he hears instrumentalists expressing musically into

¹⁴² Zimmerman, 75.

¹⁴³ See Amiri Baraka, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999), 28.

¹⁴⁴ For a more detailed analysis of the voice as limited to the foundational period of jazz see, Lara Pellegrinelli, “Separated at Birth: Singing and the History of Jazz,” *Big Ears: Listening For Gender in Jazz Studies*, ed. Nichole T. Rustin et al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 31-47.

language. Lastly, Hendricks constructs an interactive and coherent narrative structure between all the instruments from the recording.

By adding lyrics to instrumental recordings (or, more precisely, by hearing lyrics within the recordings), Hendricks blends together not only vocal and instrumental roles in jazz, but also music and language. He blurs the line between what Lindon Barret refers to as the signing voice—the voice as an expression of language—and the singing voice—the voice as a musical instrument that creates abstract sound.¹⁴⁵ Hendricks validates the voice by demonstrating that it can perform the music of the “technically superior” instrumentalist, while also preserving the unique feature of the voice through language. As will be discussed in the second half of this chapter, the outcome of these points of intersection is his unique form of hip intellectualism. Hip intellectualism is constructed in four ways. First, Hendricks uses vernacular language to designate himself as hip and an insider of the bebop countercultural movement, and also intellectual through his process of finding lyrics that fit the music as exactly as possible. Second, while he writes in the vernacular of primarily African American musicians, his lyrics are sung by a mixed gender and integrated group, and therefore his work demonstrates a fluidity of race and gender performance. Third, he often writes lyrics in which he references particular musicians in order to demonstrate his understanding of lines of influence and tradition in jazz. Lastly, by writing about particular instrumentalists and recreating the music as close to the original as possible he memorializes artists that he sees as forefathers of the jazz canon in an attempt to prove that the voice can execute technical instrumental music. Hendricks uses the voice as a hinge to move between and engage with all of these frameworks. In order to understand the numerous implications of Hendricks’ work, we must first turn to his writing process.

¹⁴⁵ Lindon Barrett, *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

3.1 THE POET LAUREATE OF JAZZ AT WORK

3.1.1 Listening Practices

For Hendricks, the seeds of poetic inspiration emerge out of instrumental sound. Listening for Hendricks is a spiritual process, and at times he even refers to himself as “God’s pencil.”¹⁴⁶ He describes his writing process as an out-of-body experience in which lyrics emerge mystically as he listens. Hendricks believes that he is a vessel of divine inspiration through which language emerges from music. The son of an African Methodist Episcopal Minister, he spent his formative years singing in the church choir and copying biblical passages for his father’s weekly sermons. Through this experience he built a rich lexicon of words and ideas that shape his approach to lyric writing.

Developing from his spirituality, Hendricks’ vocalese represents not only his composite view of art that merges language and music, but also that his expression is divinely inspired. Hendricks proclaims, “Music is endlessly occult and secret. It’s a spiritual art form. All art is spiritual. Painting is spiritual, painting and music and poetry and dance. Plato put them all together...the true poet sang both the music and the words at the same time.”¹⁴⁷ For Hendricks music and poetry are divine and mystical expressions of something greater than humankind.

¹⁴⁶ Jon Hendricks, interview by Lee Ellen Martin, University of Toledo Music Building, September 15, 2009.

¹⁴⁷ Zimmerman, 41.

As an ardent fan of instrumental jazz, he found that he could incorporate his voice into the music that he loved by adding lyrics to it. According to his daughter Aria Hendricks, “He just couldn’t have loved it more...I mean that is a passion, it’s a calling, and it’s like clergy called to bop.”¹⁴⁸ From his love of instrumental jazz, Hendricks found a means to participate in the music that he enjoys through singing and writing lyrics. He often reasons that his unique talent for writing lyrics emerged out of his literary talents as well as his virtuosic ability to hear complex instrumental passages and recreate them with his voice. Trumpeter Harry Sweets Edison once commented that Hendricks’ ear is so acute that he could “hear a gnat piss on cotton.”¹⁴⁹

Similar to the literary rhetorical device of prosopoeia, in which a speaker communicates to the audience by giving voice to an inanimate object or another character, Hendricks narrates what he hears the music is saying. He describes his lyric writing process as words emerging out of the music, which is why he stresses the importance of listening.

Well I listen. The main thing—I figure—this is true of anybody... If you listen long enough, you’ll hear it finally. And when you hear it and you get it to the point where you can hum it on the subway or walking down the street then, after a time, words begin to come to you, whatever the horn is sayin’, they just form themselves. Some of the phrases, like that on “Let Me See,” that just screams, “How d’you do there?” It shouts just like what he was saying...after I play it a couple of weeks or so, while I’m around the house, I get it in my head so I can hum it. The words come in no time.¹⁵⁰

Referring to Count Basie’s composition “Let Me See” (recorded by Lambert, Hendricks & Ross on the album *Sing Along With Basie* in 1958), Hendricks describes the opening lyric that he wrote to Lester Young’s tenor saxophone solo.¹⁵¹ From repeated listening, Hendricks developed a lyric for “Let Me See” that is thematically centered on the bravura of instrumental improvisers.

¹⁴⁸ Aria Hendricks, interview by Lee Martin, Market Diner in New York City, June 22, 2014.

¹⁴⁹ Jon Hendricks, Personal Correspondence with Lee Martin.

¹⁵⁰ Ralph Gleason, “All of Them Sing To Me: An Interview with Jon Hendricks,” *Jazz A Quarterly of American Music* 5, (1960): 44-45.

¹⁵¹ Transcribed from Lambert, Hendricks & Ross “Let Me See,” *Sing Along with Basie*, Columbia Records 33SX 1151, 1958, LP.

The importance of listening is not only a part of his lyric writing process, but also a common theme he turns to in his lyrics. For “Let Me See” he wrote:

People diggin’ Bird’ll know what Bird was diggin’
Don’t’cha know you gotta grow?
An when you gotta grow you gotta grow a lot
And then the people treasure what’ch you’ve got
People learn to listen to you while you’re playin’
I see you’re watchin’ eye glistenin’
Be listenin!¹⁵²

Hendricks highlights the inference of what he hears the musician say through the instrument. He understands what the instrumentalist does musically and translates it into his own form of poetic expression. Listening for Hendricks is not only a tool to discover the words, but it is also a means for him to express his own understanding of the music. Hendricks studies the music in order to translate it into the medium of language.

Hendricks describes the actual act of writing as the final step of his lyric formation process. He must be able to hear all of subtle nuances of the entire recording in his mind before transcribing the music into his poetic voice. Aria describes her father’s process as he sits in his record room and listens to one album for an entire month. He focuses in on one song for a couple of weeks, playing it repeatedly throughout the day, and then listens to individual sections of the recording for a few hours before ever putting pencil to paper. The actual act of writing happens very quickly. According to Aria, “Once he got out his yellow legal pad, and once he got out that pencil it was twenty minutes from start to finish.”¹⁵³ She remembers that he would make very few revisions, only ever altering a missed word or extra syllable after completing his lyric. By waiting for the music to transmit words to him, Hendricks never struggles to find lyrics that fit particular recordings. Kevin Burke, a jazz singer and band member of Hendricks’ 1980s vocal

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Aria Hendricks, interview by Lee Martin, 2014.

group Jon Hendricks & Company, remembers Hendricks' writing process as seemingly effortless. "I have never seen him really stumped. He might have to listen to something three or four times, but he just goes straight through and nails it."¹⁵⁴ Hendricks never struggles to find the words because, through deep listening, he waits for the music to tell him the entire story.

The title provides the subject for the story in his lyrics. Hendricks remarks, "I start from the title, and then from the title construct a story about that title."¹⁵⁵ For example, his lyrics to "Little Pony" are based entirely on the improvisational virtuosity of Norwood "Pony" Poindexter, a saxophonist of the Count Basie big band.¹⁵⁶ He plays off of the theme of horses and also the improvisatory reputation of Poindexter. On the 1957 *Sing a Song of Basie* album, Hendricks sings:

Anywhere you go they gotta saddle Little Pony with a solid reputation
Down around the main street
Over on the hipper beat
People think of Little Pony as a real king
And his playin' is a pleasure-givin' thing.
Blowin' a horn and ridin' go together
And forever give the kind of thrill a lot of people never wanna end
But they be tellin' about it, baby
And I'm merely goin' through
He can figure it out an' do it
Blow your horn, do up the sound
Sing your song, you're really puttin' it down
A little bit of listenin' with a passable ear
Will get an awful lot of messages anywhere¹⁵⁷

Inspired by the title, Hendricks tells the story of Poindexter's reputation as a strong improviser praised for being hip. Hendricks draws on the canon of jazz kings, describing Poindexter as a

¹⁵⁴ Kevin Burke, interview by Lee Martin, Bryant Park, June 13, 2014.

¹⁵⁵ Zimmerman, 76.

¹⁵⁶ "Little Pony" was written by Neal Hefti for the Count Basie Orchestra in 1950 and was inspired by Poindexter's playing. For further details see Leonard Feather and Ira Gitler, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 531.

¹⁵⁷ Transcribed from Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, "Little Pony" in *Sing a Song of Basie*, ABC-Paramount, 1958, LP.

“real king.” In jazz, influential instrumentalists—particularly trumpet players—are often referred to as kings such as Joe Oliver, and Louis Armstrong, because of their improvisational skills.¹⁵⁸

If unsure of the meaning of the title, Hendricks directly asked composers for the significance or context behind the name of the piece in order to develop a narrative that coincided with the original intentions of the composer. He emphasizes the importance of knowing the story behind the title.

I never change the title, ‘cause I think most guys who name songs, they had something in mind, y’know, when they named the song. I like to stick with that, that usually just gets me to the story quicker. I had a little trouble with “Shorty George.” I didn’t know who this guy was. So I go to Basie and I say, “Hey Basie, who is Shorty George?” And Basie looked at me, looked me up and down, and turned around and walked away and said, back over his shoulder, “That’s the cat that comes in the back door!...So I got into the whole story.”¹⁵⁹

From Basie’s explanation, Hendricks constructed a narrative centered on the various infidelities of Shorty George, a conniving womanizer and troublemaker. He unfolds the story of Shorty George in a three-character narrative. Ross sings Buck Clayton’s solo beginning with the lyric “it takes a woman to tell you Shorty George is sneakin’ around.” Hendricks responds singing the lyric, “the cat’s a big drag” to saxophonist Earl Warren’s solo.

Hendricks’ lyrics to Count Basie’s “Jumpin’ at The Woodside” draw on the importance of the Woodside Hotel in Queens, New York to Basie and his band. During the 1930s, the band often stayed at the Woodside due to the hotel’s reputation as one of the more accommodating places for jazz musicians. Hendricks explains the importance of the Woodside in the development of jazz.

The Woodside was a hotel in New York where not only the Basie band, but all the bands—Andy Kirk, Jay McShann, everybody that came to New York—could check in,

¹⁵⁸ For an example of the canonization of trumpeter’s as kings of jazz see Scott Yanow, *Trumpet Kings: The Players Who Shaped the Sound of Jazz Trumpet* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2001).

¹⁵⁹ Jon Hendricks quoted by Ralph Gleason in “All of Them Sing To Me,” 45.

get rooms for the band, and rehearse. So many musicians and show-business people stayed at the Woodside. Nobody was going to knock on your wall if you rehearsed at 3 o'clock in the morning. So from that title I constructed a story about what a great hotel this was, and what a great thing it was to stay there if you were in show business. Then the horns became the characters in the story that commented in one way or another on their experience staying at the hotel.¹⁶⁰

He creates character voices that reflect how he believes soloists would speak in relationship to the theme of the title and the genre of the piece. Hendricks draws from the actual experiences of jazz musicians to construct the thematic narrative.

Similar to a method actor, Hendricks draws from his own experiences as a performing singer as well as his interactions with jazz instrumentalists to portray the musicians as realistically as possible. Not only does he strive to paint an accurate portrayal of how the musicians would speak, but he also stresses the importance of singing their solos as close to the recordings as possible. His desire for musical accuracy is a part of his desire for validation as a singer. He also stresses the importance of the title in determining the composer's original intent in order to preserve it in his lyrics. In drawing from the title, the thematic accuracy of Hendricks' lyrics prove that he is not only a part of the jazz community as a singer, but also that he has something legitimate to contribute to the music.

By adding words to music Hendricks taps into the linguistic dimension that instrumental music alone cannot access. He describes his work like this:

I call it translating, really. If you translate a novel from Russian into English, you have to get the vulgate inflections in the one language and transfer them to the other language. Not just a literal translation. I try to translate the feeling of the music lyrically...I pay close attention to the music. I don't just rhyme the words to fit the meter. I try to feel the music out. And, in doing this, I create such a new thing in itself that some of the musicians don't even recognize what I've done.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Zimmerman, 76.

¹⁶¹ National Jazz Archive: The Story of British Jazz, "Jon Hendricks Interview 1," accessed August, 27, 2014, <http://www.nationaljazzarchive.co.uk/stories?id=199>.

In matching the sound of words to the sounds of the music, Hendricks translates music into language. His vocalese fuses the communicative functions of music and language together. Walter Benjamin discusses the importance of translation. He writes, “translation instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language.”¹⁶² Hendricks attempts to create a mode of expression that reaches the widest possible audience. Vocalese is a form of translation that encapsulates the nuances of instrumental expression and mirrors them with particular modes of language. By finding the words in the sound, Hendricks personifies the literal voice of the instrumentalist and by doing so, interweaves his own voice into the instrumentalist’s music. By using language and music, Hendricks communicates across verbal and musical forms of expression, and interwove the expressive capabilities of instrumentalists and vocalists together.

Drawing from his experiences as a writer, Hendricks reconfigured his studies of literary form in storytelling within the context of instrumental music. He recalls, “the fact that I was an English major and studied literature and how to write stories was valuable because it taught me how to construct a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end— with a plot and a cast of characters.” He used these skills in vocalese as characters “became the solo instruments.”¹⁶³ This adaptation of narrative structure that he hears within the music of jazz instrumentalists distinguishes Hendricks as a lyricist. Will Friedwald describes the complexities of Hendricks work:

Jon Hendricks is a lyricist on lots of different levels. He is a very gifted and talented individual. Jon can write a lyric to a song that’s sort of in the Tin Pan Alley tradition of

¹⁶² Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator” in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 2000), 2.

¹⁶³ Zimmerman, 76

just writing 32 bars to the main theme of a jazz tune. But Jon can also do this other thing that no one else in the Tin Pan Alley world can do, which is to adapt the whole piece from beginning to end, including the solos, the orchestration, even the drum breaks. He can take the whole thing and write lyrics to that and make that into a sort of bigger canvas for himself to work on in telling a more involved, a deeper, more complicated story. Hendricks is really the master of that.¹⁶⁴

The importance of a coherent storyline is a signature of Hendricks' vocalese lyric writing style. His talent for writing lyrics that closely fit the melodic and rhythmic structure of music, while also telling an engaging story, is why world renowned jazz vocalist Dianne Reeves refers to him as the jazz griot. She explains, "Well he draws you in with his stories...you want to hear them and it's just so much information, and he's funny and gives a lot of history. He's kind of the griot of this jazz art form."¹⁶⁵

He does not merely find words that fit the rhythm and meter of the original recordings, but he finds a way to tell a story from within this framework. He posits, "You can listen to instrumental music but when you put words to it, it reaches people in a way that touches them because it uses language, which is their instrument. I mean it's their music."¹⁶⁶ Narrative is the most direct way for Hendricks to engage mainstream American audiences with instrumental jazz. His lyrics make instrumental jazz accessible to audiences through plot line. But what happens to the voice at these points of intersection between music and language?

¹⁶⁴Will Friedwald, "Jazz in Song: The Words" narrated by Nancy Wilson, NPR's Jazz Profiles, *NPR*, January 9, 2008, <http://www.npr.org/2008/01/09/17929094/jazz-in-song-the-words>.

¹⁶⁵ Dianne Reeves, in discussion with Joe Conforti for his unpublished documentary film *The Hang With Jon Hendricks: An American Original*. <http://jc-productions.com/jonhendricks.html> The materials were accessed at Joe Conforti's apartment in New York City on June 23, 2014.

¹⁶⁶ Friedwald, "Jazz in Song: The Words."

3.2 THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN MUSIC AND LANGUAGE

3.2.1 The Singing and The Signing Voice

Words and music remain forever in dialogue with each other: born together, always separating and yet also always recombining and imitating each other.¹⁶⁷

As the primary arbiter of language and music, the voice according to Lindon Barret is often divided into two roles: that of the signing voice (the vehicle of language and meaning) and the singing voice (an instrument of aural aesthetics and figurative meaning). The signing voice is perceived as declamatory and fixed in semantics, while the singing voice is considered more abstract and subversive in its intent. According to Barrett, the singing voice undoes speech. He writes, “By highlighting the enunciative or vocative aspect and moment of voice, singing voices mark the absence that allows iteration and repetition. They imprint above all the pure sonorous audibility of voice, and not a seemingly absolute proximity to fixed meaning and identity.”¹⁶⁸ In what follows, I argue that Jon Hendricks’ vocalese differs from Barrett’s vocal binaries in that he blurs the roles of the singing and signing voice.

The relationship between language and music in vocalese often operates on two levels simultaneously. Vocalese lyrics affix meaning onto music by adding the semantics of language. But here it is also important to remark upon an unexpected twist: because vocalese lyrics are often sung at fast tempi, and with multiple voices singing different parts at once, the semantics of language sometimes dissolve into abstract sound. In these moments of semantic disintegration, Hendricks creates what Aldon Nielsen describes as a “slippage of signifiers” in which the ear

¹⁶⁷ Martin Clayton, “Introduction,” *Music, Words and Voice A Reader* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 3.

¹⁶⁸ Lindon Barrett, *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 83-84.

cannot hear all of the lyrics due to speed of delivery.¹⁶⁹ At these points of rupture, the voice moves between the more fluid meanings of music and the semantics of the words.

In these moments, when the lyrics become almost unintelligible, the voice seemingly becomes an instrument, momentarily stripped of its linguistic capabilities. This contrasts with slower pieces sung in unison, when the voice fulfills its expected role in using language to deliver semantic content (i.e. the signing voice). But must these two be so strictly opposed? Alden Nielsen discusses the role of the singing and signing voice in terms of a spectrum, criticizing Barrett's stratification of the voice into either sonic or linguistic meaning. He argues: "The singing voice affects, deploys, and even displaces the meanings of the meaningful word, but it does not in so doing leave the meaningful entirely behind."¹⁷⁰ Vocalese reinforces Nielsen's argument by demonstrating that the voice is capable of presenting meanings that cross between language and music. While all singing moves between text and music, in vocalese the lyric itself is built upon the non-vocal, and actually relies on that memory of sound for its meaning. The voice, though continually delivering text, is therefore always indexing a non-semantic register. It is therefore both simultaneously semantic and non-semantic, which differentiates it from other modes of singing. In other words, vocalese does not just move between the poles of music and text but it breaks them open entirely.

Hendricks layers meaning both by both telling a story and by using the voice as an instrument through scat syllables to create forms of expression that are not limited to language. By signing through language, and singing through scat, Hendricks' vocalese helps to demonstrate the unique capabilities of fluidity of the human voice. Hendricks navigated the

¹⁶⁹ Aldon Nielsen, *Black Chant: Languages of African-American Postmodernism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 116.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 28.

complexities of the singing and the signing voice in his lyrics to Duke Ellington's "Caravan." For Juan Tizol's trombone solo, Lambert sings the non-indented text (that is provided at the bottom of this page) while Hendricks and Ross sing the indented lines, which are the saxophone section parts. The vocal parts operate in a call and response pattern, but the overlap between parts blurs the semantics of language into the choral or big band sound world of the recording. The trio moves in and out of different semiotic registers and demonstrates the fluidity of the voice in language and music.

In imitating the plunger mute sounds of trumpeter Cootie Williams, Ross sings on the syllables "ya, ha la ya." These syllables create the sense of a foreign language. It is interesting to note that Hendricks chose not to lyricize the muted trumpet, the mute being a technique commonly used in the Ellington ensemble to imitate the sound of the human voice. Instrumentalist known for this technique include Bubber Miley and Tricky Sam Nanton.¹⁷¹ Though no words are used, the syllables themselves connote the aesthetic of Ellington and Juan Tizol's original composition and create a pseudo-language.

Night
Across the endless desert way
And stars above are shining bright
The sun illuminates the day
The mystery of their magic light
And then it seems to pass away
Shines down upon our caravan
Ya ha la ya ya ha la

Stars
And when you think it's out of sight
Create a map up in the sky
The moon illuminates the night
For man to chart his journey by

¹⁷¹ For a more detailed discussion of the vocal qualities of the Ellington ensemble see, Graham Lock, *Blutopia: Visions of the Future and Revisions of the Past in the Work of Sun Ra, Duke Ellington, and Anthony Braxton* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

From with reflected solar light
And guides our desert caravan
Ya ha la ya ya ha la¹⁷²

Hendricks portrays the exoticism of the piece through his unusual scat syllable choices and creates an alluring sound world that mirrors the mysticism of his lyrics. He demonstrates that the signing voice is not the only expression of meaning, but that in fact the singing voice can also reinforce the theme of his lyrics.

Hendricks' shifting between voice qua proprietor of language and voice qua instrument intrigues audiences and challenges them to decipher the meanings of his lyrics when listening. By writing lyrics to iconic jazz repertoire, Hendricks engaged audiences intellectually by lyricizing the music that they already knew. He reconfigures musical expectation of instrumental jazz by composing narratives that audiences had previously never associated with the music.

3.2.2 Hip Intellectualism

The outcome of Hendricks' intersection of music and language functions in multiple ways. Hendricks creates a unique form of expression that I refer to as "hip intellectualism." This form of expression operates on four levels simultaneously. First, by blending fast instrumental recordings with lyrics written primarily in the vernacular, he uses language that stylistically mirrors the aesthetic of the music. His attention to detail and his use of jazz vernacular designate Hendricks as hip, meaning that he has an understanding of the countercultural aesthetics and politics of jazz instrumentalists. He also demonstrates the intellectual skill needed to translate music into language. Second, by using vernacular Hendricks' lyrics imply racial coding;

¹⁷² Transcribed from Lambert, Hendricks & Ross "Caravan," *Lambert, Hendricks & Ross Sing Ellington*, Columbia Records CS 8310, 1960, LP.

however, because an integrated and mixed gender group sings them, his lyrics do not fit within traditional representations of racialized language. His lyrics demonstrate the hybridity of race and gender through the group's singing. Third, his lyrics and scat singing demonstrates hip intellectualism by canonizing individuals as members of the jazz lineage and tradition. Lastly, by writing lyrics to instrumental recordings, Hendricks memorializes instrumentalists—a practice that occasionally attracted criticism because some viewed his work as mere imitation.

Hendricks creates a highly specialized space for his voice within the instrumental framework through the practice of hipness. Hipness is a term that emerged during the bebop period to imply insider knowledge and understanding of countercultural intellectualism created through language and jazz music. As such, the term became a cultural marker of Afro-Modernism. Guthrie Ramsey describes Afro-Modernity as an outgrowth of African American experiences of Modernity particularly through industrialization, urbanization, and its reflection in art as increasing abstraction in Post War America.¹⁷³ Afro-Modernism took on two further implications: first, it implied new structural changes in jazz, and, second, it more broadly connoted a rejection of the racist mainstream music industry.¹⁷⁴ As an African American living in New York during the rise of the bebop period, Hendricks was influenced by bebop and its alternative counterculture. The bebop aesthetic was not only a genre of music but also a vernacular language that rejected the racism and segregation of the predominantly white mainstream recording industry. During the bebop period, hipness designated non-conformity. The vernacular language that musicians spoke offstage, along with the modern compositional and improvisatory approaches that they employed onstage, became part of Hendricks' artistic

¹⁷³ Guthrie Ramsey, "'We Called Ourselves': Race Music and the Politics and Practice of Afro-Modernism at Midcentury," *Race Music*, 76-96.

¹⁷⁴ These connotations of Afro-Modernism are drawn from Ingrid Monson, "The Problem with White Hipness: Race, Gender, and Cultural Conceptions in Jazz Historical Discourse," 407.

expression.

Hendricks connects to the sonic sensibilities of bebop through vocalese and through scat singing. He performs hipness by integrating the instrumental virtuosity and the vernacular language associated with the bebop period into his performances. Though he writes lyrics to music outside of the bebop canon (e.g., the large ensemble repertoire of Duke Ellington and Count Basie), he superimposes the vernacular language of bebop onto the music in order to align himself with the music's modern musical aesthetic. By singing the solos of jazz instrumentalists with his lyrics, and then using his voice as an instrument when improvising, Hendricks demonstrated his proficiency in not only the vernacular language but also the improvisatory and hip musical language of bebop.

One of Hendricks' most intellectually hip demonstrations of his proficiency in vernacular as well as bebop improvisatory language is his rendition of bassist Oscar Pettiford's composition "Swingin' Till the Girls Come Home." Hendricks penned these vocalese lyrics:

Roll back the rug
Break out the jug
I'm gonna have a ball
The likes of which have never been done
My wife is on vacation
So is my mother in law
I betcha never saw the crazy kind of a fling that I'll be flingin'
Then I really will be swingin' till the girls come home

Roll down the shade
Send home the maid
I'm gonna live a little now for all the dues that I've paid
My wife is on vacation
So is my mother in law
I betcha never saw the crazy kind of a fling that I'll be flingin'
Then I really will be swingin' till the girls come home

Gonna invite some crazy cats I know

Let them bring their horns and blow
And we'll cook, and we'll ball, and the neighbors will murder us all ¹⁷⁵

Hendricks' lyric is full of vernacular terminology from the bebop period such as "cats," "swingin'," and "blow," that reference musicians who are fluent in the improvisatory language of jazz. Hendricks demonstrates his own improvisatory skill and intellectualism in the piece by imitating the sounds of different bass player for his entire scat solo. He sings voiced plosive scat syllables beginning with the letter "b" to imitate the sound of Oscar Pettiford's bass. He then calls out different bass players throughout his scat solo and imitates their sound. He names Percy Heath, Paul Chambers, Ray Brown, and Charles Mingus, and subtly changes how he scats to imitate each of their approaches to the upright bass. Hendricks demonstrates that he is both hip to the vernacular and improvised languages of the bebop period. He demonstrates that his fluency in bebop was developed through deep listening and study.

In his highly specialized form of poetry that is bound to music, Hendricks most often writes in the vernacular of bebop jazz musicians. The word "hip" itself occurs frequently in vocalese lyrics, and is a fitting descriptor of Hendricks' meticulous attention to jazz music as a means of poetic inspiration and translation. Phil Ford describes the characteristics of hipness.

My claim is that hipness is an aesthetic and a sensibility... it is like an operating system—a code, running largely below the threshold of conscious thought, that constellates habits of mind and patterns of taste; orders our everyday perceptions of what is meaningful, true, and beautiful; and shapes individual acts of artistic creation. ¹⁷⁶

In a similar definition Richard McRae defines hip as, "to be aware, wise, sophisticated, and especially understanding of the music."¹⁷⁷ Hendricks' highly individualized lexicon blends the language of the African Methodist Episcopal Church where he grew up, bebop vernacular

¹⁷⁵ Transcribed from Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, "Swingin' 'Till the Girls Come Home," *The Swingers*, Pacific Jazz Records, WP-1264, 1959, LP.

¹⁷⁶ Ford, *Dig*, 20.

¹⁷⁷ Rick McRae, "What is hip?" and Other Inquiries in Jazz Slang Lexicography," *Notes* 57 (2001): 584.

associated primarily with the African American male musicians in New York during the 1940s, and the academic lexicon from his experiences at the University of Toledo. His lyrics are often written to fast instrumental recordings; therefore, they are hard to comprehend without repeated listening so they necessitate a form of studied intellectualism.

Hendricks' hip intellectualism demonstrates that jazz is not merely music of non-literate musicians, but that it is fashionable as well as intellectual. History scholar Thomas Aiello explains, "Being 'hip,' and thus knowing all of the intricate speech patterns and rules of those similarly hip, was a passcode into that cloistered cool world."¹⁷⁸ Audiences who were knowledgeable about bebop musicians and lingo had the advantage of understanding the allusions and references in Hendricks' lyrics. Vernacular language provided Hendricks with a means to articulate his connection to the counterculture of bebop. Not only did this vernacular identify Hendricks with bebop, but it also created a new means of connecting with audiences.

Hip intellectualism is Hendricks' vehicle for the voice to actively comment and engage within an instrumental idiom. Using bebop vernacular and the nicknames of jazz musicians, he illustrates that he understands the music and its cultural history deeply. More broadly, through his references to other art forms Hendricks demonstrates the cleverness of his lyrics. Through blending standard and vernacular forms of language with music Hendricks connects with audiences and implies that they are hip and intellectual if they understand all of the implications in his lyrics. For those that do not understand all of the references, they are still able to understand the basic themes of his lyrics and connect to instrumental music through a form of storytelling.

¹⁷⁸ Thomas Aiello, "Introduction," *Dan Burley's Jive* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), xx.

In vocalese, language strengthens the audiences' connection to the music and creates new understandings of the meanings of jazz repertoire. Hendricks' gift in creating witty narratives that fit intimately with music is the primary reason why he is considered the poet laureate of jazz. The importance of language for Hendricks is its appeal to a wide variety of audiences. He argues, "anybody can go bla bla bla but lyrics build a bridge, they build a house, a structure with words."¹⁷⁹ Unlike anyone else, Hendricks fuses poetry and music in extremely close cooperation as a means of connecting to audiences as well as jazz instrumentalists. Though audiences unfamiliar with bebop vernacular may not have understood all of his references, the fact that he sang words allowed Hendricks to connect with audiences who would understand at least some of the meanings of his words.

Through his lyrics, Hendricks creates a form of expression that reflects how jazz musicians speak to each other. As Ralph Gleason wrote,

The jazz language, the peculiar amalgam of underworld slang, racial dialects and the work language of the musicians, has become the most vital force in American common speech, just as jazz music has become the most vital force in American music. Curiously enough, with the emergence of Hendricks all previous attempts at jazz poetry are instantly obsolescent...jazz musicians read and hear and understand what Hendricks is saying and it is no coincidence that when the poet of jazz appeared he should be, as Hendricks is, not only a drummer but a singer.¹⁸⁰

For Hendricks, vernacular shares similarities with jazz in that they were both formed initially as aural and adaptive practices as opposed to written practices and they are also both rhythmic. Hendricks draws on the versatility of slang as a predominantly oral form of language to the extent of more formal written language. Vernacular language, like jazz is often improvised and heavily influenced by context. He explains, "I like to write in the vernacular. You can express

¹⁷⁹ Jon Hendricks, interview by Lee Martin, February 27, 2014.

¹⁸⁰ Ralph Gleason, "Hendricks' Jazz Poetry," *New York, N.Y. Journal American*, November 7, 1959, 6.

yourself much better in the vernacular than I think you can in so-called literary terms.”¹⁸¹

Hendricks uses language that not only fits the music, but that speaks to the musicians. He demonstrates that he is conversant in their language, and thus gains credibility as an insider.

Hendricks’ choice of vernacular language draws primarily on bebop musicians’ vocabulary, featuring words like “dig,” “hip,” “groovy,” and “hep cat” among others. Robert Gold identifies a shift that occurred in jazz vernacular between the swing and bebop period. He writes:

Obviously most slang is metaphoric, but less obvious is why metaphors tend to be elaborately decorative in one period and severely functional in another, though World War II is a divider between the easy-going loose hyperbole of the Louis Armstrong-Cab Calloway generation (collar the jive, like the bear, I ain’t nowhere) and the unsmiling incisiveness of the boppers (dig it; ax; cool)...¹⁸²

While Hendricks’ lyrics to *Sing a Song of Basie* are primarily set to recordings of the swing era, his lyrics employ numerous terms and nicknames of musicians from the bebop period. Drawing from his own experiences, Hendricks writes in the bebop vernacular when lyricizing swing compositions. He drew from the language that he heard and spoke while living in New York at the height of the bebop period in the late 1940s and early 1950s. He positions his voice within the contemporary jazz community of the late 1950s, and encodes his lyrics with vernacular references only understood by those conversant in the musicians’ language.

The use of vernacular functions verbally as well as musically for Hendricks, as it provides him with a form of language where he can employ abbreviations of words to rhythmically match what the instrumentalists’ play. Hendricks finds vernacular the most conducive to his work, because the language sounds like the music. Jazz singer Kevin Burke

¹⁸¹ Zimmerman, 78

¹⁸² Robert Gold, “Introduction to Jazz Talk,” *Riffs & Choruses: A New Jazz Anthology*, ed. Andrew Clark et al. (New York: Continuum, 2001) 323.

describes Hendricks' use of vernacular as means to mimic the rhythmic phrasing of instrumental solos. Burke posits:

What's great about his lyrics I think is that besides how great they are just sitting on the page, is how they work in the mouth to create the percussive sound, to create the swing. Because there are a lot of people, you can look at their lyrics and they look fine on the page, but then they don't come off rhythmically correct to say, convey the instrumental idiomatically correct...I think that's why he does all the apostrophe words. You know it's "git," it's not "get," or that's just a "t'." It's "t'go," it's not "to go." When you see his handwritten lyrics you see all of these apostrophes. He is saying rhythmically this is not long this is short. This is a truncated word.¹⁸³

Hendricks modifies standardized language through vernacular to fit the rhythmic and melodic precision of instrumental recordings, and in doing so he creates lyrics that match the music so well that they seem as if they had always been a part of the music. Hendricks translates the music into language so seamlessly that after hearing his lyrics it becomes difficult to listen to the original recordings without thinking of his words.

3.3 DIG THIS! SINGING IN THE VERNACULAR

Drawing from African American vernacular language, Hendricks participates in constant negotiations of racialized sounds and words. Andrew Clarke explains, "Jazz language appears in spoken and written form as a particular vernacular, argot or code. In many instances-especially racial contexts it is a language, a lingo, which signals and expresses difference...Material is largely drawn from the 1940s-1950s, arguably the period of most prolific invention and interest

¹⁸³ Kevin Burke, interview with Lee Martin, June 13, 2014.

for jazz language...¹⁸⁴ Hendricks engages forms of African American performativity by writing lyrics in the vernacular. He draws from the rich history of dialect poetry of the Harlem Renaissance, made famous by figures of such stature as James Weldon Johnson, and Paul Laurence Dunbar, but uses the language of his contemporaries. Yet the added complexity of Hendricks' work lies in the fact that his lyrics were sung in an integrated and mixed gender group. In the context of racialized language, then, the performances of Hendricks lyrics by Lambert, Hendricks & Ross did not remain within normative categories of racialized language, but rather moved between them.¹⁸⁵

By blending standardized forms of English with bebop vernacular Hendricks not only code switches between linguistic markers of social groups, but he also embeds commentary on race in his work in subtle ways. For example in his lyric to Sonny Rollin's "Airegin," Hendricks uses primarily coded slang of the bebop period to reflect the genre of the piece. Because the lyrics go by so quickly, Hendricks uses vernacular terms to accurately articulate the rhythm of the piece, which also makes the message of the lyric harder to grasp on first listening.

Wait'll y'dig it on the map - Airegin
Spelled backwards
Really're closin' up the gap - Airegin
Gone fac'wards
Back long time ago they saw a ghost
Ghost made a boast
Soon that ghost was host

Wait'll y'dig it on the map - Airegin
Spelled backwards
Really're closin' up the gap - Airegin
Gone fac'wards
Those losing their hue
They goofed 'n got the wrong view

¹⁸⁴ Clark, *Riffs & Choruses*, 317.

¹⁸⁵ In the Annie Ross [Chapter 4](#), I discuss the intersections of race and gender in her performance of Hendricks' lyrics in more detail.

First, things reverse, last is first!
Ya dig it!¹⁸⁶

Drawing from the title—Nigeria, spelled backwards—Hendricks comments on the slave trade by building on the idea of backwardness through word play. He uses the word “ghost” to depict the colonizer as a villain and describes the colonized as those who had not lost their hue. When he sings, “First, things reverse, last is first ya dig it” he implies that those with “hue” have the right view. His use of the word “host” also has interesting implications in that it could a slave driver who forces Africans to come to America, but the word host could also imply a subject that carries disease, as if colonization was a plague on Africa.

At a rapid-fire tempo, Hendricks’ lyric to “Airegin” commented on race relations at a time when mainstream American society purposefully avoided the discussion. In using wordplay and humor, Hendricks challenged audiences’ understandings of his lyrics. The reference to Nigeria is not easily understood, particularly when the title of the piece is sung as opposed to read. By embedding the message of his lyrics in fast paced music, Hendricks speaks the unspeakable in American popular culture. Sonny Rollins remarked that the reason he named the piece “Airegin” was because “it might have been too controversial to call a song *Nigeria* at the time. Perhaps that would have been too blunt and too blatant. Perhaps I wanted to make my message incomprehensible to white-owned record companies...spelling Nigeria backwards was an act of incredible subtlety.”¹⁸⁷ As a man discriminated against due to the color of his skin, Hendricks mirrors this message and instills racial pride subversively by encoding the meaning of his lyrics. As an African American performing prior to Martin Luther King’s March on Washington, Hendricks’ social mobility was limited. In order to express himself politically,

¹⁸⁶ Transcribed from Lambert, Hendricks & Ross “Airegin,” *The Swingers*, © 1959 by Pacific Jazz Records, WP-1264, LP

¹⁸⁷ Marc Myers, *Why Jazz Happened* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 152.

Hendricks used word play and humor as ways to subtly get his point across. Ralph Ellison explains the reasons for the subversive nature of humor and wordplay.

American society contained a built-in joke...that the joke was in many ways central in our condition. We welcomed any play on words or nuance of gesture, which gave expression to our secret sense of the way things really were. Usually this took the comic mode, and it is quite possible that one reason the popular arts take on an added dimension in our democracy lies in an unspoken, though no less binding agreement that popular culture is not to be taken seriously. Thus the popular arts have become an agency through which Americans can contemplate those aspects of our experience that are deemed unspeakable.¹⁸⁸

In the guise of wordplay, Hendricks engages pointed social criticism of race relations in a way that was palatable to mainstream American audiences. As an African American man performing for mainstream predominantly white American audiences, Hendricks participated in the mode of criticism that he had available to him at the time. Within the framework of social respectability for an African American man of the 1950s, Hendricks could not blatantly criticize the atrocities of colonialism and the impact of the slave trade on the United States, and he therefore he enshrouded his opinions in clever word play that was not as easily understood.

Hendricks' vocalese negotiates racialized sounds and words in a manner redolent of what Henry Louis Gates calls "double voicing." Gates writes: "A novelist such as Ralph Ellison or Ishmael Reed creates texts that are double-voiced in the sense that their literary antecedents are both white and black novels, but also modes of figuration lifted from the black vernacular tradition."¹⁸⁹ While Gates explains the notion of double voicing as a racial negotiation of literary texts, we might see Lambert, Hendricks & Ross as a sort of triple voicing. Not only does the

¹⁸⁸ Ralph Ellison quoted by Robert G. O'Meally in "On Burke and the Vernacular: Ralph Ellison's Boomerang," *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, ed. Genevieve Fabre et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 256.

¹⁸⁹ Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), xxiii.

group move between race and gender categories because of its demographics, but also since they are a vocal group they add yet another register of the semiotics of music.

For example his lyrics to Leroy Kirkland and Horace Henderson's composition "Charleston Alley" intersect notions of race as well as gender. The Lambert, Hendricks & Ross rendition begins with Ross singing,

On the avenue
You may be havin' you a solid ball
But it ain't no ball at all
Compared to the kicks when you dally in Charleston Alley.
Maybe it don't look so hot but believe me it's a spot
Where you can sure let your hair down
Everything's right and you can boogie all night.¹⁹⁰

Ross sings of enjoying oneself through vernacular expressions such as "havin' a solid ball" and getting "kicks" from Charleston Alley. According to Dan Burley's dictionary of bebop slang aptly named "The Jiver's Bible," "kicks," is defined as a thrilling experience.¹⁹¹ Using another common American expression of "Letting your hair down," which means to feel comfortable enough to relax, Hendricks encodes a gendered performance in having Ross sing the lyric. As hair is often considered a symbol of femininity, Ross performs the feminine in Hendricks lyric.

Later on in the same song, Dave Lambert performs an interesting performance of race through gastronomic references. Lambert sings,

Ribs and pigs feet
The tastiest meat that you ever did eat
And a good piano player, a plinkin' and plunkin'
And playin' them blues
I doubt if you'll ever be gayer¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Transcribed from Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, "Charleston Alley," *The Hottest New Group in Jazz*, Columbia Records, CL 1403, 1962, LP.

¹⁹¹ Dan Burley, "The Jiver's Bible," *Dig*, ed. Thomas Aiello, (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 207-229.

¹⁹² Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, "Charleston Alley."

Singing about pigs' feet—considered by some to be a delicacy of African American soul food—Lambert moves between markers of race by singing Hendricks' lyrics. As a white man singing about black southern food, Lambert does not conform to traditional notions of the racial binary in the United States. He goes on to sing about a pianist, as homage to the composer of the piece Horace Henderson, a pianist and the brother of big band leader Fletcher Henderson. In the shout chorus the entire trio sings the lines,

So dig this vocal travelogue that we're singin' everyone
Bout that circle by the dark sun, Charleston Alley is the place to be
We get our kicks from hicks who hurry and take in the great white way
We'll pick the alley any day,
Charleston Alley is the place for me.¹⁹³

Hendricks once again plays off of the notion of jazz as a counterculture that is performed through insider vernacular. Charleston Alley represents the place that only insiders' or those hip to the jazz culture know about. He refers to Charleston Alley as "that circle by the dark sun," meaning the community of people who know about the Alley and gather there at night. Those hip enough to know about Charleston Alley stand in opposition to the "hicks who hurry and take in the great white way." The great white way is a nickname for the Theater district in New York City most famously associated with Times Square. Hendricks implies that mainstream forms of entertainment are not only inferior to jazz places such as Charleston Alley, but that they are also for "hicks," someone considered provisional and uninformed. There is also an implication of race when he refers to the mainstream with the term "white way" and the hip insider group as congregants around the "dark sun." Hendricks once again veils his social commentary in vernacular, in creating an evaluative framework of hipness that implies jazz culture as the ideal.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

Because Hendricks wrote his lyrics to be performed by an integrated, mixed-gender group, they do not fit neatly into a single linguistic category of subjective expression. Hendricks lyrics imply that hipness is not a marker of one subjectivity, but open to all fluent in the language and culture of hipness regardless of skin color. His lyrics demonstrated to audiences the fluidity of racial and gendered performativity. As Ingrid Monson argues, “The vernacular gloss, which sets ‘the black way’ against ‘the white way,’ simplifies a long historical process of cultural confrontation that has resulted in a cultural landscape in which African American and non-African American remain distinct but partially overlapping.”¹⁹⁴ Hendricks’ lyrics are neither explicitly black nor white. His lyrics are however more normative in terms of gender, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

3.3.1 Traditions and Influence

Vocalese both draws on traditions and creates new forms of musical meaning. By singing iconic instrumental jazz repertoire with lyrics, Hendricks revises tradition. Nielsen describes the importance of revision as an instance in which, “each member of the inheriting chain of tradition repeats the chant in a different voice, and replays it in a different register.”¹⁹⁵ Vocalese reinvents the music and reconfigures the nature of listening to language. Albert Murray’s retrospective approach to narration positions experimentation within tradition—this too, is an integral aesthetic of vocalese. Murray writes, “experimentation is an action taken to insure that nothing endures which is not workable; as such, far from being anti-traditional, as is often assumed, it actually

¹⁹⁴ Monson, *Saying Something*, 100.

¹⁹⁵ Nielsen, *Black Chant*, 30.

serves the best interests of tradition, which, after all, is that which continues in the first place.”¹⁹⁶ Vocalese is both in tradition with the music—because it attempts to sonically match recordings—but it also runs counter to the tradition because it appropriates instrumental sound for the voice and adds lyrics that impose new meanings onto sound.

In writing lyrics to the music that he loves, Hendricks aligns himself with instrumentalists that he considers important and foundational to the idiom. He is not only trying to validate his voice within the sonic world of instrumentalists that he loves but he is also sharing his own opinions on who is important in jazz by choosing to write lyrics to particular recordings. Hendricks engages in the tradition of recreating history through storytelling. Hendricks preserves the legacy of instrumentalists that he considers as American cultural icons.

Hendricks engages with forms of tradition in jazz by lyricizing popular jazz recordings and discussing lines of influence between musicians within his lyrics. Part of his versatility as a lyricist is drawn from his understanding of the confluence of influences among musicians. When asked whether he writes differently depending on soloist or composer, Hendricks explains that he hears lineages of influence in each musician that he lyricizes:

There’s not that much difference between writing for Duke and writing for Monk, because philosophy is at the basis of what they both do, and one is a child of the other. From Duke comes Monk. They both are well steeped in a deep religious philosophy. So those two, I would put almost next to each other as practically the same...¹⁹⁷

He hears the lineage of influence between artists and at times even comments on that influence explicitly in his lyrics. This reverence for tradition stems from a similar impulse of the more widespread practice of jazz musicians quoting standards during improvisation. In his lyric to Lester Young’s solo on “Let Me See” Hendricks sings:

¹⁹⁶ Albert Murray, *The Hero and the Blues* (New York: Random House, 1996), 71.

¹⁹⁷ Zimmerman, 80.

People diggin' Bird'll know what Bird was diggin'
Don't'cha know you gotta grow?¹⁹⁸

Though his lyrics are written to a Lester Young solo, Hendricks implies that Charlie Parker listened to Young and that he directly influenced Parkers playing. Charlie Parker mentioned as “Bird,” in this lyric is considered the premiere figure in the development of bebop. Hendricks references Parker in this swing solo by Lester Young in order to illustrate that Young was highly influential to Bird’s development as a bebop saxophonist. Hendricks creates a linear map of influence from Young to Parker in order to establish his own understanding of the trajectory of jazz through his lyrics. Hendricks demonstrates his connection to the history of the music as well as his awareness that jazz is an amalgamation of multiple influences that continually emerge and reemerge. By recreating instrumental solos through vocalese, Hendricks articulates lines of influence and reintroduces them through the new context of the voice.

In adding lyrics to instrumental music, Hendricks not only creates new meanings but also memorializes instrumentalists. For example, in his lyric to Count Basie’s “Everyday I Have the Blues,” Hendricks sings, “Dig Count Basie blow those blues away,” naming the bandleader within the first line of the piece. Indeed, the album this song appears on is called *Sing a Song of Basie*. Part of Hendricks’ desire to memorialize instrumentalists in his lyrics is to make a place for his voice in the music that he loves and reveres. Memorialization is a way that Hendricks can commemorate the music that he considers an intrinsic aspect of American cultural heritage through the voice. In writing lyrics to music that loves, the voice allows Hendricks to not only recreate the sound of the music, but to also add something new to the music which is to directly state the names of particular jazz musicians. The voice, unlike other instruments, allows Hendricks to tell his story of jazz. According to his daughter Aria, part of his desire in writing

¹⁹⁸ Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, “Let Me See,” *Sing Along With Basie*, Columbia 33XS 1151, 1958, LP.

lyrics arose out of his deep love of the music. Aria explains, “I think that the real thing about dad is that yes he is a working singer, and yes he was always a working singer, but more than that (and a lyricist) he was a devout fan, just a devout fanatical fan of the art form.”¹⁹⁹ His love and deep respect for jazz instrumentalists is one of the primary reasons behind Hendricks’ canonization of his musical heroes through vocalese.

Part of Hendricks vocalese process is preservationist in that he insists on performing repertoire in the original key and at the original tempo. Hendricks attempts to recreate as much of the original as the human voice can manage. Aria Hendricks describes how the instrumentalists who worked with Lambert, Hendricks & Ross often found Hendricks’ insistence on exact replication stifling to their own creativity. Aria claims that musician’s would, “get very irritated with his insistence on it being a certain way...with dad insisting being like, ‘no Basie 1937, not even Basie 1954.’”²⁰⁰ Instrumentalists who worked with Lambert, Hendricks & Ross had to not only replicate the style of the instrumentalists that the vocalese arrangements were based on, but they also had to replicate the instrumentalists’ style from particular decades.

Hendricks claims that instrumentalists’ acceptance of vocalese by the jazz greats is contingent on recreating recordings accurately. He recalls one colorful instance in which trumpeter Miles Davis thought Annie Ross’ performance had strayed too far from his original solo:

When Annie did his [Davis’] solo on *Four*, I was eating a steak up in Toronto. He moved me over, took the fork and knife out of my hands, and ate my steak. I said, ‘You ate my steak.’ He said, “You mess with my solos, I’ll mess with your food.’ And mess wasn’t the word. But these guys are very involved in what they did. They take great pride...they don’t want to hear it back messed up. I try to tell the singers that. They don’t listen...It’s hard to find someone with that respect for what it is they’re singing. They’re not just singing words to an instrumental. They’re singing creations of living people who want to

¹⁹⁹ Aria Hendricks, interview by Lee Martin.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

hear that creation back, with the addition of words, without losing any of the musical artistry and creativity they put into it.²⁰¹

What is interesting about this story is that Annie Ross never sang the Miles Davis solo on “Four,” Hendricks did. Ross sang the second solo on the recording, which was originally performed by pianist Horace Silver. In attempting to recreate instrumental recordings accurately, musicians at times reacted negatively to his work as copying their work. Hendricks believed that if he recreated the music with extreme accuracy that his lyrics would be understood as a contribution to the music and not a copy, but rather a demonstration of his reverence to the instrumentalists whose solos he lyricized.

However not all musicians felt that way about vocalese. Certain musicians who worked with the group eventually left to pursue other opportunities that allowed for more creative freedom. Drummer Jimmy Wormworth, who toured with Lambert, Hendricks & Ross in 1960, described working with the trio as a job.

To me that was just a job that was for security and plus it was fun, and look, it was glamorous as hell, at least as far as jazz is concerned... Well it's like everything else—there is good and bad to everything. The good side was, look what I was exposed to. I made money to fly my wife and sometimes even my kids to gigs and out of town and travel and blah, blah, blah and meet some of the top shelf of this art music, Louis Armstrong all kinds of people. I might not have had that opportunity at least not that quickly certainly so.²⁰²

Musicians such as Wormworth and Charles Mingus describe Lambert, Hendricks & Ross as a financially stable form of jazz that was not as musically exciting as they would have liked. To some instrumentalists, the fact that vocalese is a form of recreation renders it illegitimate. For example, in a 1960 *Down Beat* column called the “Blindfold Test,” Mingus reacted to Lambert,

²⁰¹ Zimmerman, 82.

²⁰² Jimmy Wormworth, interview by Lee Martin, New York, NY, June 21, 2014.

Hendricks & Ross as “not that original, man.”²⁰³ While Hendricks recalls musicians’ reactions to his work as only positive, in reality not all instrumentalists considered his work jazz.

Vocalese was not accepted by all jazz instrumentalists, however Hendricks strove to win over musicians with his vocalese by demonstrating his accuracy in re-creating their work. Though not all instrumentalists accepted his work, some did. Aria Hendricks explained how instrumentalists believed that Hendricks’ lyrics were acceptable but other vocalese lyricists were ruining the music. She remembered musicians saying, “it was fine for your dad to do it but he’s opened the door to all these nincompoops who think they can do it.”²⁰⁴ Hendricks attempted to validate his work among instrumentalists by performing iconic solos with a high degree of technical precision and facility with lyrics.

Hendricks’ unique gift for language allows him to connect not only with instrumentalists but also with audiences. As critic and philosopher Frank Kofsky writes:

It is essential to realize that in a Hendricks lyric, as in any great poem, the effect depends upon the inseparable union of content and the means of expression. Hip lyrics which lacked substance would be merely clever, and conversely, the most profound of philosophical doctrines would be a drag unless phrased in our very personal vernacular...Hendricks communicates a message...in a language no less poetic for being that of our speech... Hendricks represents the attitudes of the jazz people.²⁰⁵

For Hendricks lyrics bridge the dividing lines between music and language as well as voice and instrument. As he describes, “I think with every musician words and music go together. The marriage of words and music is a magical thing.”²⁰⁶ By matching the music so closely with lyrics, his work becomes a learning tool for audiences and other singers, making instrumental jazz approachable through the common thread of language. According to Aria Hendricks, his

²⁰³ Leonard Feather, “Blindfold Test,” *Down Beat*, April 28, 1960, 17. Reprinted at the Charles Mingus Official site, accessed March 15, 2015, <http://mingusmingusmingus.com/mingus/blindfold-test>.

²⁰⁴ Aria Hendricks, interview by Lee Martin.

²⁰⁵ Frank Kofsky, “Everybody Here’s Got Ears” *Jazz A Quarterly of American Music* 5 (1960): 51-56.

²⁰⁶ Tomkins, <http://www.nationaljazzarchive.co.uk/stories?id=199>.

virtuosity lies in his “ability to not only come up with what turns out to be the perfect lyric, but how artfully and beautifully it fits with the prerecorded music and how it enhances it. It in-and-of-itself becomes a tool to transcribe the music in your mind.”²⁰⁷ Like translating a text into a native language, Hendricks makes music approachable and comprehensible to audiences through his own unique form of hip intellectualism.

In the work of Jon Hendricks, the separation of poetry and music blend together, thus demonstrating the fluidity between music and language. Hendricks prizes the voice as vital to his art. He explains, “As a jazz musician, I would like to be remembered as a poet...the language that one speaks attains its height in poetry; a person reads a great poem and his soul is ennobled.”²⁰⁸ Hendricks negotiates the separation of voice and instrument in jazz by recreating instrumental music and translating it into vernacular lyrics. His work provides a new lens to translation studies in that it negotiates different forms of expression and semantics across art forms. He constructed a bridge between music and language through listening and merged the singing and signing voice.

Not only did his lyrics create a way for Hendricks to integrate his voice into the music he loved through his poetry, but they also have now become learning tools to young jazz singers in developing an instrumental vocabulary. His work could lead to future investigations into the vocalists’ learning process of instrumental vocabulary. According to vocal jazz pedagogue Rosana Eckert, Hendricks’ vocalese are beneficial to students because they “inject even more jazz vocabulary into their brains, but it’s through a vocal tradition of lyrics.”²⁰⁹ Lyrics allow

²⁰⁷ Aria Hendricks interview by Lee Martin.

²⁰⁸ Jon Hendricks interview by Greg Thomas, “Jon Hendricks: Vocal Ease,” *All About Jazz Artist Profiles*, April 10, 2008, <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/jon-hendricks-vocal-ease-jon-hendricks-by-greg-thomas.php?&pg=2#.VELVXpRdXPY>.

²⁰⁹ Rosana Eckert, interview by Lee Martin, February 27, 2015.

singers to memorize melodies more quickly. Eckert also describes vocalese as a bridge between audiences and instrumental jazz.

Vocalese is a way to have some real jazz soloing going on for your audience— but let's say a lot of times when an audience comes to see a singer they are not necessarily a really experienced jazz audience, or instrumental jazz audience— so they may not always understand the scatting thing. But if you do an improvised solo that has a lot of great language and is 100% jazz but is set to lyrics, that can be a really neat way to sort of bridge that gap between a less experienced audience. They are really getting a good jazz experience but in a way that makes it a little easier to understand. It's a wonderful thing. Plus often times, it's a really neat challenge to grow the ear training of the singer too.²¹⁰

By writing lyrics to popular jazz recordings, Hendricks created a new audience for instrumental jazz, and developed a method to immerse young singers in the instrumental vocabulary of jazz through the medium of language that they were already comfortable with. He not only successfully translated complex instrumental music into language, but he also tells complete stories while memorializing the music that he considers the epitome of American culture. By intersecting the roles of voice and instrument with English, Hendricks bridged the gap between the voice and the instrument in jazz.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

4.0 A CHICK SINGER OR A DIVA? GENDER PERFORMATIVITY IN VOCAL JAZZ

Often dressed in lavish gowns and singing the highest parts of the Lambert, Hendricks & Ross arrangements, Annie Ross was the visual focal point of the group. For example, on the trio's first album cover one cannot read the name of the album title without being interrupted by Ross' breasts (see fig. 4.1). The central point of focus in the image, meanwhile, is her legs draped over the piano in nothing but black stockings. Ross' body clearly dominates the image. Contrastingly the bodies of Lambert and Hendricks are not only hidden behind the piano but they are also dressed in generic everyday white button down shirts so as not to draw attention away from Ross. Lambert looks up at Ross to reinforce her body as the central focus of the image.

[Figure 4.1](#) Album Cover *Sing a Song of Basie* 1957, From the Annie Ross Collection, Box 4, Folder 10, Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University Libraries (accessed June 9, 2014).²¹¹



Even though Ross visually dominates the photo, her name is printed in a smaller font than the two men, and she is described with the word “featuring”—as if she is a guest on the project. While on the surface Ross represents the “canary,” a term used to describe jazz singers whose primary purpose is to sing the melody and look pretty, Ross was more than a pretty voice and titillating eye candy. As Hendricks recalled, “I’ve heard every singer of any consequence there is, nobody could have done what Annie did. She was the best trumpet section we could have had. There was no better one on the planet.”²¹² In this chapter, I argue that beneath the 1950s display of American femininity, Ross engaged in an act of subterfuge through her voice.

While Jon Hendricks wrote the majority of Lambert, Hendricks, & Ross lyrics, critics, musicians, and audiences recognized Annie Ross for her voice. As Grammy Award winning composer and arranger Johnny Mandel proclaimed,

Annie Ross I think is the best singer I’ve ever heard — in just about all categories. I’d like to hear a lot more of her, singing slow songs and everything else. I think she’s a marvel and nobody can lay down time like this girl. She’s got range, a voice that just

²¹¹ Joe Eula, accessed June 7, 2015, <http://www.discogs.com/Lambert-Hendricks-Ross-Sing-A-Song-Of-Basie/release/3008514>.

²¹² Jon Hendricks, *No One But Me*”

does everything...she practically encompasses the whole piano keyboard. She's got a freak voice, but it's correct.²¹³

What was this Scottish girl with the “freak voice” doing singing jazz? As a white woman in a predominantly African American male art form, she certainly turned heads. Ross was known as the real vocalist of the group, because of her expansive range and her ability to articulate complex rhythms in an extremely high register of her voice while making it seem effortless. A close friend and collaborator with such artists as Billie Holiday, Charlie Parker, and Kenny Clarke, Annie Ross is an important figure in jazz history. When she joined Lambert, Hendricks & Ross in 1957, her sense of swing, and the flexibility of her voice are what solidified the trio's success. Ross' voice was the vehicle that brought Hendricks' lyrics and Lambert's arrangements to life. At eighty-five years young, Annie Ross continues to perform regularly in New York City.

Born in Mitcham, England, in 1930 to the Logan family—a troupe of traveling, Scottish vaudevillians—Annie Ross never fit the traditional narrative of an American jazz singer. She started performing and singing when she was three years old. She recalled,

I don't think anybody had a weirder upbringing than I did. My mother and father were totally stage struck. As were many in our family and I'd sing at a drop of the hat. I mean there's a story that my mother couldn't find me at a railway station. We were on our way somewhere by train and she found me in the ladies room on top of the basin singing for the customers. I was like a precocious midget.²¹⁴

Sensing potential in their daughter, Ross' parents brought her to the United States where her aunt, Hollywood actress Ella Logan, raised her.

In 1935 Ross won a talent contest and appeared on a Paul Whiteman radio broadcast after which she became known as the “Scottish Shirley Temple.” Two years later, she appeared in the film production of *Our Gang of Follies*, singing a big band swing arrangement of the Scottish

²¹³ Johnny Mandel, interview by Leonard Feather “The Blindfold Test: John's Special,” *Down Beat*, April 2, 1959, 10.

²¹⁴ Annie Ross, *No One But Me*, directed by Brian Ross (2012: Glasgow, SCT: CONNECTFilm, 2012, DVD)

traditional song “The Bonnie Banks o’ Loch Lomond.” In an interview on *NPR’s* “Piano Jazz with Marian McPartland,” Ross stated that the arrangement of the song was actually her aunt’s.²¹⁵ In *Our Gang of Follies* she sings the first verse of “The Bonnie Banks o’ Loch Lomond” in a Scottish accent with heavily rolled “r’s,” yet in the chorus the performance becomes a hybrid mixture of the traditional Scottish lyrics and elements of American jazz—with scat syllables and phrases such as “now fellas” thrown in. By blending folk and jazz Ross revealed her uniqueness as a singer from an early age. Beginning her career as a Hollywood child star, and in her adolescence moving to Paris to sing jazz with musicians of such stature as drummer Kenny Clarke and saxophonist James Moody, Ross was anything but a traditional jazz singer.

Even though she conformed to visual ideals of the feminine, she challenged normative representations of white femininity, first, by appearing onstage with a black man and, second, by singing music composed and performed by primarily African American male instrumentalists. Beginning with a discussion of gender roles ascribed to singers in jazz, this chapter examines how Ross at once performed a traditional visual femininity while expanding the vocal roles available to women in jazz. She did not stay within the confines of the songbird, but instead used her voice to perform roles that were highly unusual for a white, female singer. She became the first woman to write vocalese with her 1954 lyrics to Wardell Gray’s “Twisted,” which is now a standard in vocal jazz repertoire.²¹⁶ By 1958 Annie Ross was a member of the most popular vocalese group in the history of the idiom. With Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, she revealed her vocal dexterity by singing the solos of some of the top male instrumentalists of the time. Her

²¹⁵ Annie Ross on *Piano Jazz* <http://www.npr.org/2010/12/17/132138020/annie-ross-on-piano-jazz> (accessed December 7, 2014)

²¹⁶ Annie Ross, “Twisted” from *King Pleasure Sings/Annie Ross Sings*, Prestige Records, 1301, 1952, 7” EP.

voice spanned the subdued tones of Neal Hefti's trumpet on "Lil Darlin," the growling brass sound of Emmett Berry on "The King," to the propulsive feel of Horace Silver's piano solo on "Doodlin." Regardless of range or instrument, Ross used her voice to create a more malleable space for herself in a male dominated idiom. However, when she joined the trio she quit writing lyrics and it will be necessary, in the course of this chapter, to examine why. One thing however is certain: though Ross was a tremendously talented vocalist and lyricist, she had to navigate a complex position as the only woman singing the repertoire of African American male musicians and composers.

Drawing on the work of scholars such as Adriana Cavarero, Ingrid Monson, and Wayne Koestenbaum, this chapter discusses heterogeneous entanglements of voice against the backdrop of a series of binary oppositions. First, I examine how the female voice is mediated in jazz through the "canary" stereotype by jazz critics, and then rearticulated in African American literature as a symbol of freedom. By examining the juncture between race and gender and the implications of terminology applied to Ross' work, I argue that Ross moved between vocal and social categorizations due to the type of music that she sang, the people with whom she performed, and the virtuosity of her voice. I then discuss how Ross blurred gender expectations through vocalese lyrics. As language is often coded as masculine, and voice is coded as feminine, Ross complicates the binary when she employs both simultaneously. What is interesting to note, is that in jazz the gendered binary of voice and language is reversed. To improvise without words is considered the ultimate form of expression and instrumental sound therefore is considered the masculine form of expression, whereas singing lyrics is considered feminine. Third, I analyze the gendered aspects of improvisation in jazz, and discuss why Ross chose not to scat in live performances. Finally, I examine the source of Ross' anxiety

surrounding improvising as an outgrowth of the voice/instrument binary in jazz. The conception of voice as internal to (and inseparable from) the body and therefore feminine is often pitted against the understanding of instruments as external technical devices that require mastery. By performing the feminine on the visual register, Ross created a broader space for the female voice within the boundaries of predominantly male instrumental jazz. As such, the story that I tell in this chapter is less about the emancipation of any individual or social group, and more of an exploration of the compromises, strategies, and antagonisms that structured jazz in the mid-20th century that continue to haunt contemporary jazz performance.

4.1 AN UNUSUAL CANARY

As a white female jazz singer, Annie Ross had to navigate a framework constructed through the valorization of a particular form of masculinity. Women were traditionally expected to participate in jazz by dressing beautifully and singing the melody, while male instrumentalists improvised and were considered serious musicians. According to Sherrie Tucker, singers were considered “trinkets to decorate the bandstand.”²¹⁷ In line with the equation of singers as decorative objects, critics and musicians often referred to vocalists as songbirds, canaries, or thrushes and were valued for their physical beauty and sweet sound. The gendered framework in jazz evaluated women based on their looks, and valued men for their musicianship and

²¹⁷ Tucker, *Swing Shift*, 57.

instrumental virtuosity. From this perspective, the voice—likened to a bird’s song—is understood as natural and instinctual, as opposed to the learned skill of male instrumental performers. Categorizing the female vocalist as a small, non-predatory animal created an evaluative framework for women that was highly scripted—and restrictive.

The bird terminology attributed to female singers became popular during the swing period of the 1930s, and continued into the reception of Annie Ross’ 1952 recording of “Twisted.” *Downbeat* described Ross as,

The most unusual new thrush on the American scene has just made her record debut here, and she’s not around to cash in on it...Annie’s *Twisted* on Prestige is the first major feminine contribution to the lyricized-bop or *Moody Mood* school of vocalizing...²¹⁸

Referring to the first successful vocalese recording— “Moody’s Mood for Love” by King Pleasure — the critic simultaneously aligns Ross with one of the founders of vocalese, and yet categorizes her as an “unusual thrush.” By describing Ross as a small bird known for its beautiful appearance and unusual song, Ross’ contribution was diminished even as it was affirmed.²¹⁹

Contrastingly, male jazz musicians are often referred to as cats—that is, as natural predators of birds. Women, then, are not only described in diminutive terms, but they are positioned as what Simon de Beauvoir calls the “prey of the species,”²²⁰—as songbirds in danger of being devoured by the male instrumentalist. Lara Pellegrinelli discusses the competitive nature of male instrumentalists. She writes, “They emphasize earning a place as ‘one of the

²¹⁸ Len, “Disc Is Working: Annie Doesn’t Live Here Anymore, But She Should” *Down Beat*, January 19, 1953, 13.

²¹⁹ Ornithologist Austin Craig Apgar describes the song of the thrush as, “its notes are among the sweetest given by any bird, but it is impossible to write them in words or music. Its peculiarly weird song must be heard to be appreciated.” From *Birds of The United States East of the Rocky Mountains: A Manual for the Identification of Species in Hand or in the Bush* (New York: American Book Company, 1898), 52.

²²⁰ As quoted by Elizabeth Fallaize, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 103.

cats,' an insider in the fraternity."²²¹ While men compete to earn their place as an insider, women and especially singers are designated as separate and estranged from the competition entirely.

4.1.1 Voice and Instrument

The relationship between the voice and instruments often falls into a gendered binary where the voice is understood as natural versus the instrument as technical. Similar to the perception of female as natural versus male as cultural, the voice in jazz is perceived as bodily while the instrument is considered a tool external to the body that requires mastery.²²² Because the voice is considered feminine, natural, and associated with the body, it is demeaned or relegated to a secondary status in musical practice. Writing specifically about the association of voice and gender, Pellegrinelli observes:

The vast majority of jazz singers have been, and still are, women. The singer has often been the only woman in the band, on stage and at rehearsals, and that has also contributed to the distrust of vocals in general, which can be sensed when looking at statements from both jazz musicians and jazz critics throughout history.²²³

Contrastingly, instrumental jazz is considered predominantly male and is often used as a point of reference or as a measuring stick for singers, who are considered technically inferior. Kate Daubney describes how vocal performance is often overshadowed by the virtuosity of instrumental jazz performances. Daubney writes: "The voice, with its comparatively limited range of pitch and of opportunities for timbral variation, appears to provide less of a technical

²²¹ Pellegrinelli, "The Song is Who?," 101.

²²² See Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture," *Feminist Studies* 1 (1972): 5-31.

²²³ Viveka Hellström, "Is She a True Jazz Singer?," *Jazz, Gender, and Authenticity: Proceedings from the 10th Nordic Jazz Research Conference* (Stockholm, 2012), 88.

challenge, and its physical intimacy to the performer implies easier expressive channels.²²⁴ What Pellegrinelli and Daubney illustrate is that the relationship of the voice and the instrument in jazz is perceived as an antagonistic binary. The voice connotes body, emotion, nature, and popularity, while the instrument is associated with rational intellect, technical virtuosity, and what Pellegrinelli describes as “the primacy of music as non-verbal expression, authenticity, and high art.”²²⁵ Particularly because singers use words, the voice in jazz is considered the bearer of commercial music for the masses, whereas instrumental music— because of its technicality and lack of lyrics —is considered to hold higher cultural esteem. This perception of the separation between voice and instrument is also physicalized in live performance settings. Singers are often positioned out front of an all male instrumental ensemble, creating a literal space between voice and instrument on stage.

Separating vocalists from instrumentalists in jazz also has gender implications.

According to Vickie Willis:

A women could stand up and sing because she could be captured by the male gaze; a woman could not, however, stand up and play, because her ability to speak in a “man’s language” made it impossible for his gaze to capture her —which is one of the reasons that many publicity photos for “all-girl” bands showed women instrumentalists dressed in gowns and holding their instruments (Tucker, 58), a very different sort of picture than the photographs of women jazz singer’s “orgasmic” singing.²²⁶

Because of the voice’s connection to the body, singers were associated with hyper-sexuality. Playing an instrument with dexterity reaffirms the separation between instrument and the body, and between male and female. This risk of music being seen as feminine is one of the main

²²⁴ Kate Daubney, “Songbird or Subversive? Instrumental vocalization technique in the songs of Billie Holiday,” *Journal of Gender Studies* 11 (2002): 19.

²²⁵ Pellegrinelli, “The Song is Who?”, 85.

²²⁶ Vickie Willis, “Be-in-tween the Space: The Location of Women and Subversion in Jazz,” *The Journal of American Culture*, vol. 31 (2008), 299.

reasons that the technical skills involved in performing instrumental jazz are so heavily emphasized and interrelated with notions of masculinity.

Ross used her voice to create a more instrumental approach to singing. While popular singers of the era such as Nat King Cole won accolades singing jazz standards such as “Mona Lisa” in 1950, Annie Ross used her voice as an instrument—a highly experimental and cutting edge technique for a jazz singer at the time. In 1950, she recorded a wordless walking ballad composed by James Moody entitled “Le Vent Vert.” Ross used her voice as an instrument within a chamber jazz ensemble that featured Jack Dieval on piano, Nat Peck on trombone, Emmanuel Soudieux on bass, Richie Frost on drums, and James Moody on tenor saxophone. She sings what would have been considered in 1950 as an extremely modern, chromatic, and dissonant contrapuntal line in which she weaves her voice in and out of the role of melody and background suspensions.

The introduction of piece is a slow duet between Peck and Moody for five bars, an unusual length for an introduction. Ross then enters singing a syncopated vocal line, against the countermelody of the two horns. Her melody ranges from a low F below middle C and up two octaves. What is impressive in her performance is not only the range required to execute the melody, and the fact that the melodic line is full of dissonance, but also her harmonic frame of reference is extremely sparse, and therefore singing in tune is extremely difficult. The piano is barely audible and the bass is the primary source of harmony—but the latter is played in a low register that makes the chord tones more difficult to distinguish. Even so, Ross executed the chromatic and dissonant vocal line with precision and accuracy. For example, at one point in the melody Ross accurately sustains an F# above middle C, while the horns play an F natural and an

E flat an octave lower. This piece not only demonstrated her technical abilities as a singer, but it also aligned her with the modern jazz players of the era.

As an unconventional singer, Ross aligned herself with the modernist jazz instrumentalists of the time. She often describes herself as unconventional, remarking that, “I’ve never gone with what is popular. I think I was a bit of rebel and I was always searching.”²²⁷ Ross once again confuses the perceptions of the role of female singers in jazz, revealing that she can execute an instrumental line with as much precision as James Moody, but also that she is not in fact interested in the mainstream. Ross strove to create her own sound and emphasized serious musicianship and technicality in her singing, in order to move beyond the role of the canary.

In her early experimentations with expanding the role of the voice to encompass a more instrumental approach, Ross recorded repertoire without lyrics that was performed entirely on scat syllables. For her debut solo album *Annie Ross Sings* (1952), she composed a wordless piece entitled “Annie’s Lament” that starts off as a slow ballad for piano and voice sung primarily on the “ah” vowel. Using primarily vowel sounds, Ross begins the piece scatting with unusual syllable choices that create a soothing lullaby like quality. As the piece progresses, it transitions into a medium swing tempo as the bass and drums are added. At this point Ross begins to use more traditional scat syllables associated with bebop such as “be,” “ba,” “de,” and “da” that use consonants to create a more rhythmic drive.²²⁸ By singing the melody without lyrics, she becomes the voice beyond logos, what Dolar calls “the lawless voice,” in that she expresses herself through sound as opposed to with words.²²⁹ Using her voice as an instrument within a

²²⁷ Ross, *No One But Me*, 2012.

²²⁸ For a more detailed analysis of scat syllables see William R. Bauer, “Scat Singing: A timbral and Phonemic Analysis,” *Current Musicology* 64 (2001), 303–323.

²²⁹ Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 80.

piano trio, Ross demonstrated her versatility as a vocalist, and as a solo vocalist she moved between vocal and instrumental roles.

4.1.2 The Songbird at the Juncture of Race and Gender

Within the musical imagination of mid-twentieth century America, Annie Ross was an odd bird due to the fact that she sang instrumental music and because she is white. Writers of the Beat generation such as Terry Southern note that white female jazz singers were considered sub par to black female singers. In his essay Southern writes, “There aren’t any great ofay singers... Anita O’Day is all right...but I mean you wouldn’t compare her with Billie.”²³⁰ The perception that white female jazz singers, were somehow less authentic than black female singers was a reality that Annie Ross had to navigate as a young singer. She developed her jazz sound first by imitating Ella Fitzgerald recordings as a young girl. As she grew older she befriended Billie Holiday who became her mentor. This reveals that Ross musically self-identified with African American musicians. As a predominantly African American art form, jazz singing in the United States was often evaluated in terms of race. And here it is relevant to note another, quite different meaning in the metaphor of the songbird. Farah Griffin writes:

From the anonymous composers of the spirituals and folk tales to later poets such as Paul Laurence Dunbar and Abbey Lincoln, black people have likened themselves to birds: birds in flight, birds incapable of flight, caged birds, free birds, but most especially singing birds. For the white observer black singing is birdlike because it escapes categorization.²³¹

²³⁰ Terry Southern compares Anita O’Day to Billie Holiday in, “You’re Too Hip Baby,” *The Cool School: Writing From America’s Hip Underground*, ed. Glenn O’Brien (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 2013), 285.

²³¹ Griffin, “When Malindy Sings: A Meditation on Black Women’s Vocality,” 07.

Though jazz critics often described Ross with avian metaphors, the term did not take on the signification of freedom because she was a white woman born outside of the United States. Yet aspects of the type of singing that she engaged in did escape certain gendered categories and jazz provided her with a personal sense of freedom. Ross proclaims that African American jazz musicians were the only people from whom she felt love, acceptance and familial belonging. For Ross, being a jazz songbird allowed her a space of acceptance and a sense of freedom, which had otherwise evaded her for her entire life.

After a long and often bitter relationship with her aunt Ella Logan, Ross left Hollywood. She changed her name from Annabelle Logan to Annie Ross and moved to Paris, where she began singing the modern jazz of the 1950s with musicians such as Dizzy Gillespie, James Moody, and Kenny Clarke. She recalls, “What I found in Paris was love and acceptance. The French had no qualms about a white girl performing with black musicians, whereas in America it was very difficult...”²³² Ross found a means to escape categories of American social respectability through modern jazz singing. By moving outside of the boundaries of the United States and developing what Ingrid Monson has described as the subcultural politics of style, jazz provided Ross with an alternative framework of American mainstream social mores.

Using her voice as an instrument by singing modern jazz compositions and vocalese, Ross rejected the expectations of how a white woman was supposed to sound on recording and of whom she was allowed to appear with onstage. Singing jazz as an “instrumentalist” allowed Ross to engage in both a male and African American space of performance. Ross used her voice

²³² Ross interview in, *No One But Me*. For a particular discussion of jazz in Paris and the perception of racial equality see Bill Moody, *The Jazz Exiles: American Musicians Abroad* (Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 1993). Also see Laura Frader “Crossing the Pond: Jazz, Race, and Gender in Interwar Paris” (PhD diss., Northeastern University, 2010).

to create a sense of freedom because it allowed her, at least temporarily, to exist outside the cage of gender expectations.

Though Ross felt a valence of freedom overseas, while working in the United States as a white woman among predominantly African American men—she had to navigate the complexities of social respectability and its entanglements with sexual anxiety. Particularly as a white woman onstage with a black man in the 1950s, Ross tiptoed around American taboos of interracial sexuality. Eric Porter discusses the American perception of interaction between white women and black men, “whether based on sex, love, friendship, or patronage, relationships between black male musicians and white women were usually perceived in sexual terms, and this perception led to trouble.”²³³ As will be discussed in more detail in [Chapter 6](#), miscegenation was an ever-present social anxiety that Lambert, Hendricks & Ross had to contend with as an interracial and mixed gendered group.

Despite these potential pitfalls, Ross partially disengaged from the trope of the vulnerable canary and established a position of agency. She performed an alternate identity, one in which her voice moved beyond categories of racial respectability. Tucker writes that jazz gave white women, “conditional access to realms of expressive freedoms they were otherwise forbidden, carefully contained moments of mischievous disruption to rules and regulations of patriarchal supremacy.”²³⁴ By using her voice in a new way, Ross sang the music of predominantly male instrumentalists and simultaneously added her own voice onto the music through language.

Although Ross was able to disrupt American patriarchal supremacy she was not able to eradicate it. The female songbird in jazz was expected to perform the melody but was not

²³³ Porter, *What is this Thing Called Jazz?*, 88.

²³⁴ As quoted by Sherrie Tucker, “‘But This Music is Mine Already!’: ‘White Woman’ as Jazz Collector In The Film *New Orleans* (1947),” *Big Ears*, 239.

permitted the agency of self-expression that free use of language affords. The songbird is not permitted self-expression through speech, because language is understood as a domain relegated to men—this is what Richard Middleton calls “patriarchal sources of logos.”²³⁵ The perceived separation between the voice and language is often split along gender lines. Mladen Dolar articulates the dominant Western perception:

Music, and in particular the voice, should not stray away from words which endow it with sense; as soon as it departs from its textual anchorage, the voice becomes senseless and threatening- all the more so because of its seductive and intoxicating powers. Furthermore, the voice beyond sense is self evidently equated with femininity, whereas the text, the instance of signification, is in this simple paradigmatic opposition on the side of masculinity.²³⁶

Ross troubles this dichotomy because on the one hand she is a singer and makes sound with her body—thereby conforming to notions of femininity—but she simultaneously strays away from the gendered divisions because she writes her own lyrics. Annie Ross troubled the gendered binary of language and music when she became the only woman in 1954 to write a hit vocalese lyric to tenor saxophonist Wardell Gray’s “Twisted.” Prior to Ross’ recording, vocalese lyric writing consisted almost exclusively of male lyricists.²³⁷

Through the composition of “Twisted”, Ross conjoined the two poles of the mind–body binary of Western culture, what Cavarero describes as, “woman sings, man thinks.” She not only wrote lyrics that melodically and rhythmically fit Wardell Gray’s tenor saxophone solo but her lyrics also demonstrated that she was not reducible to a body simply channeling the words of others. She stepped outside of the confines of the feminine canary stereotype by writing her own lyrics, and she poked fun at gender expectations through the content of her prose. “Twisted”

²³⁵ Richard Middleton, *Voicing the Popular: On Subjects of Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 93

²³⁶ Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 43.

²³⁷ For more information on early vocalese lyricists see [Chapter 1](#).

centers on the themes of mental instability and extreme intelligence, and Ross satirizes the stereotype of women as mentally unstable. She begins “Twisted” with the lyric,

My analyst told me that I was right out of my head
The way he described it, he said I’d be better dead than live
I didn’t listen to his jive
I knew all along that he was all wrong
And I knew that he thought, I was crazy
But I’m not, Oh no!...

As psychoanalysis became fashionable across the United States in the 1950s, Ross poked fun at the new trend by reflecting on a (presumably fictitious) conversation with her analyst. Interestingly, in an interview Ross revealed that the original opening line of her lyric was “my aunt always told me”—a reference to the tumultuous relationship that she had with her aunt while growing up.²³⁸ Ross humorously switched the subject of her lyric from her aunt, to a presumably male analyst to engage with prevalent stereotypes associated with women and hysteria during the 1950s.²³⁹ She continued,

My analyst told me that I was right out of my head.
He said I’d need treatment
But I’m not that easily lead
He said I was the type that was most inclined
Went out of his sight to be out of my mind
And he thought I was nuts, no more ifs, or ands, or buts,
Oh No!

They say as a child
I appeared a little bit wild
With all my crazy ideas
But I knew what was happenin’
I knew I was a genius
What’s so strange

²³⁸ Annie Ross, *No One But Me*. In her handwritten, unpublished memoirs at the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University, she discusses the physical, verbal, and sexual abuse that she experienced while living with her aunt. For further details on Ross’ recollections of her childhood see Annie Ross Personnel Writings I, Box 7, Folder 6, Annie Ross Collection, 1934–2001, The Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University Libraries.

²³⁹ For a discussion of the prevalence of psychoanalysis in the 1950s in the United States see, Eli Zaretsky, “Charisma or Rationalization? Domesticity and Psychoanalysis in the United States in the 1950s,” *Critical Inquiry* 26 (2000): 38-354.

When you know that
You're a wizard at three?
I knew that this was meant to be

Well I heard little children were supposed to sleep tight
That's why I drank a fifth of vodka one night
My parents got frantic, didn't know what to do
But I saw some crazy scenes before I came to
Now do you think I was crazy?
I may have been only three but I was swingin'!

They all laughed at A Graham Bell
They all laughed at Edison and also at Einstein.
So why should I feel sorry if they just couldn't understand
The reasoning and the logic that went on in my head?
I had a brain, it was insane
So just let them laugh at me
When I refused to ride on all those double decker buses
All because there was no driver on the top²⁴⁰

She references Alexander Graham Bell (a Scottish inventor credited with developing the telephone), Thomas Edison (who developed the electric light bulb, the phonograph, and the film camera), and Albert Einstein—often used as a prime example of human genius. All within one phrase Ross aligns herself with the greatest minds of the 20th century and reveals that hysteria is not confined to women, but a diagnosis given to anyone who dares to think differently.

Her lyrics were also an ode to the hipster who rejects therapy and the aspiration of attaining the norms of social behavior and instead embraced what some categorized as mental illness, but which she saw merely as a different way of thinking. By writing these lyrics Ross articulated the sentiments of the hipster subculture and demonstrated the verbal as well as musical virtuosity of her voice. Ross illustrated that she was both articulate in language and reflective of the culture in which she engaged. The theme of madness and genius became prevalent among beat writers and reflected the hip subculture associated with jazz, beginning in

²⁴⁰ Transcribed from Annie Ross, "Twisted," *King Pleasure & Annie Ross*, MP3 file, Downloaded April 10, 2008, *iTunes*.

the mid 1940s and peaking in the 1950s. By drawing on the notion of the genius, Ross engaged with the aesthetic of the hipster who strove to demonstrate intellectualism through fluency in the bebop vernacular. Ross revealed that she could not only write her own lyrics, but that she was also well versed in the language and culture of modern jazz.²⁴¹ By aligning herself with famous male inventors and proclaiming, “I had a brain,” Ross demonstrated that women could both sing and think.

While Ross proved that she could write witty vocalese lyrics, social pressures impacted her will to continue in the idiom. Though Ross claims to have simply lost interest in writing lyrics, it is odd, to say the least, that she quit once she joined Lambert, Hendricks & Ross. When the group was formed, Jon Hendricks became the primary lyricist and Ross took a backseat. But even though Ross quit writing lyrics, she continued to create interesting and complex performances of gender and race.

For example, in the group’s recording of Count Basie’s “Fiesta in Blue,” Ross sings African American trumpeter Buck Clayton’s solo. She begins by singing “Hey Fellas’ Hey Fellas, I’ve got some mighty important news.” Though it seems as if she is addressing men, her performance of this lyric creates gender and racial ambiguity because a man performed the original solo. Though audiences did not necessarily know that Ross was singing Buck Clayton’s solo, most jazz audiences knew that primarily male musicians played the Basie repertoire. Ross in a sense performs vocal drag by recreating Clayton’s solo. While the trumpet is coded as masculine in jazz, Hendricks’ lyric to Clayton’s solo focuses on crying, an activity often

²⁴¹ For further discussions of the intellectualism of the jazz hipster and the development of the beat generation see Anatole Broyard, “A Portrait of the Hipster,” in *The Cool School*, 202-221.

gendered as feminine.²⁴² Ross sings, “way down deep even though we’re happy, we’re just tryin’ to hide a lot of cryin’, livin’ life the best we can. Man behavin’ like a natural man. Women carryin’ on like women, ever since time’s beginnin’.”²⁴³ By referring to men as natural—a characteristic famously described by Sherry Ortner as feminine—Hendricks’ lyrics reverse the gendered binary and further complicate the fact that Ross sings the lyrics.²⁴⁴ Ross’ vocal register and timbre recreates the sound of Clayton’s solo as feminine.²⁴⁵ In this performance Ross once again muddles the traditional binaries associated with male and female gender roles by moving between both categorizations through language and sound.

Hendricks’ line, “Man behavin’ like a natural man” draws on the primitivist myth often associated with African American male jazz musicians in the United States. Monson explains that there are mythologized “qualities that sometimes partook of what Andrew Ross has called a ‘romantic version of racism.’ Casting jazz musicians as ‘untutored, natural geniuses’ easily invokes primitivist ideas of the African American artist unspoiled by culture and civilization.”²⁴⁶ Though Hendricks did not have Ross in mind when he wrote these lyrics (he wrote them prior to her joining), once she recorded his words they took on more complex meanings.

Since Ross sang the lyrics, notions of the primitive and the natural overlap—between African American men and white women. As a white female jazz singer, Ross was often

²⁴² For gendered stereotypes associated with grief see Kenneth Doka, *Men Don’t Cry, Women Do: Transcending Gender Stereotypes of Grief* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

²⁴³ “Fiesta in Blue,” Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, *Sing a Song of Basie*, ABC-Paramount ABC-223, 1958, LP.

²⁴⁴ Sherry Ortner, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture,” *Women, Culture, and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 67-88. The implications of a “natural man” when applied to African American jazz musicians also carries waited signification. See for example, Ted Gioia, “Jazz and the Primitivist Myth,” *The Musical Quarterly* 73 (1989): 130-143. See also Lara Pellegrinelli’s discussion of the primitivist myth and jazz singers in her dissertation, “The Song is Who? 79-90. Ingrid Monson’s, “The Problem with White Hipness,” also discusses primitivist stereotypes in jazz.

²⁴⁵ According to Anatole Broyard the hipster represented “the great instinctual man, an ambassador from the Id.”, “A Portrait of the Hipster,” in *The Cool School*, 219.

²⁴⁶ Monson, “White Hipness,” 403.

sexualized in reviews and images in ways not unlike that the primitivist myth of the African American men as overly sexual and connected to the body. Because both African American men and jazz singers were often categorized as “natural,” the lyrics reveal the malleability and interconnectivity between race and gender roles.

One of the most sexist lyrics in the Lambert, Hendricks & Ross repertoire is “Rusty Dusty Blues.” While Ross had to navigate these misogynist lyrics, at moments in the song she seems to sing as another man within the group. The piece was recorded with the Count Basie Orchestra and vocalist Joe Williams in 1958. A blues in the key of A \flat major, the whole group begins by singing in harmony.

If y' wanna keep a gal y' gotta scold her
Joe did it an here's what he tol' her
If you dig havin' me hang aroun'
Stead o' those other guys
Listen to me baby
You gotta lose those luxury eyes
An' when I take you strollin'
You won't need no diamonds, an' rubies
An' satins, an' laces
To dig the envy on the other faces
Oh no sir-ee!
You won't get wealthy on me now
Listen while I tell ya'

The lyrics begin with an endorsement of reprimanding women as a means of possession. Ross performs background response vocals behind Williams, with Lambert and Hendricks reinforcing the message, thus in a sense making Ross complicit in the misogynist message.

JOE: Mama, don't you beg your daddy for no diamond rings
LHR: You're gonna get rhinestones
JOE: Mama, don't you beg your daddy for no, diamond rings
LHR: Get some money an you can buy us both a fine stone
JOE: Cause baby, you already
LHR: That's right
JOE: Got the best of everything...

LHR: You never knew no better
Your diet was franks and beans
JOE: Get up, get up, get up woman, get up off your big fat rusty dusty
LHR: I'm here lookin' for bread
JOE: Get up, get up, get up woman, get up off your big fat rusty dusty
LHR: Offer me love instead
JOE: Get up mama, get up before you get too rusty
LHR: Honey get money
JOE: Now you got the very best
LHR: Oh yeah
JOE: The best of everything
Yes baby you've got what it takes to really swing
You better lose that champagne taste
LHR: I knew you when you drank gin
JOE: I'm so afraid mama
You're lettin' me go to waste
LHR: You're tastin', I'm wastin'
Get up an' come on in— yeah!²⁴⁷

The overt misogynistic theme becomes a framework within which Ross has to navigate her subjectivity.

In a sense, the lyrics fall within the normative framework of blues textuality. According to Charles Banner-Haley, “blues lyrics were unquestionably negative in their stance toward women. Yet women participated extensively in the blues...these songs mirrored the deep-seated tensions, the sexual exploitation, and the male dominance that pervaded America.”²⁴⁸ Ross sings about a woman who is lazy, materialistic, and of a low class standing who deserves to be scolded by a man. Though the theme of the lyrics is clearly misogynistic and Ross in effect marginalizes herself by singing the words, the voice once again scrambles gender expectations. By singing these lyrics with three other male singers she performs as one of the men, yet she distinguishes herself from them by singing in a range of her voice that is associated with women. She sings in

²⁴⁷ Lyrics taken from the liner notes of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross Plus the Basie Band, *Sing Along with Basie*, Roulette Records, R-52018, 1958, LP.

²⁴⁸ Charles T. Banner-Haley, *The Fruits of Integration: Black Middle-Class Ideology and Culture, 1960-1990* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2010), 125.

the upper extreme of her vocal register in imitating the trumpet section of the Basie band, and ends on an Eb6, an unusually high note. Interestingly the higher a male trumpeter ascends, the more he is perceived as masculine. But when sung by Ross, the masculinity of the high trumpet is feminized by the voice. Working within the dominant masculine framework, Ross uses sound to move between gender roles, she sounds feminine but the lyrics that she sings are from the perspective of a male protagonist.

Ross' performance of pianist Horace Silver's "Come On Home" solo is another example of the ambiguity of subjectivity, in which language and sound intersect in an unstable performance of gender and race. Ross sings Hendricks' lyrics:

What's there to talk and talk and talk about?
What's there to squawk and squawk and squawk about?
...Man doin' what he want to
Spend all of his time
Stayin at home
Sweet home
Home
You dig me pretty baby?
You heard right
Come on home
Mama's gonna' treat you so you never roam
Cuz what's gotta be, gotta be
You, you're the only man for me.
I don't want you to be misled
Mean what I said
Come on, come on, come on.²⁴⁹

Ross begins by singing about men staying at home, which is unusual considering the domestic space of the home is often considered a space relegated to women.²⁵⁰ Though the theme of the lyrics centers around the infidelities of a wandering man who should return home to his wife, in

²⁴⁹ Transcribed from Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross, "Twisted" *The Hottest New Group in Jazz*, Columbia CL 1403, 1962, LP.

²⁵⁰ For a discussion of domesticity in the United States during the 1950s see, Michelle Nickerson, "Women, Domesticity, and Postwar Conservatism," *OAH Magazine of History* 17 (2003): 17-21.

this lyric Ross—as the only woman in the group—is in the position of power. Lambert begins singing of the troubles of men straying from home and Hendricks responds with “I’ve figured it out and I’ve got it together,” implying that once he heard Lambert’s warning he understood the message about returning home to the domestic space of women. While Ross seems to fulfill the traditional role of woman in the domestic space, she is the one who decides to accept the return of the male character.

Having Annie Ross in mind when Hendricks wrote the lyric, it is interesting to note that he chose to write from the perspective of a woman. Hendricks reconfigured the original solo to conform to Ross’ subjectivity, in a sense creating a form of vocal drag. Furthermore, Ross sings African American vernacular associated with jazz such as “dig” and “squawk” and therefore she fluidly overlaps notions of race and gender categories of language. The use of the word “squawk” infers the bird stereotypes associated with a harping woman. But divisions of gender remain ambiguous, due to the fact that the solo was first performed by a man and then sung by a woman. This example reveals the complexity of race and gender roles that are created when adding lyrics to Silver’s music.

Another example of the representation of domestic space in Hendricks’ lyrics is Ross’ performance of Horace Silver’s piano solo on “Home Cookin.” The group begins in unison with Annie Ross singing an octave higher than Hendricks and Lambert.

I just found a woman
She ain’t nothin’ for looks
But out in the kitchen
She tends to business and cooks...
Don’t cook me up no fancy line
Cook me a dinner

While the lyrics conform to certain sexist norms of the servile role of women in a domestic space, this theme is queered because Ross sings the declamatory line “cook me a dinner.” Ross’

performance of Horace Silver piano solo with Hendricks' lyrics is a sarcastic display of servility, when in real life Ross was anything but the homemaker.

One thing that really hurts a lot of women
I'm talking to you modern women...
Nothin' that you puttin' down will make your man gain a pound
A man'll do an awful lot o' lookin'
But he's always comin' home to get his cookin'
Don't get too fancy ladies keep somethin' t' cook in the pot
Just feed your man one good meal every day

Hendricks' lyrics present a masculine message of subservience to women in the vernacular. Yet, what are the implications of a woman singing those lyrics? While she conforms to the notion of women as subservient to men in singing Hendricks' lyrics, she also positions herself temporarily as one of the men. Through her voice Ross creates a space for herself in which the binary expectations of gender are much more fluid.

Though Ross demonstrated through vocalese that a woman could do more than look pretty and sing the melody, she was reluctant to write lyrics or improvise once she joined Lambert, Hendricks & Ross. The trio upheld the gendered division of labor within the group. Hendricks wrote all of the lyrics, Lambert wrote all of the arrangements, and Annie Ross provided the vocal virtuosity and visual appeal. What complicates these gendered categorizations of language and its relationship to music, however, is that in jazz the binary seems to operate in reverse in which logos is expressed through improvisation—and therefore sound—and lyrics or singing the melody are categorized as feminine. In this case, Ross was doubly marginalized in the trio, because she not only quit writing lyrics, but she also never improvised through scat. As will be discussed in the next section, the vocal form of improvisation known as scat singing is relegated within the group to the men, while Ross is confined to singing the lyrics.

4.2 CAN SHE BLOW? GENDER AND IMPROVISATION

Though Ross found a means to fluidly move between categorizations of the female jazz singer, she nonetheless experienced performance restrictions due to her gender. Even though Ross had already garnered attention for her witty lyrics, once she joined the group she quit writing. Though she never explicitly said why, Jon Hendricks suggests that she felt intimidated by him.

She's a superb lyricist. I keep trying to get her to continue to write lyrics but she says, "Oh no, Oh no, I can't compete with you." And I said, "There's no competition in the arts, you just write what you write, and I'll write what I write."...she should write more lyrics because "Farmers Market" is a masterpiece, have you ever heard it? It's a masterpiece.. and "Twisted" is a ... it's a peon, it's a hymn. Its got to do with her childhood. She's a great writer, but I seem to have intimidated her just by being there... but I wish she would write. She was intimidated, and she thought that she couldn't write that well.... Annie was very shy about all that and she actually did stop writing. I thought it was a tremendous waste of a great talent, but there's nothing you can do about that.²⁵¹

Though Ross had the ability and the experience of writing her own successful vocalese lyrics and scat compositions, the social pressures of being a woman in a predominantly male performance space affected her sense of possibility. After joining the group Ross felt the need to conform in certain ways to the gender norms of the time period. Judith Butler explains the pressures of social norms as how we carry desires to conform to notions of the normalcy of gender that are perpetuated through repeated performances.²⁵² Because women were so restricted in terms of

²⁵¹ Jon Hendricks, *No One But Me*, 2012

²⁵² Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.

employment opportunities and expected to stay within the realm of domesticity in 1950s America, as the only woman in a group of male singers and instrumentalists, Ross deferred to the social norms of men as leaders in the 1950s.²⁵³

Aside from no longer writing lyrics, Ross also felt intimidated by vocal improvisation. She rarely scatted. As mentioned previously, in jazz the source of logos is reversed from language to improvisation—what Ingrid Monson famously referred to as “saying something.”²⁵⁴ The aim of jazz music is to express, to speak through music rather than words. As a trio that attempted to validate the voice as equal to the instrument by singing instrumental music, a large part of the validation process arose out of vocal improvisation. Both Jon Hendricks and Dave Lambert often took lengthy solos to demonstrate their ability to converse in the idiom of improvisation, what some would argue is the defining feature of jazz.²⁵⁵ In choosing not to scat, Ross separated herself from the role of the improvising instrumentalists. As Hendricks was the lyricist and Lambert the arranger, Ross did not feel like an equal player in the trio, and therefore was limited in the degree of comfort that she felt in expressing herself improvisationally onstage.

And she separated herself physically as well. For instance, on February 13, 1960, the trio performed the song “Spirit Feel” on Hugh Hefner’s syndicated television show, *Playboy’s Penthouse*. After performing the melody, Ross moved from the center to the side of the set as Jon Hendricks began his lengthy scat solo. Though Ross clapped and participated through short bursts of encouragement, shouting words like “go” and “ya,” during Hendricks’ improvisation

²⁵³ Betty Friedan would not publish *The Feminine Mystique* until 1963, and so for Annie Ross strong female role models who spoke openly about women’s rights particularly in jazz performance were non-existent in 1950s America.

²⁵⁴ Monson, *Saying Something*.

²⁵⁵ For a discussion of the importance of improvisation in jazz see *Ibid*. See also, Paul Berliner, *Thinking In Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

she walked from centerstage off to the side, thus creating a physical gap between herself and the male scat singers

On the same televised appearance, the trio performed “The King” with Count Basie big band vocalist Joe Williams. Once again Ross removed herself from the improvisational space. All three men took lengthy scat solos while Ross snapped her fingers and sang background vocals. This footage reveals that scat was clearly a man’s performance role within the group. Towards the end of the song Williams signaled to the trio to trade fours, a common instrumental improvisation practice, in which musicians improvise over four bars and trade musical ideas with each other. After declaring “fours,” Williams moved over to Lambert, walking directly in front of Ross and physically separating Ross from the improvisational space and obscuring her image on camera.

[Figure 4.2](#) Frame Grab from “The King” performed on *Playboy’s Penthouse*, February 13, 1960.



Despite visually obscuring her, Williams encouraged Ross to participate in the trading. While she does participate, she scats four bars tentatively, and at a lower volume than the three men. She stands slightly behind everyone else while improvising revealing her hesitation.

In live performances, Ross was also reluctant to scat. At the trio's July 2, 1960, performance of "Airegin" at the Newport Jazz Festival, Hendricks and Lambert took lengthy scat solos, while Ross stood over to the side of the stage clapping.

[Figure 4.3](#) Frame Grab from "Newport Jazz Festival," July 2, 1960.



If Hendricks is correct in saying that Ross felt intimidated to write vocalese lyrics, by examining live performance footage it is apparent that she also did not feel comfortable scatting. Drummer Jimmy Wormworth (pictured above in [figure 4.3](#)), who continues to perform with Ross weekly in New York City and toured with the trio in 1960, remembers that Ross did not improvise often.

She didn't scat that much—it was mostly Jon and Dave that did. They went into their macho-alpha-male jive where they had to out do each other. Well the way she embellishes around the melody I know she could do it. I mean she'll do things around the melody that's basically like what Roy Eldridge or anybody would do, they improvise around the melody...She'll play around with the melody, syncopate the melody figure and all that, and that's great. So I know she can scat if she wants to. Once in a great while I guess I've heard her scat...²⁵⁶

²⁵⁶ Jimmy Wormworth, interview by Lee Martin, New York, NY, June 21, 2014.

Unable to subvert all of the gender divisions during her time with the trio, Ross never never participated in the group on an equal footing with Hendricks and Lambert. Though she often claims that she didn't scat because she didn't want to, I contend that the struggle had more to do with the gendered dynamics of the group and the social pressures of how she felt that she was supposed to act as a woman onstage in the 1950s. Ross revealed that scatting was beyond her limits within the group and was therefore a performance role relegated to the men in the trio. While Ross fulfilled certain aspects of the jazz canary by dressing beautifully and not scatting, because she sang instrumental repertoire, she was also categorized as a diva.

4.3 FROM A THRUSH TO A DIVA, GENDER AND THE VOICE

Annie's more like a musician than a lot of singers. She's got diva, whatever that is but she's one of the cats like as a musician..."²⁵⁷

Pianist Tardo Hammer, who currently performs with Annie Ross weekly at the Metropolitan Room in New York City, asserts Ross' validity as a singer by referring to her both as a diva and one of the cats. By referring to her as a "cat" he categorizes her as a musician, but he still separates her from the jazz brotherhood by referring to her as a diva. A categorization that implies both extreme talent as well as the connotation of being temperamental and overconfident, the diva is a title often given to successful but demanding women in jazz. As Pellegrinelli explains: "The chick singer stereotypes overlaps with the image of the diva, a term for which there is no male equivalent in jazz...she can be an empowering figure, but her often unwarranted

²⁵⁷ Tardo Hammer, *No One But Me*, 2012.

demands for attention and respect, temperamental attitude, and superficiality are certainly not welcome in jazz culture.”²⁵⁸ A term that emerged from nineteenth-century Italian opera to refer to prominent female singers, “diva” is defined by Wayne Koestenbaum as, “a specific female role (a woman opera singer of great fame and brilliance),” that “is also a pliant social institution, a framework for emotion, a kind of conduct, expectation, or desire, that can move through a body...”²⁵⁹ While Ross was considered a diva because of her musical brilliance, the same term implies that she was volatile or even hysterical. According to drummer Jimmy Wormworth:

She always looked calm, collected, and serene but she came up as a real artist man. Like you know, she was the stereotype of the artist. If I had to use one bad stereotype its wild. But you’d never know it unless you were around her because she was the ultimate worldly, sophisticated person in the arts...²⁶⁰

Singing a predominantly masculine musical idiom, Ross had to conform to certain heteronormative gender roles. Onstage she imbued professionalism and because of her unpredictable behavior offstage she was often called a diva.

Singers who assert themselves and express what they want from their musicians onstage are referred to as divas. Contrastingly, there is no male equivalent to a demanding musician; he is simply understood as a professional. Particularly as someone who fronts the band, and is in a position of leadership both musically and visually onstage, female singers are often confronted with a great deal of animosity if they assert themselves. The importance of the body is also a centrally defining feature of the diva. Dress, makeup, and hair visually distinguished the diva. When performing with Lambert, Hendricks & Ross from 1957 to 1962, Ross became known not only for her vocal dexterity but also for her sartorial flair. As Jimmy Wormworth recalls:

²⁵⁸ Pellegrinelli, “The Song is Who?”, 92.

²⁵⁹ Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queens Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1993), 111.

²⁶⁰ Wormworth, interview by Lee Martin, June 21, 2014.

She had the most beautiful gowns. I have no idea where she got them, who made them or what, and she just knew how to wear ‘em too. She always looked sharp. I’d be sitting in her dressing room waiting for us to go out, I’d just be hanging out, she’d have a cigarette and just look completely gorgeous and totally ablaze.²⁶¹

One has only to look Chuck Stewart’s photo taken of the group in 1961 (that is pictured below) to see Ross’ connection to the diva. She is literally dressed with markers of nobility and femininity, because of her floral sequined gown and tiara.

[Figure 4.4](#) Photo used with Permission by Photographer Charles Stewart, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, 1961.



Koestenbaum explains that for the diva dress is at times more important than timbre:

A good gown gives the diva’s possibly bestial voice an appropriate sheath, and masks the less acceptable meaning of the female voice ...A good gown vindicates the diva by making her glamorous...showing gender’s dependence on costume...clothes give gender its social meanings...²⁶²

²⁶¹ Wormworth, *No One But Me*, 2012.

²⁶² Koestenbaum, *The Queens Throat*, 120.

The importance of dress for a singer has to do with the connection between the voice and the body. The female singer's body is a central part of her performance and therefore dress is often scrutinized. Jazz singer Anita O'Day, for example, was initially scrutinized for wearing a band jacket as opposed to an evening gown when she worked with the Gene Krupa big band.²⁶³ This goes to show that Ross' choice of performance attire was not entirely mandated. Instead, it seems that Ross was subtly and implicitly pressured into acting and dressing the part of a feminine singer. As a strange kind of compensation, she was in turn permitted to sing in ways that would otherwise have been considered outlandish. Richard Middleton describes the importance of dress as a cover for the wild and dangerous body of the singer. He quotes Nietzsche: "being without visible essence...concealed by a sheen of adornments...you undrape her at your peril': for what you may unveil, is: a secret maleness!"²⁶⁴ Nietzsche reveals that roles of gender are performative and therefore if one were to take away the adornments such as clothing, one might realize that gender is a social construct. An extravagant gown drapes the body and reinforces the importance of dress in performing gender norms.

A gown is the visual way of connecting the internal and embodied femininity of the voice that emerges from the body. Tracing back to Roland Barthes' oft-cited text, "The Grain of the Voice," the corporeal nature of the voice is considered its unique feature.²⁶⁵ Adriana Cavarero similarly discusses the bodily distinctiveness of the voice as a "corporeal root of uniqueness."²⁶⁶ Susan McClary also describes the common perception of the voice as bodily and gendered. She

²⁶³ For a discussion of Anita O'Day's unusual dress as a female jazz singer, see Bruce Crowther, *Singing Jazz: The Singers and Their Styles* (San Francisco: Miller Freeman Books, 1992), 122-127.

²⁶⁴ Middleton, *Voicing the Popular*, 94.

²⁶⁵ Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," 179-189.

²⁶⁶ Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, 66.

writes, “voices stand for the imperatives of sex” because the voice originates “within the body’s borders.”²⁶⁷ That is to say, the body becomes intrinsic to the performance of diva.

The importance of singing notes in the upper register of the voice is a distinguishing feature of the feminized voice and an important part of the diva categorization. Koestenbaum's discussion of the value of the high note is relevant here. He explains that, at least in the context of operatic performance, “singing bodies are prized for moving up: up the staff, up the social ladder.”²⁶⁸ He argues that the higher a singer ascends the greater their reputation. Though Koestenbaum discusses opera singers, his observation has interesting implications when applied to Annie Ross, who by singing the trumpet section parts assumes agency by demonstrating her physical stamina in recreating the upper range of the trumpet.

Yet the sound of the high trumpet parts becomes problematic in the context of vocalese. As Ross moves up the staff, she moves further and further away from the semblance of language, and the semantic content becomes increasingly inaudible with every ascending pitch. Arguably, the voice increasingly assumes the role of the instrument as lyrics become unintelligible. And since high notes are more physically demanding of the body there is also an element of danger. As the singer reaches for the top of her range, one becomes more aware of the physical production of vocal sound, but also of her vocal dexterity. Extremely high registers in the voice require both physical and technical mastery to execute. Both male and female singers will often spend years practicing vocal exercises in order to be able to control and accurately execute notes in the upper range of their voices. By singing the high trumpet parts, Ross demonstrates her technical demand of her voice, illustrating once again the unstable boundary between vocal and

²⁶⁷ Suzanne Cusick, “On Musical Performances of Gender and Sex,” in *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, and Music* (Zürich: Carciofoli Verlagshaus, 1999), 29.

²⁶⁸ Koestenbaum, *The Queen’s Throat*, 170

instrumental binaries in jazz and reiterating why Johnny Mandel proclaimed that she had a range that “practically encompasses the whole piano keyboard.”²⁶⁹ If jazz discourse conflates technical mastery with masculinity, on the one hand, and the voice with naturalness and femininity in the other, Ross effectively scrambles and moves between these categories.

When asked what Annie Ross contributed to the group, Jimmy Wormworth explained that she added, “beauty, glamour, real jazz knowledge, and great facility that allowed her to sing all those difficult parts...She was the only vocalist. I mean Dave wasn’t really a vocalist he was an arranger...Jon was a poet who I think just dabbled in music but who I think was really musically talented.”²⁷⁰ Ross became known for her voice. Due to her vocal dexterity she was able to sing the technically demanding music of the top male jazz instrumentalists of the time, and by doing so was able to move between the separation of vocal and instrumental roles in jazz that were traditionally contingent on gender.

By emphasizing her body, Ross performed gender through visual cues due to the social norms of the time. According to Judith Butler, gender is performative and operates through the repetition of performed social norms, and these performances, “initiate subjects into social order. These repetitions compel bodies to act, move, and behave in certain ways in order to attempt to maintain the impression of natural gender behavior.”²⁷¹ As the only woman onstage surrounded by men, Ross performed the socially acceptable role of the female jazz singer visually by appearing in extravagant gowns, so that she was considered non-threatening when singing the music of male instrumentalists. By scrambling gendered performance roles Ross became known as both the canary and diva and utilized both on a spectrum simultaneously.

²⁶⁹ Johnny Mandel, interview by Leonard Feather “The Blindfold Test: John’s Special” *Down Beat* April 2 1959, 10

²⁷⁰ Wormworth, *No One But Me*, 2012.

²⁷¹ See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

Though she was singing— an area deemed acceptable for women— what she was singing was highly unusual for a woman in jazz at that time. Furthermore, the music that she became famous for was at first considered unusual. Group vocalese was the brainchild of a struggling studio musician named Dave Lambert, who strove to create big big bands and write bebop for the voice. Like Ross, he struggled to find his position as a vocalist within the instrumental idiom of bebop. I turn now to a discussion of Lambert's position as a white studio arranger, and one of the first bebop vocal arrangers and composers.

5.0 SINGING AN INSTRUMENTAL LANGUAGE: DAVE LAMBERT AND THE BEBOP VOCAL JAZZ GROUP

Dave Alden Lambert (1917-1966) had many professions. At various times he worked as a tree surgeon, a carpenter, and a drummer—all before gaining recognition as an arranger and singer in the group Lambert, Hendricks & Ross.²⁷² Though he worked odd jobs to keep his family financially afloat, his daughter Dee Lambert remembers: “Music was in his head all the time and it had to come out. He'd walk down the street scatting; I mean it wouldn't be singing out loud, but rhythms under his breath. When he would go down five flights of stairs, he would even do that in time.”²⁷³ She recalls that he memorized people's phone numbers just by their dial tone sequence. Whether performing onstage or singing on his way to work, bebop was deeply engrained in Lambert's everyday life.

Lambert rose to prominence in the mid-1940s with his scat arrangements and compositions for the Gene Krupa Band. Jazz critic Leonard Feather credited his song “What's This?” as the first vocal bop recording.²⁷⁴ Lambert not only self-identified with bebop but he composed, arranged and performed vocal repertoire in an idiom that was considered primarily instrumental. But his role in the modernization of vocal jazz was complicated by his subject

²⁷² After serving as a paratrooper in World War II, Lambert moved to New York in the late 1940s and taught himself to arrange under the tutelage of composer John Benson Brooks. Lambert garnered a reputation from working primarily as a jazz singer and arranger, in various vocal groups such as Gene Krupa's G-Noters, Stan Kenton's Pastel's, and most famously with Lambert, Hendricks & Ross.

²⁷³ Dee Lambert, interview by Lee Martin, March 1, 2015.

²⁷⁴ See Leonard Feather and Ira Gitler, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 399.

position. What were the conditions under which a white man from Boston not only performed bebop, but also decided to write bebop for the voice? Jon Hendricks elucidates Lambert's importance,

He is the only white man I know of who made a significant cultural contribution to what is essentially a Negro art form. He took jazz vocals from the swing mode into bebop, and sang and recorded with the best including Charlie Parker. Dave was an extraordinary person and an extremely gifted singer. I was truly inspired by his work. He was my friend.²⁷⁵

In writing bebop for vocal groups, Lambert was one of the only white studio musicians to modernize jazz singing. He created a unique position for the voice in a predominantly instrumental tradition.

Aligning the voice with the new instrumental sound, Lambert placed his work squarely within bebop—a genre that attempted to position jazz between high art and popular culture. Beboppers distinguished themselves through technically complex and virtuosic approaches to improvisation as a reaction to what they felt were the limitations of swing. Many musicians felt that swing was dominated by the predominantly white music industry and that it was too commercially driven. According to James Lincoln Collier, one of the major differences between swing and bebop were the demographics of the musicians. Collier observes:

Black musicians dominated bop in a way that they had not dominated other forms of jazz since the early days in New Orleans. Black musicians devised the music without any help from whites, and they were its stars for a considerable period thereafter: Parker, Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell...were the quintessential boppers and they were all black.²⁷⁶

While many of the icons of bebop were black, the musicians themselves were not motivated by racial exclusivity. For example, Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker often hired white musicians

²⁷⁵ Jon Hendricks, "Hendricks and Ross Together Again," interview by Donald James, *L.A. Watts Times*, June 3, 1999

²⁷⁶ Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (Oakland, University of California Press, 1999), 18.

such as Al Haig, Stan Levey, Red Rodney, and Dave Lambert to play in their groups and on their recordings.

This study grapples with the complexities of Lambert’s subject position as a white man who not only self-identified with the intellectualism of being hip—that is, fluent in the bebop subculture—but also the fact that he was a white man in the white music industry. Throughout his career Lambert continually moved between categorizations of not only what a white studio musician was supposed to write, but also what a white studio musician was supposed to look like. I analyze his compositions, arrangements, and live performance with Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, in order to elucidate how he adapted bebop to vocal jazz through what Albert Murray “reciprocal voicing,” a practice in which the voice imitates the instrument and the instrument imitates the voice. I then study his early reviews and the fixation on his bebop goatee, to elucidate how Lambert’s visual aesthetic identified more with the afro-modernist bebop aesthetic.

5.1 A STUDIO ARRANGER, BEBOPPER, AND THE INTERSECTIONS OF SUBJECTIVITY

As a white man singing, composing, and arranging bebop and other forms of jazz for the voice in the late 1940s, Dave Lambert was a highly unusual figure in the music industry. He was never interested in following the trends of what was popular; instead, he wanted to experiment with the voice on his own terms. Growing up in a working-class neighborhood, Lambert had little

exposure to formal music training, and neither of his parents was musically inclined. According to his daughter Dee Lambert, he grew up in Boston where his mother was “a stay at home mom until she divorced. She owned a little grocery store on the wrong side of the tracks.”²⁷⁷ Despite his family’s limited interest in music, Lambert dedicated his life to jazz. He started playing drums in high school but switched to singing when he heard the Merry Macs and crooners like Bing Crosby. After serving as a paratrooper in World War II, Lambert moved to New York in the late 1940s and studied arranging under the tutelage of composer John Benson Brooks. Lambert garnered a reputation from working primarily as a jazz singer and arranger in various vocal groups such as Gene Krupa’s G-Noters, Stan Kenton’s Pastel’s, and most famously with Lambert, Hendricks & Ross. When he was not arranging, he also worked as a studio singer. Lambert provided vocal backgrounds for some of the top names in jazz including Charlie Parker, Chris Connor, Carmen McRae, and Tony Bennett.

While being white undoubtedly provided Lambert with easier access to work opportunities, he did not entirely fit within the normative framework of the white studio arranger, because he was writing for the voice. According to David Joyner there was an influx of white studio arrangers who wrote in the bebop idiom.

The mid-1940s saw the redefinition of jazz as high art rather than popular music, and this occurred with the emergence of bebop. Jazz soon saw an influx of predominantly white jazz composers, arrangers, and instrumentalists, some of whom were trained in contemporary classical-music techniques. While others were self-taught or mentored outside the academy, both groups shared modernist aesthetic tendencies and sought new approaches to jazz.²⁷⁸

Where Lambert differs from this group, was that he was one of the only arrangers to write and compose bebop for vocal groups when the style was considered a primarily instrumental idiom.

²⁷⁷ Dee Lambert, Interview with Lee Martin, March 1 2015.

²⁷⁸ David Joyner, “Analyzing Third Stream,” *Contemporary Music Review* 19 (2000): 69.

Working against negative stereotypes of the voice as less technical, Lambert attempted to validate the voice by writing in the new modern aesthetic of bebop.

5.1.1 A White Bebopper and the Complexities of Race

Beboppers' importance to white hipsters as symbols of black assertiveness and ...highlighted their utility as imagined role models for an "outsider" style that could be chosen to substitute for (or supplement) modes of postwar white masculinity. "Trads" and bebop modernists alike tended to fix black jazz masculinity as a sign for something valuable and lacking in white society. —Sherrie Tucker ²⁷⁹

Considered a subculture in the early 1940s, bebop took on an aesthetic of intellectualism that was visually and sonically identified through particular modes of dress and the use of vernacular language. ²⁸⁰ To be hip implied a sense of belonging in the bebop subculture, but also a rejection of the predominantly white mainstream music industry. For the genre's white fans, bebop aesthetic was identified with the hipster. Roy Carr describes the hipster as:

A concept copped from blacks by whites...the hipster was born with bebop. Both were war babies, and while the rest of the nation...were shoulder-padding to the big bland strains of Glenn Miller— the khaki mixing promiscuously on a pass with the utility underwear and whistling "Happiness Is Just a Guy Called Joe"— bebop and hip were hopping down the clubs along 52nd Street in New York and Central Avenue, LA. In the decade of Digging for Victory, they were plain digging, period. ²⁸¹

Carr reveals the racial complexities surrounding the hipster. He paints a picture of American society in terms of a racial binary, describing the mainstream music industry as resolutely white, boring, and vanilla (recall his description of "big bland strains of Glenn Miller"). Contrastingly,

²⁷⁹ Tucker, "But This Music is Mine Already!" 245

²⁸⁰ Bebop emerged from a number of historical events, including the involvement in World War II, industrial development in urban environments, continued Black migration from rural southern to northern urban areas, and increasing racial tensions in the 1940s. For further information on the socio-historical influence on the development of bebop see, DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, Ramsey, *The Amazing Bud Powell: Black Genius, Jazz History, and the Challenge of Bebop*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2013); Eddie Meadows, *Bebop to Cool: Context, Ideology, and Musical Identity*, (Durham: Greenwood Press, 2003).

²⁸¹ Roy Carr, *The Hip: Hipsters, Jazz and The Beat Generation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 11.

bebop is presented as an underground music created by blacks and geared towards audiences who were fluent in the subculture. Within the discourse of the time, a figure such as Lambert could only approach bebop indirectly, as an outsider and at best, an ally.

But the vector of aspiration could also be reversed. For, just as white musicians such as Lambert longed to be part of the African American bebop fraternity, African American musicians sometimes viewed Western classical music as a kind of aspirational horizon. At the very least, iconic beboppers such as Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker often cited white European composers as highly influential to their work in order to reconfigure the perception of jazz as a “low” art form.²⁸² Many bebop musicians cited European classical composers as influences to demonstrate that jazz musicians were not only well versed in many types of music, but also to elevate the perception of jazz from overly sexualized music to the high esteem of Classical music among mainstream American audiences. In particular musicians were trying to elevate the perception of jazz to the same level as Classical music, by disassociating from the perception of jazz as music for the sexualized black male body.

There is a long history of white critics writing about the black male body and its relationship to jazz. Norman Mailer, in a controversial essay titled, “The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster,” depicted the stereotype of African Americans in jazz:

Knowing in the cells of his existence that life was war, nothing but war, the Negro (all exceptions admitted) could rarely afford the sophisticated inhibitions of civilization, and so he kept for his survival the art of the primitive, he lived in the enormous present, he subsisted for his Saturday night kicks, relinquishing the pleasures of the mind for the more obligatory pleasures of the body, and in his music he gave voice to the character and quality of his existence, to his rage and the infinite variations of joy, lust, languor, growl, cramp, pinch, scream and despair of his orgasm. For jazz is orgasm.²⁸³

²⁸² For a discussion of Race and classical music during the bebop period see Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 86. For a more specific discussion of Charlie Parker see, Carl Woideck, *Charlie Parker: His Music and Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2001), 280.

²⁸³ Norman Mailer, “The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster,” *Dissent* 4 (1957): 279.

Mailer clearly articulates what Monson calls “the problem with white hipness”—the problem, that is, of whites adopting the hipster aesthetic in order to identify with a romanticized form of blackness, that perpetuate racist stereotypes.²⁸⁴ Monson demonstrates that the defining feature of hipster culture was the valorization of an imagined African American sexual virility. She cites Mezz Mezzrow and claims that whites wanted to identify with black musicians to become more in tune with their own sexuality. But how does Dave Lambert fit within this framework?

Like many people who identified with the bebop subculture, Lambert openly cited musical influences both inside and outside of bebop. But he never romanticizes his African American musical influences as romantically hyper-sexualized. Barry Ulanov described Lambert’s musical tastes.

Charlie Parker he calls “the greatest instrumentalist I’ve ever known of course, I haven’t heard them all. But he can express anything he can think of on his horn. And if he thinks of more than he plays then he’s even greater than we think he is.” He likes Dizzy of course...Freddy Gruber, Serge Caloff, Red Rodney, Johnny Mandel...a lot of the youngsters in and around New York who have been working with the bebop formulations. He listen to Scriabin, Schönberg, Edgar Varese, the music recorded in the Belgian Congo and in India. In sum Dave says, “I’ve got to learn from everybody; I haven’t had enough musical education. I want to learn; I want to express myself, I want to make the best music that I can.”²⁸⁵

Lambert demonstrates his cosmopolitanism by referencing an expansive repertoire spanning white European music, black and white beboppers, and other international music. In doing so he revealed that he drew from far beyond the American color barrier.

²⁸⁴ Monson, “The Problem with White Hipness,” 402-406.

²⁸⁵ Barry Ulanov, Dave Lambert, *Metronome*, July 1947, 43.

5.1.2 Beards, Berets and the Bebop Aesthetic

Lambert adopted the bebop aesthetic in order to be a part of the new jazz culture. He identified with the music that he loved by not only writing it, but also dressing in the new style. Jazz scholar Preston Whaley describes the visual aesthetic of bebop as, “The argot, the zoot suits, the smack, the goatees, the berets, the green-tinted, horn-rimmed glasses spelled out a new style that was serious and relaxed, intellectual and street savvy—in short, hip.”²⁸⁶ Besides from creating a new look, the bebop aesthetic and dress provided Americans with an alternate cultural identity that did not conform as rigidly to the racial binaries of mainstream society. The bebop identity allowed people to interact in between the color line. For example, beboppers wore the beret—a marker of French fashion—while conversing in a uniquely American form of vernacular and listening to bands like Billy Eckstine’s. This reveals that what was considered black and what was considered white was not rigidly defined—bebop, in fact, rendered these categories much more fluid. The social importance of the bebop language and dress provided an alternate identity for Americans that fluidly moved across and between the color line.

Although Dizzy Gillespie argued that the second most common lie about beboppers was that they all “wore beards, goatees, and other facial hair and adornments,” the bebop aesthetic became widespread during the late 1940s. Both Lambert and Gillespie became visual representatives of the aesthetic in the July 16, 1947, cover of *Down Beat* magazine, which was appropriately titled “The Beards.”²⁸⁷

²⁸⁶ Preston Whaley, *Blows Like a Horn: Beat Writing, Jazz, Style, and Markets in the Transformation of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009) 40.

²⁸⁷ Dizzy Gillespie, *To Be or Not to Bop: Memoirs of Dizzy Gillespie* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), 280. “The Beards” accessed April 13, 2015, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/loc.natlib.gottlieb.04401/enlarge.html?page=1§ion=ver01>.

[Figure 5.1](#) William Gottlieb, “The Beards” *Down Beat*, July 16, 1947.²⁸⁸



The caption for the photo read:

For cover decoration this issue, staff lens man Bill Gottlieb lined up five of the most familiar beards in the music world, posed them simultaneously for a beard photo to end all beard photos—we hope. Reading from left to right, the gentry with the hirsute adornment are Dave Lambert, John Simmons, Chubby Jackson, George Handy and Dizzy Gillespie. You know, of course, that in the same order they are a singer, two bass players, an arranger, and trumpet man.²⁸⁹

Although scholars have argued that the bebop aesthetic was a black subculture, it is clear from the above image that the bebop beard moved across racial lines. The historical record is clear, of course, that bebop was developed African American musicians quite apart from whites. But already by 1947 the beard had become a symbol of interracial masculinity within the jazz community. As Monson argues, “The symbolic intersection of masculinity, music, and race

²⁸⁸ According to the Library of Congress “The Beards” photo that is featured William Gottlieb’s Photo collection “It entered into the public domain on February 16, 2010,” accessed March 30, 2015, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/html/gottlieb/gottlieb-copyright.html>.

²⁸⁹ No Author, “Five Beards on the Cover,” *Down Beat* July 16, 1947, 1.

perhaps explains the persistence of jazz as a fraternity of predominantly male musicians.”²⁹⁰ By wearing the goatee Lambert identified himself with the masculinity of the bebop brotherhood.

Since beards became visual cues of the bebop culture, many jazz critics included references to Lambert’s facial hair when associating his work with the genre. In a 1949 *Down Beat* review of Lambert’s vocal composition “Hawaiian War Chant,” he is described as, “our bearded tree surgeon friend” who “gets a shot at his long felt dream for a bop-influenced choir. It certainly is a different sound, with Davie’s sca-bopping adding much color.”²⁹¹ The critic aligns Lambert with the bebop subculture not only through the aesthetic cue of the beard, but also through a description of the unusualness of his vocal group sound. Reviewers often fixated on his beard because it was an unusual visual aesthetic for a white singer and arranger at the time.

Bassist Bill Crow recalled the controversy surrounding Lambert’s beard when white bandleader Stan Kenton considered hiring him. As a representative of more mainstream jazz, Kenton did not condone Lambert’s bearded bebop aesthetic. Crow recalls what Lambert’s former wife, Hortense Carpentier, once told him about the incident.

Horty remembered an interview Dave had with Stan Kenton, who thought he might hire Dave to form a vocal group for him. Dave stopped by Stan’s dressing room at the Paramount Theater in New York, and they talked it over. “Of course, you’d have to shave off your beard,” said Stan, pointing to the Vandyke that Dave wore at the time. “I couldn’t do that,” said Dave. They agreed to disagree...as Dave rose to leave, Stan also stood up. The difference in their height was remarkable, and Dave’s parting shot as he stared into Kenton’s shirtfront was: “Well, I’m sorry we can’t see eye to eye.”²⁹²

Revealing his sense of humor, Lambert refused to shave his beard because it represented his connection to bebop. According to Victoria Sherrow the Van Dyke — or goatee as it is more commonly known today— was named after Anthony Van Dyke, a wealthy Flemish painter from

²⁹⁰ Monson, “White Hipness,” 405.

²⁹¹ Author Unknown, “Dave Lambert: Always, Hawaiian War Chant,” *Down Beat* May 20, 1949, 12.

²⁹² Bill Crow, *From Birdland to Broadway: Scenes From a Jazz Life* (New York: Oxford Paperbacks, 1992), 46.

the 17th century. Sherrow reveals that in the United States the goatee had a resurgence in popularity during the 1950s with the rise of the beatnik generation, who associated the goatee with the bebop subculture.²⁹³ The goatee represented an alternative to the mainstream. Ten years prior to the trend, Lambert's goatee was his visual marker of his connection to bebop, and was therefore considered by the press and more established musicians in the industry as an anomaly. Lambert refused to shave his beard because for him it was what distinguished him from the squares or the white mainstream.

Lambert directly discussed his facial hair in an interview with jazz critic Barry Ulanov.²⁹⁴ "I like the beard; I think I look better with it—that's why I grew it—just a vain thing."²⁹⁵ Lambert describes his fixation with his beard as vain, but his look was a part of a larger visual movement among musicians of the bebop era. *Life* magazine for example, published an exposé on the trends among bebop musicians. The feature described the popularity of the goatee in bebop emerging from Dizzy Gillespie. The article describes those who wore goatee's as devotee's who "ape the eccentric appearance of bebop's inventor, Gillespie" by wearing "horn-rims, a goatee and a beret..."²⁹⁶ While the *Life* article revealed that many young Americans looked to Gillespie for an alternative cultural identity through modes of dress and modes of speech, Lambert was a part of the musicians' inner circle. He not only dressed like a bebopper but he played the music and he was a bebopper.

By featuring Dave Lambert on the cover of the premier jazz publication *Down Beat* with Dizzy Gillespie —considered the creator of bebop fashion—Lambert was recognized as hip. By

²⁹³ Victoria Sherrow, *For Appearance' Sake: The Historical Encyclopedia of Good Looks, Beauty and Grooming* (Westport: Oryx Press, 2001), 115.

²⁹⁴ For further details on the Van Dyke see Victoria Sherrow, "For Appearance' Sake: The Historical Encyclopedia of Good Looks, Beauty, and Grooming" (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001), 114

²⁹⁵ Barry Ulanov, Dave Lambert, *Metronome*, July 1947, 43.

²⁹⁶ No author, "Bebop: New School Jazz is Led By Trumpeter Who is Hot, Cool and Gone," *Life*, October 11, 1948, 138.

dressing like the beboppers and composing music in the idiom, Lambert demonstrated that he understood the subcultural art form and was considered an insider. Lambert was not merely a follower. Because he appeared on the cover of *Down Beat*, Lambert's reputation as a bebop insider became known among the jazz audience. He was also accepted among bebop instrumentalists because of his work with Charlie Parker (which will be discussed in more detail below.)

Part of what distinguished musicians such as Dave Lambert as bebop insiders, was the hipness concept. Hipness during the bebop era was understood as part of the non-conformist nature of bebop culture, which stood in defiance of mainstream (predominantly white) popular culture. Hipness was performed through improvisation, dress, language, and most importantly a deep understanding of bebop's intellectualism both on and off the bandstand. Phil Ford describes the political nature of hipness:

In 1948, it was hard to grasp that hipness is neither style nor ideology, but a stance —a way of styling your clothes, hair, gesture, speech, and music with the aim of creating an aesthetic distinction between you, the discrete observing critical outsider, and the square world you find yourself living in. It is not just fashion, and it is not just politics: it is a stance within which fashion becomes political and politics becomes fashionable.²⁹⁷

Hipness was categorized as a form of insider intellectualism, and if one understood the subcultural politics of style one was considered hip.

According to Amiri Baraka, one of the largest differences between white and black beboppers was the matter of choice. Baraka argues that “young white American intellectual, artists and bohemians” chose to use bebop as a way to express their own rejection of the mainstream, whereas African American artists had no choice in terms of non-conformity to the

²⁹⁷ Ford, *Dig*, 58.

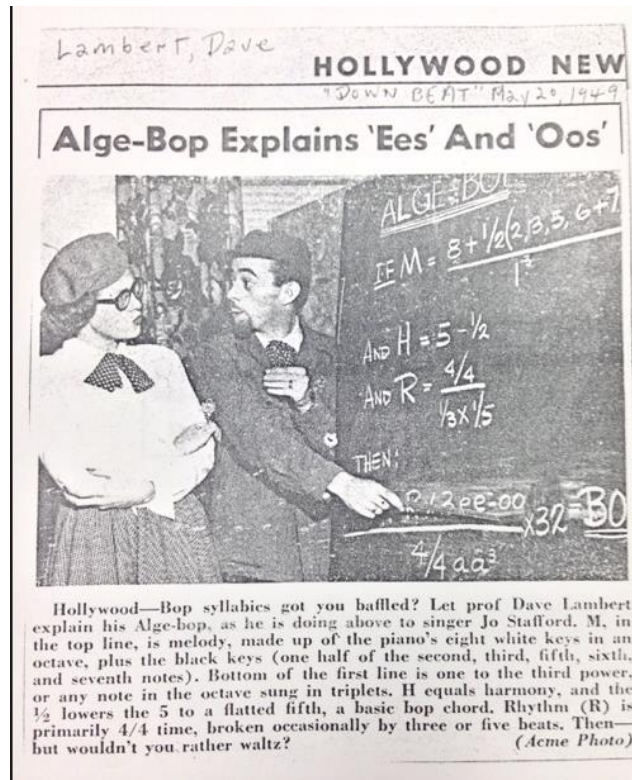
mainstream because they were continually cast as outsiders.²⁹⁸ Baraka's distinction is important. He reveals that people like Lambert had a choice to conform to non-conformity. Lambert could move between the mainstream music industry and the insider culture of bebop. However, for African American jazz musicians the mainstream was not open to them and therefore jazz as an outsider culture was their only option.

Lambert chose to identify with bebop, and his identification with it was often featured in early reviews of his work. In a satirical display of bebop's intellectual hipness, a *Down Beat* review of Dave Lambert and Jo Stafford's recording of "M+H+R x 3ee – oo/ 4/4 aa3 x 32 bop (Jolly Jo)" refers to Lambert as a professor of "Alge-Bop."²⁹⁹ Stafford and Lambert lampoon the visual markers of bebop hipness (see fig. 5.2). Stafford wears a beret and horn rimmed glass, and Lambert's goatee is prominent. As a white man and a white woman the intellectualism of bebop is ambiguous. Are they countercultural? Or since they are white is this merely a reinforcement of the perception of the overly intellectual and overly white ivory tower? The photo satirizes the intellectualism of bebop for a more mainstream audience and presents the intellectualism of bebop through the guise of a white professor whose job it is to translate the bebop subculture for a white audience. This example reveals how the media carefully negotiated perceptions of race by interweaving the intellectualism of bebop hipness with more mainstream ideals of white-dominated academia.

²⁹⁸ Baraka, *Blues People*, 231

²⁹⁹ Joe Stafford and Dave- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJzWks1K7QM> and Dave Lambert singers released on Capitol Records "Vocal Group with Orchestra" 57-604, 1949.

Figure 5.2 “Alge-Bop Explains ‘Ees’ And ‘Oos,’ *Down Beat*, May 29, 1949.³⁰⁰



The media used these artists as vehicles to translate the bebop subculture for the mainstream, by literally representing Lambert and Stafford as white academics that decode the complexities of bebop for mainstream audiences. Lambert attempts to teach Stafford to be hip, yet the photo reveals that fully understanding the insider culture is extremely complex. They poke fun at the technicality of bebop by depicting the music as a very technical math equation and ending the caption with “but wouldn’t you rather have waltz?”—as if bebop is too complex and therefore not worth attempting to understand. In this photo, hipness is depicted as an elite position attainable by only the smartest of individuals. By depicting bebop as overly complex Lambert pokes fun at his own dual status as an insider of bebop as well as a white intellectual. Through

³⁰⁰ No author, “Alge-bop Explains ‘Ees’ and ‘Oos,’” *Down Beat*, May 20, 1949, 12.

the guise of humor Lambert confuses the expectations of his white male subjectivity. He is both a nerdy white male professor, but he is also a professor of the predominantly African American art form of bebop. Lambert moves between expectations of racialized subjectivity.

Though they are both wearing markers of the bebop aesthetic, Lambert is presented as the hip intellectual and Stafford as his student. When the caption states that Lambert is teaching Alge-bop—a musical math equation—to female singer Jo Stafford, the gender connotations are clear. Lambert is depicted as the professor with his pointer in hand, while Stafford is an inquisitive student with a perplexed facial expression and crossed arms. The image implies that a full understanding of bebop is only available to women through extremely hard work and through the guidance of a male teacher.

While Lambert was represented as a bebop professor by the media, African American musicians were depicted in an all-together different light. Even while bebop artists strove to create music that eradicated the primitivist stereotypes associated with earlier jazz forms, the media often undermined the intellectual contributions of African American bebop musicians by fixating on the physical. For a contrasting example of how the press depicted a black bebop hip intellectual, one has only to examine a 1947 *Down Beat* photo editorial of Dizzy Gillespie entitled “Gillespie’s Gyration and Gestures Get His Band Going.”

[Figure 5.3](#) William Gottlieb, “Gillespie’s Gyration And Gestures Get His Band Going,” *Down Beat*, August 27, 1947, 14.³⁰¹



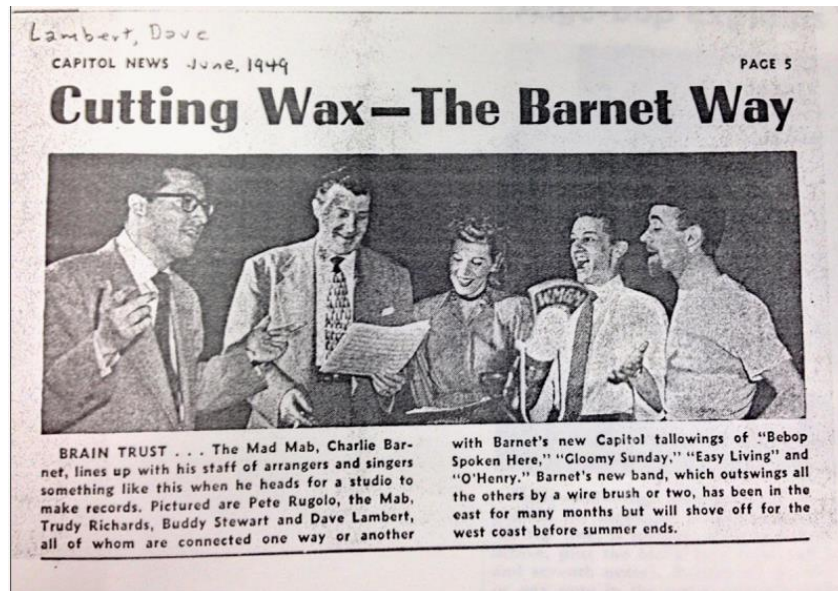
Considered by many to have pioneered the visual and sonic aesthetic of bebop, Gillespie is depicted as overtly and reductively physical. Not only are the photos of Gillespie motion shots—drawing the eye to the movements of his body—but they also capture his exaggerated facial expressions. The language of the headline is notable, too, as it foregrounds the term gyration when describing Gillespie’s style.³⁰² This clear contrast in the depiction of Lambert as an “alge-bop” Professor on the one hand, and Gillespie as gyration genius on the other, reinforces the racial binaries prevalent in the United States during the late 1940s. Even though Gillespie formally studied music at the Laurinburg Institute, helped to develop Afro-Cuban jazz, and is considered a founding father of bebop, primitivism continued to haunt mainstream representations of his work. While other photos of Gillespie depict him in more dignified light, Lambert—to be sure—was never labeled a gyration genius. Though this is only one example, the representation of intellectualism and corporeal primitivism in the *Down Beat* photo editorials clearly depicts racialized notions of the black body and the white mind.

³⁰¹No Author, “Gillespie’s Gyration and Gestures Get His Band Going,” *Down Beat*, August 27, 1947, 14. Photo can be seen in the William P. Gottlieb Collection, accessed March 18, 2015, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/jan06.html>. According to the library of congress this pictures entered into public domain on February 16, 2010.

³⁰²Ibid.

In a similar display of (racialized) braininess in bebop, a review of Charlie Barnett names Lambert as a member of Barnett's musical brain trust.³⁰³

Figure 5.4 "Cutting Wax —The Bernet Way," *Capitol News*, June 1949, 5.³⁰⁴



Featured in this photo-editorial as a member of Charlie Barnett's all white "jazz council," the intellectualism of bebop takes on a complex layering of racialization. While on the one hand Lambert is depicted as member of the brain trust, he is providing council to Charlie Barnett, a musician more commonly referred to as "Mad Mab." According to Scott DeVeaux,

Barnett was a maverick whose disregard for conventional opinion was legendary. Born into a wealthy railroad family, he inherited a degree of financial independence that

³⁰³ According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, Brain Trust was originally used during Franklin D. Roosevelt's campaign for presidency in 1932. According to the entry, "The term was coined by journalist John F. Kieran and gained national currency at once. Raymond Moley, Rexford Tugwell, and Adolphe Berle, all professors at Columbia University, were the three principal members." Brain trusts were expected to help the president make decisions on economic and social problems. "It contributed suggestion and drafts for campaign speeches, all of which underwent considerable revision by Roosevelt." Encyclopedia Britannica Online, "Brain Trust," accessed March 18, 2015, <http://academic.eb.com/EBchecked/topic/77400/Brain-Trust>.

³⁰⁴ No author, "Cutting Wax—The Bernet Way," *Capitol News*, June 19, 1949, 15. Courtesy of the Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University Library.

allowed him to give full expression to the rebellious side of his nature. The general public knew him as the “Mad Mab,” a hard drinker and gambler who married no fewer than eleven times.³⁰⁵

As an eccentric figure, Charlie Barnett fit within the perception of the bebop artist as a mad genius. According to Ingrid Monson, “the modernism in the self-conception of bebop musicians partook deeply of the image of the avant-garde artist as outsider and social critic, and of the accompanying expectation of ‘mad’ or ‘bad’ behavior.”³⁰⁶ Yet Barnett’s madness is contradicted in the photo by his staid behavior and the seriousness of the other singers. While the editorial draws on the trend of zany intellectualism that was associated with bebop music, the fact that the singers are all white, reading music and—except for Lambert—clean-shaven and formally-dressed, reveals a more mainstream cultural image of what a white singer was expected to look like. This example reveals that while the media marketed this project as bebop subculture, in reality it subscribed to a more mainstream model of white studio singers reading music—even if it was the music of a mad genius.

By associating with such a “mad genius,” Lambert’s work with Barnett often poked fun at the intellectualism associated with bebop through the non-intelligible language of scat. The piece “Bebop Spoken Here” begins with Lambert and Buddy Stewart trading short scat phrases with a big band. Barnett then interrupts the piece to question his Brain Trust. He says, “Wait a minute, wait a minute, what are you guys talking about?” Lambert responds, “ee leeya skla fa” and Barnett retorts, “I don’t know what you are saying,” followed by “that doesn’t make sense. What are you speakin’?” Barnett pokes fun at the common criticism of bebop being unable to

³⁰⁵ DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, 256. Barnett’s band would also become the first white jazz band to play at the Apollo Theater in New York.

³⁰⁶ Monson, “White Hipness,” 421.

communicate with its' audiences. His lyrics are literally lost in translation, because they move between semantics of language and music.

The melody is then introduced with the line “Bebop spoken here” and the rest of the piece is sung primarily on scat syllables such as “blee ah bah dee yah, blee ya ba dilli ya.” Later on in the song, Stewart and Lambert sing “While conversin’ with a sharpie—says Emily Post—keep your best parade first on top. When I’m givin’ you the sign of the flatted fifth.”³⁰⁷ This lyric satirizes the mainstream ideal of upper class whiteness when referencing Emily Post, a white female American author known for her writings about etiquette. In the same phrase they align Post with a bebop reference, singing the words “the flatted fifth” (also known as a tritone) that is highly characteristic of the bebop sound, and an interval that is often systematically avoided in Western classical music, if not outright demonized.³⁰⁸ The lyric implies that the square world of Emily Post readers would most likely not understand the flatted fifth reference, and would therefore need bebop language translated. Spoken word, scat, and a big band are all interspersed demonstrating Barnett’s humorous brain trust of instrumentalists and vocalists as insiders of the bebop subculture. By naming the piece “Bebop Spoken Here,” they poke fun at the failure of scat to be understood linguistically and it is most likely a play on the expression English spoken here. More broadly, they satirize American audiences’ general failure to understand bebop.

While Dave Lambert chose to identify with the bebop subculture and became the first arranger to translate the music for voice, he contended with continually shifting perceptions of

³⁰⁷ Transcribed from Kevin Gardner, “Charlie Barnett Bebop Spoken Here (Capitol 78),” *YouTube* video, 2:44, November 13, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SuuLy0rI18M>.

³⁰⁸ See Emily Post, *Etiquette: Answers To The Most Often Asked Questions About Etiquette In Your Everyday Life, At Home And On The Job* (New York: William Morrow, 2011). For a discussion of the tritone and its modernist implications in bebop see Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar American* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 183.

race. As a white man he had easier access to the music industry, but because he identified with bebop some of his initial projects were rejected. Musically he was extremely adventurous and for these reasons he was not as successful as other arrangers. As will be discussed in more detail below, he attempted to record with Charlie Parker but the project was too complex and was therefore never released. While what he was doing coincided with the musical experimentations of some of the top names in bebop, the media continued to depict his work within more mainstream notions of whiteness. As the Barnett review reveals, Lambert is never discussed as the mad genius; he is instead the sight-reading singer, who helps to regulate mad mab. Similarly in the Jo Stafford example he is depicted as the overly intellectual white male professor explaining bebop to a white audience. The press often depicted Lambert as only slightly different from the mainstream by overemphasizing his goatee, but ultimately depicting him as the comical white, male professor capable of translating the bebop subculture to the mainstream.

5.2 ARRANGING THE VOICE AS AN INSTRUMENT AND THE CREATION OF SING A SONG OF BASIE

While individuals such as Ella Fitzgerald, Slim Gaillard, and Leo Watson used the voice as an instrument within bebop, Dave Lambert was one of the first musicians to write in the idiom for vocal groups. He experimented with bebop beginning in the mid 1940s, in his vocal collaborations with Buddy Stewart, and in the 1950s he composed scat for larger vocal

ensembles. As he explained in an interview with journalist Barry Ulanov, “The most important thing is to get a sound that says something. If I do use lyrics I want the music to say the same thing that the words say—most popular songs don’t make it—the music rarely says the same thing as the lyric.”³⁰⁹ For Lambert, the sound is in the words. In an almost inverted process to the one employed by Hendricks—that is, the lyric writing technique in which he listens until the music speaks to him and reveals the lyrics—Lambert writes and arranges music for the voice out of a desire to create music that speaks. Ingrid Monson describes the verbal aesthetic of instrumental jazz as “saying something.” Music speaks when it expresses “people, and their musical and cultural histories.”³¹⁰ Lambert focused intently on finding ways to use the voice to create sounds like jazz instruments that were as expressive as language.

Though he became most successful for his vocalese collaborations with Hendricks, he initially garnered attention for his bebop compositions for vocal groups. Ulanov writes:

The interest in Dave is understandable. His deft use of his voice and Buddy’s in unison and his alone is a striking vocal innovation. It’s not the obvious scattling line, the inevitable riffs, it’s as rich musically, as adroit harmonically as most bebop and not so firmly lodged in the limitations of the school. For Dave is an individual, one who can always be counted upon for a handsome display of consistent inconsistency in his music as in his life.³¹¹

Leonard Feather discussed the influence of Lambert’s early experimentations with bebop vocals in similar terms:

It was not until January 1945, when Dave Lambert and Buddy Stewart recorded a unison vocal called “What’s This?” with Gene Krupa’s band, that attention was drawn to the possibilities of singing bop vocally. (Two and a half years later Nat Cole, having discovered bop, answered the Lambert-Stewart question with a similarly styled opus called “That’s What!”)³¹²

³⁰⁹ Barry Ulanov, “Dave Lambert: Singer-composer-arranger, he didn’t run when they yelled seat, he jumped,” *Metronome*, July 1947, 12.

³¹⁰ Monson, *Saying Something*, 2.

³¹¹ Ulanov, “Dave Lambert: Singer-composer-arranger,” 12.

³¹² Leonard Feather, *Inside Jazz* (New York, Da Capo Press, 1976), 40.

Lambert experimented with different vocal ensembles to explore the possibilities of the voice in jazz. He was fascinated with finding ways to use the voice as another instrument or instrument section in bebop. While working with Gene Krupa, he arranged for the vocal group as a section of the larger instrumental ensemble. From these experiences he met Buddy Stewart, and together they would form a bebop vocal duo.

The Lambert/Stewart duo with Red Rodney's Beboppers would go on to record three songs—"Cent and a Half," "Charge Account," and "Gussie G"—in November of 1946.³¹³ All three pieces featured unison bebop vocal lines sung by Lambert and Stewart and doubled by trumpeter Red Rodney.³¹⁴ The use of a unison melody was a common technique used by bebop instrumentalists that Lambert also chose to incorporate into his vocal charts. The rhythm section for the project consisted of pianist Al Haig, bassist Curley Russell, and drummer Stan Levey. What is unique about these early recordings is that Lambert and Stewart sang no lyrics and the pieces were sung instead entirely on scat syllables. While other vocal groups like the Delta Rhythm Boys (as discussed in [Chapter 1](#)) had incorporated scat into their performances it was not normally the only thing heard on record, and the complex and often frenetic pace of bebop was also not typically associated with vocalists in the 1940s. Audiences expected singers to sing words at least part of the time.

"Charge Account," a contrafact of the jazz standard "All The Things You Are," makes no reference to the original lyrics, silencing the unique feature of language that distinguishes the

³¹³ According to Dee Lambert "Gussie G" was titled after Dave's mother in law Augusta who was affectionately called Gussie.

³¹⁴ Bill Crow discusses the racial tensions surrounding Red Rodney's touring with Charlie Parker in the South. A Jewish, bebop trumpeter from Philadelphia who famously toured with Charlie Parker, Red Rodney became known as Albino Red. According to jazz scholar Garry Giddins, Parkers agent said, "you gotta get rid of that redheaded trumpet player: we can't have a white guy in a black band down south," Bird responded "No...Ain't you ever heard of an albino? Red's an albino." See Bill Crow, *Jazz Anecdotes: Second Time Around* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1990), 154.

voice from the instrument.³¹⁵ Yet by writing a new melody over the chord changes to “All The Things You Are” and scatting, Lambert created what Monson describes as “intermusicality” in which artists relate older musical material to newer forms.³¹⁶ In composing a contrafact, Lambert performs a common bebop technique, and therefore aligns himself with the community of musicians who were engaging with bebop composition techniques. This was one of Lambert’s first attempts at using the voice as an instrument within the bebop ensemble. He would go on to expand these experimentations by arranging and composing bebop for larger scale vocal ensembles.

In the late 1940s he attempted to record his first large-scale bebop vocal composition with the father of bebop himself, Charlie Parker. While living in Greenwich Village, Lambert became friends with Charlie Parker, and they decided to try and work together on a Parker with voices project. Gil Evans arranged the orchestral parts and Lambert wrote vocal arrangements for 12 singers. Unfortunately the vocal parts were too complex for the group and the recording was deemed a failure. Bassist and Lambert’s personal friend, Bill Crow argued that the reason for the failure was because of the studio. Crow wrote,

The studio was evidently not user-friendly. The singers hadn’t been able to hear each other well, the mic placement gave them a harsh aggressive sound rather than the blend Dave wanted, and the mix they had heard on the playbacks had sounded like music on a short-wave radio coming in from Bulgaria. Dave, Gil, and Bird offered to do the date over again for nothing, if they could go to another studio, but Verve released the date the way it was, I guess because Bird’s solos were great, and the background was considered less important.³¹⁷

³¹⁵ A contrafact is a technique used by jazz musicians in which a new melody is written over an already composed set of chord changes. Bebop musicians like Charlie Parker were encouraged by recording studios to write contrafacts a way to avoid having to pay royalties to the previous composers. Esteemed jazz scholar and musician David Baker defines Contrafact is “a tune which is based on an extant set of chord changes (harmonic progression), and it was this type of tune which comprised a large portion of the bebop repertoire.” Dave Baker, *How to Play Bebop 3* (Los Angeles, Alfred Music, 2006), 1

³¹⁶ Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something*, 127-128.

³¹⁷ Bill Crow, “Boston Dave,” *Gene Lees Jazzletter* (August 1988), 6.

The translation of bebop from instrumental ensemble to vocal ensemble was not without its challenges. Lambert struggled to find a way to use bebop harmony in vocal groups, and he also grappled with how to create a blended and balanced sound for a larger vocal group in a studio setting. An added difficulty was finding singers that could both sight read his complex arrangements but also capture the swing feeling that he wanted. The studio singers that he hired for the Parker with voices project were not well versed in the bebop vocabulary, and they wrestled with keeping the upper extensions of the chords in tune. Clarinetist Hal McKusick who was on the date recalled:

The voice parts were way too complicated....Dave's vocal charts were heavy, and by the time everyone realized this it was too late. The recording session was already underway...Dave, was in over his head. First, there were too many singers. Dave could have accomplished the same goal with better results if he had used four. All of us in the woodwind section knew it at the time. Second, Dave wasn't skilled enough as an arranger to write for so many singers. What's more, the singers weren't polished enough as a group to pull off what Dave had in mind and had written.³¹⁸

The project was never finished. Disheartened, Lambert continued to struggle throughout his career to find singers who could accurately execute his often-complex arrangements.

Lambert found the answer to his problem when he decided to try his hand at a vocalese collaboration with Jon Hendricks. In arranging already recorded instrumental music for voices, Lambert realized that singers already knew the music and had the instrumental recordings as practice tracks. In collaboration with Jon Hendricks, Lambert recorded a vocalese rendition of "Four Brothers" in 1955. Inspired by the initial success of the single, Lambert came up with the idea of having Hendricks write lyrics to Count Basie big band recordings.³¹⁹ Shifting from the

³¹⁸ Hal McKusick as quoted by Mar Myers, "Charlie Parker and Voices," *Jazz Wax*, January 30, 2008, <http://www.jazzwax.com/2008/01/charlie-parker.html>.

³¹⁹ Jon Hendricks described the formation of the *Sing a Song of Basie* project in *Down Beat*. Hendricks wrote "When I engaged Dave to do the vocal adaptation of Jimmy Giuffre's 'Four Brothers' arrangement, he bent my ear about doing a lyricized Basie album in nothin' flat! While we were rehearsing 'Four Brothers,' or listening to what each

role of composer to the role of arranger, Lambert used the popularity of Count Basie's music to create a new role for the voice in jazz.

By arranging music that people knew and loved, Lambert found that he could draw on an already established audience base. This connection to the audience that vocalese afforded was what ultimately led to the success of his next vocal group known as Lambert, Hendricks & Ross. Lambert was the first arranger to recreate an entire big band with voices, and therefore the trio simultaneously created something entirely new while maintaining a connection to the legacy of instrumental music. Lambert's arrangements reflected what Ryan Bañagle refers to as "the assemblage of music history," in which music becomes a means of "mythmaking that typically accompanies constructions of the past."³²⁰ In terms of validating the voice in jazz, in having vocalists sing all of the Count Basie big band parts with words, Lambert finally found a successful way to demonstrate that a vocal group could fulfill the roles of jazz big bands, and also improvise in the bebop idiom through scat improvisations.

Lambert's first large-scale vocalese album, *Sing a Song of Basie*, endeavored to recreate the original Basie recordings with as much accuracy as possible. He transcribed all of the parts,

other was sayin', Dave made sure some Basie records were playin'. He'd play the old things most, the 'good ol' ones' we both grew up listening to, and again we heard the marvel of them all. In this era of conservatories, we heard the old Basie band full of natural musicians from their heart play more jazz than anybody we've ever heard, no matter how smart. And nary one of 'em knew what the inside of a music school looked like... Finally I got Dave's subtle message (as subtly as a ton of coal on the head) and stopped listening casually and got t' writing lyrics instead... Dave adapted Frank Foster's arrangements for voices, then we started making choices of recording company A&R men."— Jon Hendricks, "Lambert, Hendricks & Ross and How they Grew," *Down Beat: The Great Jazz Interviews A 75th Anniversary Anthology* (New York: Hal Leonard, 2009), 68. Similarly, Bill Crow remembered the "Four Brothers" project in his memoirs. Crow wrote, "One afternoon I went over to Dave's apartment and found him talking to a young man whom he introduced as Jon Hendricks. Dave was intrigued with Jon's ability to tailor lyrics to recorded jazz solos... Jon Hendricks, wrote an amusing lyric to Woody Herman's record of "Four Brothers," and Dave re-scored the original Jimmy Guiffre arrangement for a vocal group. They recorded it, but on the playback they found that the lyrics sung at the original tempo were hard to understand. So they did it over at a slower tempo and put it on two sides of a 78-rpm record. Even though the words on the bridge teased Woody for being less modern than his sax section, he loved the record when he heard it." —Bill Crow, *From Birdland to Broadway*, 162.

³²⁰ Ryan Bañagle's, *Arranging Gershwin: Rhapsody in Blue and the Creation of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3-4.

altering the original compositions only by transferring instruments to human voices. His daughter Dee Lambert remembered her father working on the transcriptions.

When he was doing the arranging for LH&R he had a drafting table, a slanted board and a huge speaker to the left kind of hung on the wall. The reel to reel was hanging on the wall right next to him. Then he had this huge manuscript and he would do take downs of Basie recordings, and that's how he built the parts for LH&R. He did take downs of the Basie orchestra playing, and then arranged that for voices using Jon's words. Except for "Avenue C," "Little Pony," and Sandman, they co-wrote those lyrics.³²¹

Lambert initially transcribed the Basie band for 12 voices and hired studio singers that he had worked with on various projects. Once again he found that the singers could not execute the swing feeling that was at the heart of the Basie band, and initially thought that this project might end up in much the same place as the Parker with voices project. On listening back to the first takes of *Sing a Song of Basie* with the studio singers, Crow remembered that Lambert was "disappointed with the result. He hadn't been able to get the singers to phrase like the Basie band on the original records. The solos were fine, having been handled by himself, Jon and Annie Ross, but he said the ensembles sounded like 'Walter Schumann Sings Count Basie.'" ³²² In trying to make the human voice sound like a collection of jazz instrumentalists, Lambert made the mistake of hiring studio singers whom he knew could read his arrangements quickly, but he did not foresee that these singers would not understand the rhythmic feel and phrasing of jazz instrumentalists.

When asked the names of original singers on the *Sing a Song of Basie* project, Dee Lambert quipped, "I don't know who they were and they probably don't want credit. I would

³²¹ Dee Lambert, interview by Lee Martin, March 22, 2014.

³²² Bill Crow, "Boston Dave" *Jazzletter* 7 (1988): 4-8.

imagine that they want to stay anonymous.”³²³ The recording engineer for the project recalled the catastrophe of the initial attempt at recording twelve voices.

A large group of professional male and female singers was brought in to vocally simulate the sounds of the orchestra’s horn section. It was all to be the background for the final phase: the solos of Dave, Jon, and Annie. The chorus was very good at sight-reading, but Dave Lambert needed to guide them through the intricacies of the music and the Jon Hendricks lyrics. He tried very hard to help them put a ‘swing’ feeling into their singing, but without success... The sound of those singers was totally opposite to the feeling and rhythm of the Basie arrangements. The cost of the session at that point was becoming very high, and with little to show for it...at that juncture, there seemed to be no way to continue.³²⁴

Once again, Lambert’s arrangements proved too difficult to translate from instrument to voice, and the record company could not afford any more takes.

While the identities of the singers for the Basie project remain unknown, recollections by Hendricks and Lambert suggest the racial demographics of the group. When Lambert told Bill Crow that the group sounded like “Walter Schumann sings Basie” there are obvious implications of whiteness as a lack of jazz authenticity. Similarly, while he does not explicitly identify the singers as white, Hendricks’ description of the group is very suggestive. He begins, “For our first date, Dave contracted 12 experienced singers he had known and used before as the Dave Lambert Singers, some of who worked on such programs as *The Perry Como Show* and *Your Hit Parade*, and who had reputations something fierce.”³²⁵ Hendricks’ television references were shows that featured primarily white entertainers and were marketed primarily to white audiences.³²⁶ In describing the Dave Lambert singers as studio singers from primarily white television shows, one infers that the vocal group was primarily white. In the first attempt at

³²³ Dee Lambert, Personal Correspondence with Lee Martin, March 1, 2015.

³²⁴ Irv Greenbaum, *In One Ear, and In the Other: Memories of 48 Years in Recording* (New York: Abraham I. Greenbaum Inc., 2000), 82-83.

³²⁵ Jon Hendricks, “Lambert, Hendricks & Ross and How they Grew,” *Down Beat*, September 17, 1959, 69.

³²⁶ See Chapter 2 of Leonard Burnett Jr., and Andrea Hoffman, *Black is the New Green: Marketing to Affluent African Americans* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 45-81.

recording, the white studio singers were not fluent enough in the musical vocabulary of jazz to accurately recreate the swing feel of the Count Basie big band.

As a result of this first failed attempt of the *Sing a Song of Basie* project, Lambert decided to consolidate the group to only three voices. Using the newly available technology of multi-tracking, producer Irv Greenbaum offered the suggestion of overdubbing the voices of Lambert, Hendricks and Ross to achieve the full effect of a choral jazz rendition of the Basie band. The project was extremely labor intensive. Ross sang all of the trumpet section parts, Lambert the trombone parts, and Hendricks the saxophone parts. Greenbaum recalled the experience:

Dave and Jon and Annie would need to sing the parts of each horn, one at a time, and then add multiple harmonies, section after section, song after song. Though the ten songs of the album would require many grueling hours of work, the last stage of the recording could then begin, with Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross adding their vocal renditions of the original horn solo parts.³²⁷

The trio recorded the album over several months in the fall of 1957. Record Producer Creed Taylor revealed that it took the group sixty hours in the studio to record the entire album.³²⁸ After recording the first track, “Everyday,” they listened back to the overdubbed recording and were overwhelmed by the experience. Greenbaum recalled, “I was amazed at the ease with which the singers handled those tongue twisters, especially during the faster numbers. I began to feel that I was watching some kind of genius at work.”³²⁹ When the album was finally finished Lambert, Hendricks & Ross became one of the most popular vocal groups in jazz.

As their popularity increased, offers for live performance opportunities came flooding in, and Lambert began quickly consolidating his older arrangements into three voice parts. In

³²⁷ Greenbaum, *In One Ear, and In the Other*, 84-85.

³²⁸ Stanley Dance, liner notes to *Sing a Song of Basie*, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, Impulse AS-83, 1965, LP.

³²⁹ Greenbaum, *In One Ear, and In the Other*, 84-85.

response to their success Count Basie hired the trio for the album *Sing Along With Basie* (1958); soon after this, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross went on tour with Basie's big band. As Dee Lambert recalled, Dave quickly took to re-arranging Basie's music for three voices. "Annie couldn't read music so he wrote her parts in do-re-mi. They rehearsed in the apartment while I did my homework. Joe Williams came over to rehearse some tunes—he didn't read music at all so he had to learn his part by ear."³³⁰ In re-arranging the vocal parts for live performance, Lambert decided which parts were vital for only three voices. He demonstrated his strength as an arranger by spreading out the voicings between instrumental parts to create the sonic sensation of the full registral capabilities of the big band. In a sense, the trio's live performances allowed listeners to hear both the original as well as Lambert's vocal interpretations of which voices in any Basie harmony were most important.

Lambert discovered a means to create a new position for the voice in jazz while drawing on the well-established repertoire of popular American jazz. Through his arrangements, Lambert engaged multiple audience groups interested in both instrumental as well as vocal jazz. As discussed in the previous chapter, lyrics provided a bridge to audiences less familiar with jazz. John Wriggle discusses the function of an increasing popularity of arranging jazz standards: "[T]he hybrid tactic reflects a strategy critical to many modes of entertainment designed for broad popular audiences: the juxtaposition of cultural signifiers perceived as oppositional or contradictory."³³¹ Lambert brought together vocal and instrumental roles in jazz, and in doing so created a highly successful trio.

³³⁰ Dee Lambert, Personal Correspondence with Lee Martin, March 19, 2014.

³³¹ John Wriggle, "Jazzing the Classics: Race, Modernism, and the Career of Arranger Chappie Willet," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 6 (2012): 176.

5.3 RECIPROCAL VOICING AND PHYSICALIZING AN IMAGINARY INSTRUMENT

Lambert's experimentations with the voice were a part of his process of attempting to validate the voice as equal to the instrument in jazz. His arrangements contradicted a common presumption about the divide between the voice and instrument, what jazz singer and pedagogue Rosana Eckert described as "singers are from one land and instrumentalists are from another land."³³² Besides for arranging instrumental music for the voice, he along with Jon Hendricks also frequently engaged in vocal improvisation or scat singing during live performance as means of demonstrating the versatility of the voice as both a section instrument as well as an improvising instrument. At the heart of their improvisations, Lambert and Hendricks revealed Albert Murray's concept of "reciprocal voicing," in which the voice imitates the instrument and the instrument imitates the voice.³³³

Lambert strove to break down the perception of the voice as somehow different or inferior to the instrument in jazz. At the heart of this perception of difference is the relationship to the body. Singers often describe their body as their instrument, whereas instruments are separated and outside of the body.³³⁴ In a review of Wilder Hobson's *American Jazz Music*, Theodor Adorno argues that when instrumentalists imitate the voice they are "forms of deceptive humanization ... the vocalization of the instrumental serves not only to produce the appearance of

³³² Rosana Eckert, interview with Lee Martin, February 27, 2015.

³³³ Albert Murray, *Stompin' the Blues* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1976), 114.

³³⁴ Pellegrinelli, "The Song is Who?," 91.

the human, it serves also to assimilate the voice into the realm of the instrumental: to make it, as it were, an appendage to the machine.”³³⁵ One of the ways that the trio denaturalized the separation between voice and instrument in jazz was through physical gesturing. According to John Corbett, gesture in vocal music “provides a body for the voice,” meaning that the body gives the sound of the voice a physical presence. When a singer uses gesture the audience becomes aware of the physicality of singing. Conversely, for instrumentalists gesture provides a physical representation of their individual voice. The physical pushing of keys for example allows the instrumentalist to articulate his own sound, and thus his own voice.³³⁶ In physicalizing instruments, Hendricks and Lambert both fulfill the traditional role of the singer who plays the inside of the body and the external technicality of instrumental performance through gesture.

While voice and instrument are often perceived as separate, both share an important connection to the body. This connection to the body for both instrumentalists as well as vocalists draws our consciousness to the musical moment. Jairo Moreno writes that the connection to the body during performance is “a condition that inherently denies the phenomenological separation of sound and gesture, of music and medium. The musician (and by this I mean the body and soul of the performer) is united with the instrument in the creative moment.”³³⁷ Both Lambert and Hendricks often used gesturing during improvisation not only to connect to their sound but also to help them come up with musical ideas. Hendricks uses the most blatant gesturing while improvising; he imitates the saxophone by holding his arms out as if holding the instrument. Hendricks even presses imaginary keys as a way to help him conceptualize the sound of a

³³⁵ As quoted by Ajay Heble, *Landing on the Wrong Note: Jazz Dissonance and Critical Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 36.

³³⁶ John Corbett, “Ephemera Underscored,” *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 228.

³³⁷ Jairo Moreno, “Body ‘n Soul?: Voice and Movement in Keith Jarrett’s Pianism,” *The Musical Quarterly* 83 (1999): 86.

saxophone improvising.

[Figure 5.5](#) Frame Grab “Poppitty Pop,” at Festival de Jazz D’Antibes Juan-les-Pins, August 12, 1961, *Institut National de L’audiovisuel*³³⁸



Lambert also uses physical gesture while scatting. Although not as blatant as Hendricks’ saxophone imitation, as a former drummer Lambert often swings his arms in a sweeping motion that resembles the brushes on a snare drum. His daughter Dee Lambert remembers how he often scatted rhythmic patterns both on and off stage. She recalled, “He would do like a drummer, when drummers do half time with their feet on the bass drum and then full time with his arm. Or he would be walking down the street singing rhythm or sitting at the dinner table.”³³⁹ Lambert and Hendricks employed physical gesture while improvising as a way to embody instrumental sound when performing.³⁴⁰

The trio’s performance of “Airgein” at the Newport jazz festival in 1960 is an excellent

³³⁸ Institut national de l’audiovisuel, “Le trio Lambert, Henricks Ross & le Count Basie Orchestra dans un scat,” *ina.fr*, 9:31, <http://wfw.ina.fr/video/I07197721/le-trio-lambert-hendricks-ross-le-count-basie-orchestra-dans-un-scat-video.html>

³³⁹ Personal Correspondence with Dee Lambert, March 22 2014.

³⁴⁰ Éric Fardet’s dissertation discusses why singers use physical gesture during scat as a way to connect with the instrument. For further details see, “Le Jazz et les Groupes Vocaux (Groupes, ecritures et enseignements)” (PhD diss, Universite de Strasbourg, 2006)

example of reciprocal voicing during improvisation. Composed by Sonny Rollins, the piece was originally recorded in 1954 by trumpeter Miles Davis, tenor saxophonist Sonny Rollins, pianist Horace Silver, bassist Percy Heath, and drummer Kenny Clarke.³⁴¹ In the 1960 performance, Ross sang the trumpet part of Davis, while Lambert and Hendricks doubled the melody originally played by Rollins. After the melody, Lambert and Hendricks engage in extensive scatting, closely aligning their vocal sound with instrumental improvisatory techniques. Hendricks scats seven choruses imitating the sounds of Rollins saxophone. Lambert then scats six choruses with backgrounds sung by Hendricks and Ross on the last chorus.

The peak point of improvisation in “Airegin” occurs when Hendricks and Lambert trade. They begin by trading fours and as they progress their trading becomes shorter and shorter until their voices overlap. By trading back and forth they imitate a conversation through sound that becomes increasingly heated as each one begins interjecting each other’s musical statement. In this exchange, the role of the voice as a communicator of language and the instrument as an abstract expression of intention intersect. The voice as an instrument moves between the spectrum of vocal and instrumental roles in a complex display of reciprocal voicing. This back-and-forth not only imitates a conversation between two people, but as their trading phrases become shorter and shorter, their individual voices blend into a heterogeneous configuration of sound. Similar to two horns playing together they end up improvising simultaneously until Annie Ross physically breaks them up by stepping between the two men to cue the head out. Through vocalese lyrics and scat singing, “Airegin” demonstrates how Lambert, Hendricks & Ross used their sound collectively and individually to engage with varying degrees of reciprocal voicing.

While physicalizing an imaginary instrument was a part of the trio’s entertainment

³⁴¹ Sonny Rollins, *Airegin*, Miles Davis Quintet, Esquire, 20-041, 1954, LP.

technique, it was also a means for them to channel their improvisations. When asked whether physicalizing an imaginary instrument was used by the group as a form of comedic entertainment or whether it actually helped Lambert and Hendricks articulate their improvisations, drummer Jimmy Wormworth recalled, “I guess it became a shtick...but I don’t think it started out as one...I think it did help them.”³⁴² Wormworth went on to claim that physicalizing an instrument for Hendricks and Lambert helped them to articulate their improvisations. As discussed in more detail in [Chapter 3](#), Ross was the most restricted in terms of both improvisation and the physical gesture. Lambert and Hendricks physicalized instruments as a means to connect their sound to whichever instrument they were attempting to imitate; in doing so, they connected to audiences by providing them with something entertaining and interesting to watch while listening to virtuosic scat singing.

Though gesture helped the trio use the voice as an improvising instrument, the visualization of imaginary instruments also became a part of how they were marketed visually. As Sofia Dahl explains, “To establish a relationship with the audience the performer will use gestures with multiple functions. Not only do the communicative gestures help an entertainer to deliver a musical narrative, but they also tell the audience something about his or her own personality.”³⁴³ Press photos of the group, often depicted Lambert and Hendricks performing imaginary instruments. For example [Figure 5.6](#) features Lambert physicalizing an imaginary upright bass, while Hendricks plays a saxophone.

³⁴² Jimmy Wormworth, interview by Lee Martin, New York, NY, June 21, 2014.

³⁴³ Sofia Dahl, Frederic Bevilacqua, Roberto Bresin, Martin Clayton, Dahl, Sofia, Frederic Bevilacqua, Roberto Bresin, Martin Clayton, Laura Leante, Isabelle Poggi, and Nicolas Rasamimananam, “ Gestures in Performance,” *Musical Gestures: Sound, Movement, and Meaning*, edited by Rolf Inge Godøy, and Marc Leman (New York: Routledge, 2010), 52

[Figure 5.6](#) Photo used with permission by Photographer Charles Stewart, 1959.



Similarly, on the trio's November 23, 1958, appearance on *The Steve Allen Show*, Lambert and Hendricks humorously sang the countermelody to "Everyday" behind Annie Ross, while using their bodies to gesture the performance of a phantom trombones.

[Figure 5.7](#) Frame Grab *Steve Allen Show*, November 23, 1958.



What is interesting in [Figure 5.7](#) is that Hendricks actually attempts to simulate the correct technique for holding a trombone mouthpiece, while Lambert makes it explicit that his trombone

is not real. For Hendricks, physicalizing imaginary instruments functions as more than just comedic entertainment—it actually helps him to simulate the sound of the instrument that he physicalizes. While Hendricks positions his imaginary trombone in the correct position with his index finger over the mouthpiece and centers it over his mouth, Lambert emphasizes the humorous element of physicalizing an unreal instrument by positioning his mouthpiece over his nose with incorrect finger positioning.

While at various times physicalizing imaginary instruments was used for entertainment purposes, at other points it helped Lambert and Hendricks to connect with the instrumental sound. In the case of Hendricks—who often referred to himself as a horn player without a horn—his physical gesture allowed him to imagine his voice as an instrument that can move between the body's internal and external borders. While Lambert was not as overt in his movements, he channeled his past as a former drummer when scatting by swinging his arm as if playing brushes. Both Lambert and Hendricks used their bodies as means to connect with the instrumental framework of the jazz that they sang while also connecting with audiences.

Lambert's work in expanding the role of the voice in jazz reflected not only changes in the music, but also changes in attitudes towards race and gender in the United States during the late 1950s. A progressive bebop arranger, he helped to expand the roles of the voice in jazz and broaden the audience for his music by drawing on the legacy of iconic jazz instrumentalists. As the first vocal bebop composer, Lambert expanded the role of the voice beyond singing the melody to include the role of improviser, and developed the vocal ensemble as an extension of a larger instrumental group. As a subculture within the subculture of jazz, the bebop voice had an extremely constricted position within jazz practices more generally. Prior to Lambert's work, bebop was considered primarily an instrumental idiom, with a few exceptional scat improvisers.

Bebop vocal ensembles were unheard of. Lambert's experiments in bebop arranging were so successful that they created an alternative idiom of expression in jazz that would inspire other spin off vocal groups. Arranger and composer Neal Hefti cited Lambert, Hendricks & Ross as a direct influence on his group the Neal Hefti Singers who recorded *Pardon My Doo Wah* in 1958. French singer Mimi Perrin, inspired after hearing Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, formed Les Doubles Six—the most successful French vocalese group of the 1960s.³⁴⁴ Lambert's contribution was less about his individual vocal talent than his particular approach to expanding the roles of the vocal ensemble in jazz to encompass instrumental techniques.

He strove to create a new sound, and in order to accomplish this he hired singers regardless of race, class or gender. Lambert, Hendricks & Ross—the group that he was most famously known for— was integrated, as was his last permutation of the Dave Lambert Singers in 1964. By appearing onstage and singing with Hendricks and Ross, Lambert identified with the intellectualism and subcultural expression of bebop through sonic and sartorial style.

Lambert's work reveals that the voice is a crucial mediator of race, class, and gender that is too often overlooked. While theorists such as Roland Barthes often reduce the voice to its bodily "grain," this dissertation shows that voice is always part of relational and identity-based constructs.³⁴⁵ Lambert's compositions revealed that the voice could function as an intersection between both. Furthermore, by writing music for an integrated and mixed gender vocal group at a moment when American social consciousness about race and gender was changing, Lambert demonstrated that his individual compositional voice was contingent on the vocal precision of

³⁴⁴ Spin off groups included the French vocal sextet Les Double Six, and the Neal Hefti singers. In an interview with Marc Meyers Neal Hefti who wrote some of the original compositions played by the Basie Band described his 1958 album *Pardon My Doo Wah* as being inspired by Lambert, Hendricks & Ross *Sing a Song of Basie* album. Hefti remarked, "Hey, those Lambert, Hendricks & Ross things are great but most of those are my arrangements for the Basie Band!" From Marc Meyers, "Hefti, Quincy and Vocalese," July 23, 2009, <http://www.jazzwax.com/2009/07/hefti-and-quincy.html>.

³⁴⁵ Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," 179-189.

others. Lambert used vocal music to move beyond the limitations of American racial stratification. Farah Griffin describes the socio-political importance of the voice as a “conduit between what and where we are and what and where we want to be.”³⁴⁶ An examination of the Lambert’s work illuminates the complex web of interconnection between jazz, voice, instrument, and race in America.

³⁴⁶ Griffin, “When Malindy Sings,” 119.

6.0 CHANGING ATTITUDES: THE RECEPTION OF RACE AND GENDER IN THE WORK OF LAMBERT, HENDRICKS & ROSS

It was a strange looking group to be walking out on a stage in the States. An Anglo-Saxon descendant of John Haldane (Dave's name was David Haldane Lambert, a real Yankee), a girl from England of Scottish decent, and an American Negro descended from a slave...So they would all look at us; but when we started to sing everything else disappeared. It was just magic that was created.³⁴⁷

As discussions of the Civil Rights movement inundated news media with stories such as the desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross became “one of the hottest vocal groups in jazz.”³⁴⁸ An integrated and mixed gender trio, they reflected changing attitudes towards race and gender in the United States during the late 1950s—and together, they represented integration onstage. Their work was a part of larger effort among artists and intellectuals in the United States to imagine and indeed conjure into existence a world of human equality. Robert Rossen's 1957 film *Island in the Sun* depicted an interracial romance between Dorothy Dandridge and John Justin, and Ronald MacDougall's 1959 film *The World, the Flesh and the Devil* was a dystopian tale in which the only survivors of the human race were African American man (played by Harry Belafonte), a young white woman (played by Inger Stevens), a white man (played by Mel Ferrer). Like Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, these films reveal that the arts were attempting to will into being an alternative to the racist and segregated

³⁴⁷ Jon Hendricks interview with Les Tomkins, “A Memorable Group,” *National Jazz Archive: The Story of British Jazz*, accessed May 1, 2015, <http://www.nationaljazzarchive.co.uk/stories?id=199>.

³⁴⁸ No author, “Lambert, Hendricks & Ross Swing at Public Hall,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 17, 1962, 5C.

socio-cultural environment of the United States at that time. It was as if they were willing integration into being.

This chapter traces the reception of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross from 1957 to 1962 in order to explore how reviews discussed the group's demographics, and also where the trio performed. Their reception reveals that they performed primarily for integrated audiences in Northern Urban American cities, and that the publications that were the most open about discussions of the group's race and gender were primarily African American newspapers and magazines. Industry publications such as *Billboard* often focused on the unusual vocal techniques of the trio and tended to shy away from its demographics. Contrastingly, newspapers and magazines marketed primarily to African American audiences, such as *Ebony*, *Jet*, and *The Chicago Defender* emphasized the integrated makeup of the trio. Examining multiple media viewpoints illustrates the complexities of race and gender reception of the group at an important moment in US history. It also helps us to understand the place of vocal jazz within that history.

While the expeditious success of the integrated group coincided with the rising prominence of the Civil Rights movement, early reviews tended to downplay the trio's demographics due to the anxieties surrounding race and gender integration at the time. Jon Hendricks, the only African American in the group, was rarely mentioned in initial reviews because I argue that certain audiences felt threatened by the fact that the group was not only integrated, but also mixed gender. In particular, having a black man and a white woman onstage together in the late 1950s triggered segregationists' stereotypes, and deep seated anxieties surrounding black male and white female interaction as inherently sexual. As anti-miscegenation laws were still in effect in many Southern States, Jon Hendricks and Annie Ross represented the segregationist's ultimate fear. Not only were a black man and white woman singing together, but

they were also performing together live. The fact that their bodies were not only on the same stage, but that their bodies also touched each other, was what triggered segregationists.

Due to the trio's progressivity of presenting a white woman onstage with a black man at a moment of heightened racial tensions in the United States, reviews reveal that the trio performed primarily to mixed audiences in Northern Urban areas. The trio never felt safe traveling throughout the south. Furthermore they were limited in terms of the media platforms through which they were allowed to perform. While Lambert, Hendricks & Ross was highly successful, the differences between audiences in the North versus the South made national television broadcasting especially fraught, and the trio only appeared on a few television programs such as the *Steve Allen Show* and Hugh Heffner's *Playboy's Penthouse*.

Despite their limitations, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross used their popularity among primarily Northern Urban American audiences, to promote Civil Rights activism. They frequently performed at fundraisers for CORE, SNCC, and the Urban League, and as individuals also volunteered their time at events like telethons to help fund the Freedom Riders who bravely risked their lives to desegregate the public transit system in Montgomery, Alabama. According to Ingrid Monson in her seminal work *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa*, the time period that Lambert, Hendricks and Ross were together is critically important in understanding the connections between jazz and shifting attitudes towards race and gender in the United States. I argue that the trio is a critically important addition to this discussion because they were one of the only popular vocal jazz groups that was mixed gender and integrated at the time, and they used their collective voice to stand in support of civil rights.

6.1 THE UNTOUCHABLES AND THE FEAR OF MISCEGENATION

Though Lambert, Hendricks & Ross stood in support of the civil rights movement by singing at fundraisers for the NAACP and the Urban League, the majority of early reviews of the trio tended to avoid discussions of race altogether. This was part of a larger trend among trade publications in jazz in the 1950s. In avoiding race many jazz critics perpetuated ideals of whiteness. John Panish observes that the media coverage of bebop limited discussion of racial demographics in an attempt to white wash the music. Critics often compared African American jazz musicians to European classical composers or contemporary white popular figures in an attempt to market the music to mainstream white audiences. Panish writes,

The highest form of compliment for bebop musicians is comparison with a white composer or artist, or a mention of their interest in European culture...the use of these comparisons and quotations as the primary point of reference functioned to obscure the distinctiveness of jazz as an African American aesthetic tradition, and instead enclosed jazz and jazz musicians securely within the orbit of white, European American culture.³⁴⁹

Following in this trend, jazz critics compared Lambert, Hendricks & Ross to white, European cultural icons, as a means of marketing their sound to a more mainstream audience.

A writer for the *Philadelphia Tribune*, listed the nicknames often associated with Lambert, Hendricks & Ross: “They have been dubbed the ‘James Joyce’s of Jive’ and the ‘Gilbert and Sullivan’s of jazz.’”³⁵⁰ These monikers associated the trio with referential icons of whiteness, and Dave Lambert spoke openly about his disdain of these comparisons. In the liner notes to *High Flyin,* Lambert remarked, “I’m not overly fond of the Joyce reference. I’d like to

³⁴⁹ Jon Panish, *The Color of Jazz: Race and Representation in Postwar American Culture* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 9-10.

³⁵⁰ No author, “Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross Open in Chicago,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, March 4, 1961, 5.

think we are all things to all men.”³⁵¹ Lambert rejected the comparison to the notoriously difficult and highbrow writing of a white European literary figure such as Joyce. He instead wanted the trio’s music to be associated with jazz and with a politics of integration, or music for all men regardless of skin color. He went on to say, “We worked hard to create our style. I can think of a better way to describe the group: ‘The Lambert, Hendricks & Ross of Jazz.’”³⁵² By referring to the trio within the context of jazz, Lambert affirms the groups’ connection to the African American tradition of jazz and rejects the comparison to white European literary figures. Lambert refuses to forget or erase the cultural heritage of jazz.

Though Lambert spoke openly about the trio’s connection to jazz as an African American art form, early reviews tended to emphasize his name more prominently than the other members. *Billboard* Reviews in 1958 and 1959 referred to the group as the “Dave Lambert Singers,” or as the “Dave Lambert Singers: featuring Annie Ross,” leaving Jon Hendricks’ name out entirely.³⁵³ While the group name Lambert, Hendricks & Ross was not formed until the trio started touring—which undoubtedly led to some confusion among early reviewers—the trio’s first album cover clearly listed all three members’ names. This erasure of Hendricks was intentionally discriminatory. Trade publications reveal that Hendricks was not merely ignored but erased in an intentional perpetuation of whiteness as the mainstream ideal.

Contrastingly, European jazz critics were the most outspoken about the demographics of the group. Italian jazz critic Bruno Schiozzi is representative of the European conceptualization of racial authenticity in American jazz, which was the opposite extreme of American white washing. Schiozzi wrote, “The humility of Dave Lambert, who creates the musical arrangements

³⁵¹ Dave Lambert as quoted in Curtis Brown, liner notes to *High Flyin,* ’ Lambert, Hendricks & Ross with the Ike Isaacs Trio, Columbia, CS 8475, 1961, LP.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Howard Cook, “Distributor News” in *The Billboard*, June 9, 1958, 15. See also *Billboard*, March 3, 1958, 13.

together with Jon Hendricks, makes his vocal qualities less evident. His vocal means are remarkable and his voice, although it reveals itself as evidently white, it is with no doubt the most beautiful of the three.”³⁵⁴ The critic reveals his evaluative framework of authenticity, by implying that the ideal beautiful voice in jazz is black, and therefore Lambert’s white sound is a pleasant, but unusual exception to the rule.³⁵⁵ He goes on to mention that Lambert is the most well known in the group due to his previous work with Gene Krupa during the mid-1940s. This was one of the only reviews of the group that spent the majority of the article praising Lambert’s white voice and reveals an interesting, albeit problematic, example of European perceptions of racial authenticity in American jazz.

In a similar European valorization of American blackness, French critic Gerard Bremond employed a backhanded compliment when writing about the trio. His article in *Jazz Hot* praised the trio for their ability to “recreate the spirit of Basie, especially when two of the singers in the group are white.”³⁵⁶ Instead of erasing the contributions of African American artists or subsuming them under the white ideal, he praises the white singers in the group for recreating the sound of a black band accurately. As a European critic, Bremond engages in the opposite technique of the American reviewers. Instead of erasing the discussion of race in reviews, he makes it the primary topic. Nonetheless, his overt color awareness (like Schiozzi’s) is problematic because by praising the group for sounding black, he perpetuates a binary based on racial authenticity in jazz.

³⁵⁴ Bruno Schiozzi “Tre Cantanti strumentisti: Lambert-Hendricks-Ross” *Musica Jazz* (1961): 20-23.

³⁵⁵ For fascinating discussions of the perceptions of race and the voice see, Laurie Stras, “White Face, Black Voice: Race, Gender, and Region in the Music of the Boswell Sisters,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 1 (2007): 207-255; Grant Olwage, “The Class and Color of Tone: An Essay on the Social History of Vocal Timbre,” *Ethnomusicology Forum* 13 (2004): 203-226; Nina Eidsheim, “Voice as a Technology of Selfhood: Towards an Analysis of Racialized Timbre and Vocal Performance” (PhD Diss., University of California San Diego, 2008)

³⁵⁶ Gerard Bremond, “Lambert, Hendricks & Ross,” *Jazz Hot* December 1959, 28.

Part of the reason why the European critics focused on the demographics of the group was due to the fact that the trio was highly controversial in 1957. Hendricks described the groups' own anxiety surrounding the initial idea of touring.

I said, "Hey we got a best-selling album...why don't we go and sing?" Dave and Annie looked at each other, you know, because I didn't think about what I had said. At that time there hadn't been much talk of integration, or the freedom rides and all the things that have happened to divide people and bring to the fore this idea of different races and all that. I wasn't thinking in terms of social life, but in terms of music and art.³⁵⁷

The initial tensions of the group were well founded. Only three years earlier when visiting his relatives in Money, Mississippi, fourteen-year-old African American Emmett Till was brutally murdered for saying "bye baby" to a white woman in drug store.³⁵⁸ Racial violence and the perceived threat of black male and white female interaction, particularly in the Southern United States, were rooted in anxieties surrounding interracial sex. At this crucial point in American history, southern segregationist groups such as the Citizen's Council published pamphlets admonishing school integration as a threat to the racial status quo. The Council slanderously wrote that white women were the most threatened by the sexual advances of African American men.³⁵⁹ The blame of failing to uphold segregationist notions of racial purity was placed on the pernicious stereotype of vulnerable white women in need of protection from hypersexual black men.

Ebony magazine, a publication marketed primarily to African Americans, printed the first direct discussion of the trio and the anxiety surrounding interactions between black men and white women in a December 1959, photo-editorial entitled "Untouchables." The author of the

³⁵⁷ Tomkins, <http://www.nationaljazzarchive.co.uk/stories?id=199>

³⁵⁸ For a discussion of Emmett Till and the fear surrounding black male and white female interaction in the Southern United States see, Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

³⁵⁹ For a concise discussion of these sexual anxieties surrounding racial mixing in the South see Elizabeth Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son: Little Rock, the Crisis that Shocked the Nation* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 359-362.

editorial, John Johnson, redeployed the term “untouchable” or the lowest social standing from the Indian caste system to describe the perception of African American men in the United States. He describes the fear surrounding physical interaction between a white woman and a black man. He argues, however, that the notion of the African American man as an untouchable—that is, as both “feared and distrusted”—is “inevitably giving way to a more enlightened and democratic way of life.” Nonetheless, he warns that this enlightenment cannot occur “as long as brother-in-law fever is rampant among the white brethren, so long will efforts be made to keep the Negro male in isolation.”³⁶⁰ At the center of this distrust in black men, Johnson introduces Annie Ross who is both white and a woman, and her interaction with black male vocalist Joe Williams as an example.

At the Playboy Jazz Festival held in Chicago late this summer, pretty Annie Ross of the jazz trio of Lambert, Hendricks and Ross was ‘riffing’ with Count Basie vocalist Joe Williams. At the conclusion of their number they impulsively embraced. “Oops!” gasped Big Joe, clamping his hand over his mouth, and Annie darted from the stage.³⁶¹

Describing the incident between Ross and Williams as an accident, Johnson satirizes the fears surrounding interactions between black men and white women. Even though the editorial describes the event with an ironic tone, it highlights the socio-cultural realities of fear surrounding race, gender, and sexuality in the United States. The editorial goes on to argue that the reason for racial animosity is due to the fight over women. Johnson writes that women with more “impulse than instinct, are the cause of the many fights between Negro and white GIs stationed abroad... They are the something else in the woodpile that keeps the segregation pot

³⁶⁰ John Johnson, “Untouchables,” *Ebony*, December 1959, 90.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

boiling.”³⁶² Instead of attempting to eradicate stereotypes of hyper sexuality he simply moves them away from the black man and imposes them onto the white woman.

Johnson’s editorial additionally highlights the absurdity of race and gender anxiety through visual means. The photo accompanying the editorial was originally the cover of *Down Beat* from September 17, 1959. The picture shows Annie Ross resting her hands on Dave Lambert and Jon Hendricks’ necks while they touch noses directly in front of her breasts.³⁶³ While everyone is fully clothed in the image, the central focus is of the two men’s faces touching and Ross’ breasts. The photo clearly pokes fun at the threat of upholding the sexual status quo. In choosing this image, Johnson instigated the fear of sexually imbued physical contact not only between a white woman and a black man, but also between two men. He alludes to the stereotypes and fears associated with jazz that Sherrie Tucker describes as, “‘too much jazz’ signals danger— criminality, sexuality, impurity—and with them, the threat to topple the white woman from her pedestal (and with her, the racial status quo).”³⁶⁴ The Lambert, Hendricks & Ross picture draws on the fears of miscegenation, implying that if left to their own devices humans—as sexual beings—will not remain within the confines of the segregationists’ status quo. Because Lambert and Hendricks touch noses across a Ross’ breasts, the physical intimacy between a black man, a white man, and a white woman symbolized all things that segregationists stood against. In the context of the editorial, the queerness of the photo was surely intentional. In short, the “untouchable” figure of the African American man becomes resolutely touchable: he touches, and is touched.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ To see the Ted William’s photo see Marc Myers jazz, “Dave Lambert and Ted Williams,” *Jazz Wax*, July 29, 2014, <http://www.jazzwax.com/2014/07/>.

³⁶⁴ Tucker, “But This Music is Mine Already!,” 241.

Because of the anxieties surrounding black male sexuality, the threat of racial violence was a grave reality for musicians who toured in the South. Interracial performances were not only deplored in parts of the Southern United States, but as Nat King Cole experienced in 1956, they posed very real and serious danger for black Americans. Playing in his home state of Alabama to a white only audience, Cole was assaulted onstage by an angry mob of white segregationists who were angered by a photo of Cole and white vocalist June Christy that was featured in the August 1956 edition of *The Southerner*. In the innocuous image, Christy simply rests her hands on Cole's shoulders.³⁶⁵ Due to incidences like Cole's and since the Supreme Court did not deem southern miscegenation laws unconstitutional until 1967, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross did not perform in the South, and instead toured primarily in larger Northern urban areas such as Chicago, New York, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Cleveland.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵ According to Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness and Race Relations* (London: University of California Press, 1998) an angry mob of white segregationists attacked Cole because of his appearances onstage with white, female vocalist June Christy. A photo of the duo in the August 1956 edition of *The Southerner* instigated the violence. For an insightful discussion of southern segregationists and the impact on the television careers of African American artists such as Nat King Cole and Harry Belafonte see Phoebe Bronstein, "Televising the South: Race, Gender, and Region in Primetime, 1955–1980" (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 2013), 32

³⁶⁶ In an interview with Jon Hendricks on June 15, 2014, he discussed the fact that the trio never experienced any racism. However he mentioned the fact that the group never toured in the South and played primarily in very cosmopolitan cities like New York and Chicago. His wife Judith Hendricks also shared her recollections of the fear that she felt about driving through parts of the United States with her children and Hendricks because they were an interracial family. Jon and Judith Hendricks in discussion with Lee Martin, June 15, 2014, New York City.

6.2 RECEPTION AND PLACE: URBAN LOCATIONS OF PERFORMANCE

Lambert, Hendricks & Ross stood in defiance against segregationists by performing for integrated audiences in major American cities. In Chicago, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross performed in Southside clubs such as the Tivoli Theater, the Sutherland Lounge, and the Regal Theater, which were all known as “black and tans” or integrated clubs at the time. The Tivoli was located in Woodlawn, a primarily African American neighborhood in the late 1950s and early 1960s. John Fish writes that the “black population, which tripled between 1940 and 1960 from 278,000 to 838,000, was steered into what the whites left behind—old housing and deteriorating neighborhoods. Woodlawn became a natural focus of black in-migration.”³⁶⁷ Press releases and advertisements for their show at the Tivoli made no effort to hide the interracial makeup of the group. In a publicity piece from June 1, 1961, The *Chicago Defender* described the success of the trio’s performance: “The all star stage bill appearing at the Tivoli theater for the past week closes tonight what has been one of the most successful box offices this season. With Basie is the famous act billed as Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, an interracial unit show.”³⁶⁸ The importance of the fact that the trio is described plainly as a well-known interracial group by one of the oldest African American newspapers in Chicago should not be underestimated.

Along with the Tivoli Theater, the trio also performed at the Sutherland Lounge. Chicago radio host Larry Smith recalled that the Sutherland lounge was “‘a black and tan’ or integrated

³⁶⁷ John Hall Fish, *Black Power White Control: The Struggle of the Woodlawn Organization in Chicago* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 12

³⁶⁸ No Author, “Tivoli ‘Love Show’ Ends Tonite,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, June 1, 1961, 16.

we would say now, as were a number of nightspots on the South Side.”³⁶⁹ The Sutherland Lounge was a premiere venue for African American jazz artists ranging from Louis Armstrong to John Coltrane.³⁷⁰ Journalist Howard Pulley of the *Daily Defender* described the popularity of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross at this venue. He wrote,

Lambert Hendricks and Ross, the swinging vocal trio at the Sutherland may break all attendance records during their first appearance at the famed Southside lounge. Annie Ross, the pretty female side of the trio, has the personality and song styling ability so rare in most girl jazz singers.³⁷¹

Reviews from the Sutherland and the Tivoli reveal that Lambert, Hendricks & Ross—while popular with both black and white audiences—were in live performance, more accepted in black communities. Even though many of the Chicago reviews praised Lambert, Hendricks & Ross as “the greatest winning ticket in the history of jazz vocal groups,” the realities of racism during the late 1950s were not limited to the Southern United States, and unfortunately Lambert, Hendricks & Ross were not immune to the vagaries of Northern racism.³⁷²

While performing in Chicago in 1960, Jon Hendricks was refused a hotel room at the 20 East Delaware Apartment Hotel located in the Gold Coast neighborhood of Chicago, which was—and continues to be—an affluent and primarily white neighborhood. The 20 East Delaware was an upscale hotel marketed primarily to white patrons. Hendricks was refused a room when the hotel was made aware not only that he was black, but also that his wife was white.³⁷³ *Down Beat* published the most detailed expose on the incident: “On the morning of November 2, Hendricks’ wife, Judy, who is white, went to the hotel, paid a \$40 deposit, and was

³⁶⁹Charles Walton, “Jazz in the Sutherland Lounge,” Hyde Park Historical Society, accessed April 22, 2015, <http://www.hydeparkhistory.org/herald/sutherlandlounge.pdf>.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Howard Pulley, “So They Say,” *Daily Defender*, May 23, 1960, A16.

³⁷² No author, “Lambert, Hendricks Ross Open Cloister,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, November 10, 1960, 23.

³⁷³ For historical information on Chicago neighborhoods and racial demographics see Ann Durkin Keating, *Chicago Neighborhoods and Suburbs: A Historical Guide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004)

given a receipt for suite 202. That afternoon she returned with Jon. The manager said, ‘we don't accept colored people here.’³⁷⁴ In response, Hendricks called his agent Willard Alexander who then contacted journalist Charles Suber of *Down Beat* to write a piece on this discriminatory incident. Suber called an attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union as well as *Down Beat* editor, Gene Lees. According to the story, “within minutes, a photographer from the *Sun-Times* was on the way, and Jack Lind, *Chicago Daily News* reporter and sometime contributor to *Down Beat* was working on the story for his paper.”³⁷⁵ The incident was later covered in *Jet* magazine, the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and the *Chicago Daily Defender*. As this anecdote suggests, while the North may have been more progressive than the South, not all doors were open to a black man with a white wife. The racial anxieties surrounding black male and white female interaction were apparent even to a popular singer in one of the largest cosmopolitan cities of the North. The trio was allowed to perform together in public spaces, but a mixed couple in a private, predominantly white space was still too controversial for Chicago in 1960.

Despite the discrimination that Hendricks faced offstage, the group’s popularity onstage allowed them to play in some of the top jazz clubs in the country. Lambert, Hendricks & Ross performed extensively in New York City at venues like the Village Vanguard, Birdland, and the Apollo Theater. Importantly, in their New York reviews they were often described as “modern.” Ingrid Monson reminds us that this designation within jazz discourse had important racial implications. Monson contends that, “The conflation of modern musical and artistic traits with the modern struggle against racial discrimination and segregation characterizes the particular meaning of ‘modern’ within the jazz community...”³⁷⁶ Associating the trio with modernism thus

³⁷⁴ No author, “Trouble For Jon in Chicago,” *Down Beat*, December 8, 1960, 11.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁶ Monson, “White Hipness,” 409.

suggested integrationist leanings. They were even part of the “Jazz For Moderns” concert at Carnegie Hall. In New York, reviewers depicted the trio as a representation of the sonic and social ideals of contemporary society.

Featured at the Apollo Theater (the premiere cultural institution of jazz in Harlem) with artists such as Sarah Vaughan, and Count Basie, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross were praised for their unusual vocal jazz. *Variety* magazine noted that, “Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, two guys and a femme, are real far out singers. They break up the house with variety of hip items that run the gamut from a Jimmy Rushing-styled blues to an all-out scat bit.”³⁷⁷ Promoted to the young intellectual crowd, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross were identified as part of the countercultural movement of modern jazz.

Aside from performances in Northern cities like Chicago and New York, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross also performed on the West Coast in San Francisco and Monterey. Playing at the “Hungry I,” a bohemian countercultural club, and the Monterey Jazz Festival, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross performed in places that—while not free of racism—were more open to the possibility of integration. The “Hungry I” was a club known for its discovery of comedians and was billed primarily as a place for intellectual audiences. *Billboard* published an article on the club describing it as a “boot camp for many of the stars who made it from San Francisco.” The owner, Enrico Banducci, reportedly “chose the name to describe his haven for the ‘hungry intellectual’: musicians writers and painters struggling for recognition and survival.”³⁷⁸ The *Billboard* article goes on to describe San Francisco more broadly as a city with “an intellectual climate provided by the University of California, Stanford, San Francisco State College and others.” The audiences at the “Hungry I” and people of San Francisco are described as a “happy

³⁷⁷ Gros, “House Reviews: Apollo, N.Y.,” *Variety*, June 3, 1959, 54.

³⁷⁸ Eliot Tiegel, “Homebreds Become Showbiz Thoroughbreds,” *Billboard*, May 6, 1967, 28.

racial mixture of its people and a long history of tolerance shaded by rebellion and irreverence.”³⁷⁹ Playing to a packed house in 1959, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross’ performance at the “Hungry I” was described by *Variety* magazine as a “sensational act for a jazz-oriented audience and a solid one even for the square...The numbers are delivered in exciting, swinging fashion by the girl and two boys.”³⁸⁰ While *Billboard* describes San Francisco as a happy racial mixture, it is interesting to note that the *Variety* reviewer chooses to identify the mixed gender of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross but does not mention the interracial makeup of the group.

Lambert, Hendricks & Ross’ performance at the Monterey Jazz Festival offers another case in point of the trio integrationist symbolism. Founded in 1958 by San Francisco radio broadcaster Jimmy Lyons and jazz critic Ralph Gleason, the initial years of the festival were met with a certain amount of racial anxiety by audiences. Bill Stew of *Variety* commented in 1959,

There was no evidence whatsoever of Jim Crow, a facet that made some persons nervous last year, though no incidents developed. Indeed, this year there’s been no nervousness; the townspeople are delighted at the economic shot in the arm the festival offers... probably the weekend’s biggest hit was the trio composed of Dave Lambert, Jon Hendricks & Annie Ross. They sing in pure jazz idiom, setting to words music by such as Miles Davis, encompassing dozens of different styles in their numbers. The trio was booked for half-hour, and begged off at 50 minutes.³⁸¹

While Stew describes subdued racial anxieties surrounding the festival, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross are recognized as the most popular performance of the 1959 festival. Ralph Gleason even referred to them as the “master of ceremonies for the Monterey jazz festival this fall.”³⁸² Gleason booked Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, not only because they were popular, but also to prove that racial discrimination was not a part of the festival. By referring to the trio as the “master of

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Rafe, “Night Club Reviews: hungry I” *Variety*, March 11, 1959, 73.

³⁸¹ Bill Stew, “2nd Monterey Jazz Fest Makes it 2 Ways—At the B.O. and On the Stage,” *Variety*, October 7, 1959, 67.

³⁸² Ralph Gleason, “Popular Jazz Lyricist Lets Songs ‘Sing to Me,’ *Indianapolis Star*, April 19, 1959, 6.

ceremonies” the review reveals that the festival saw the trio as a vehicle to showcase the festival’s anti-discriminatory policies. Gleason wanted to show America that Monterey was accepting of integrated groups.

6.3 PULCHRITUDE AND THE IDEALS OF FEMININITY

As the modern master of ceremonies Lambert, Hendricks & Ross’ reviews of gender were often antiquated. The *Daily Defender* for example, stated crudely: “In the group was a talented good looker named Annie Ross.”³⁸³ *Variety* similarly remarked on the individual contributions of the group in very gendered terms: “The two males give an energetic performance in making sounds like musical instruments. Miss Ross, incidentally, not only fills the vocal requirements, but she’s also a visual asset.”³⁸⁴ Ross is praised for her visual beauty, but her voice is described only as filling the requirements. Jazz critic Sam Chase likewise discusses the trio and emphasizes Ross’ visual beauty.

Jon Hendricks (who also pens many of the original lyrics) turns in some remarkable vocal pyrotechnics in his frequent emulation of a virtuoso tenor sax... Dave Lambert wears a pixyish smile and serves very much as anchor man, holding together many of their best efforts...To top it off, they are a most attractive group to watch, again with each personality permitted to project separately. And Miss Ross provides something, which is too infrequently present in female performers: real femininity as well as pulchritude.³⁸⁵

³⁸³ No author, “Lambert, Hendricks & Ross Discover Gold in Basie Hits,” *Daily Defender*, July 7, 1959, 19.

³⁸⁴ Jess, “Night Club Reviews: Village Vanguard, N.Y.,” *Variety*, June 15, 1960, 54.

³⁸⁵ Sam Chase, “Jazz Vocal Trio Refreshing Group,” *Billboard*, January 11, 1960, 12.

Chase engages the contentious racialized and gender ideals of white feminine beauty. He makes no mention of race, by describing Ross' femininity and pulchritude [i.e., beauty] as infrequently present in jazz. Yet he implies that most jazz singers—many of whom were black—are neither feminine nor beautiful.

It was not until the late 1960s that jazz singers such as Abbey Lincoln began speaking out against constrictive ideals of feminine beauty. In the August 29, 1968, edition of *Jet*, Lincoln reacted against the idealism of white femininity in jazz. She remarked, “White female rejects and social misfits are flagrantly flaunted in our faces as the ultimate in feminine pulchritude. Our women are encouraged by our own men to strive to look like the white female image as much as possible.”³⁸⁶ Lincoln reveals another expression of unequal power relationships, namely that the ideals of feminine beauty are confined to white women. Farah Griffin writes that “black women have been deemed unfeminine and the furthest from the white supremacist ideal of beauty.”³⁸⁷ One has only to examine an early review of Lambert, Hendricks, & Ross by Bremond to understand Lincoln's argument. Bremond wrote, “Annie is not only a musician, but she also attaches great importance to the words, what makes me believe that she is an even better singer than Fitzgerald...Annie Ross sings in a manner that is essentially feminine.”³⁸⁸ Bremond categorizes Ross as both feminine and a better singer than Ella Fitzgerald—clearly illustrating the industry ideals of whiteness and femininity. In describing Ross as feminine and pulchritudinous, reviewers such as Bremond and Chase perpetuated the white feminine ideal of beauty.

³⁸⁶ Abbey Lincoln, as quoted in Farah Jasmine Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free, Be a Mystery: In Search of Billie Holiday* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 179. Originally published by Abbey Lincoln, “To Whom Will Black Women,” *Jet*, August 29, 1968, 58.

³⁸⁷ Griffin, *If you Cant Be Free Be a Mystery*, 179.

On the other hand, white women were often considered less authentic than black female singers in jazz. Female singers in jazz faced a particularly complex set of antagonisms. David Griffiths summarizes the common perception of the singer in jazz during his interview with Annie Ross.

Unfortunately for the musician who'd like to work with lady practitioners of the jazz art, there are very, very few girls with qualifying talent. Jazz seems to be almost as much of a masculine pursuit as football: apart from singers, just about the only jazzwoman of any consequence is Mary Lou Williams. Singers (especially non-ethnic, non-black-and-bluesed ones) raise a special problem because the average musician is not normally enthusiastic about them. Oh sure, singers can help bring a little extra popularity to a band but too often—the musician feels—they draw attention away from his brilliance and anyway, the audiences they attract tend to be fringe, ignorant and only spuriously interested in jazz.³⁸⁹

Ross navigated turbulent waters as a white woman and singer in jazz. Griffiths not only claims that singers are disdained in jazz but that white singers are even more disliked. He goes on to qualify Ross' validity because of her instrumental approach to singing, and he cites instrumentalists who admire her. Though in hindsight, numerous reviews discuss the importance of Annie Ross to the trio, and even claim that when she left the group, it was no longer as good, one has to wonder if part of the reason that she left the group in 1962 was because she felt so restricted and undervalued as a woman and a singer.

³⁸⁹ David Griffiths, "A Profile of Annie Ross: Well Known Jazz Singer and Vice-President of the Jazzbeat Association," *Jazzbeat*, May 1965, 18.

6.4 SING A SONG OF FREEDOM: CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVISM THROUGH PERFORMANCE

While Hendricks was denied access to certain Chicago establishments due to the color of his skin, and reviewers often described Ross in misogynistic terms, the trio fought discrimination through their performances at civil rights fundraising events. One of their most publicized performances was Chicago's inaugural "Playboy Jazz Festival" in 1959. According to journalist Rob Roy of the *Chicago Defender*, "The 'spectacular' called the first annual 'Playboy Jazz Festival' will offer some 200 top stars over the three day span...listed among the greatest are Satchmo Armstrong, Duke Ellington...Lambert, Hendricks & Ross..."³⁹⁰ He went on to write that ticket sales to performances would benefit the Urban League. They also performed at the Chicago Urban League Festival in August of 1960. Monson claims that the event "attracted some fifteen thousand people."³⁹¹ The press publicized Lambert, Hendricks & Ross along with Sammy Davis Jr. as the feature acts of the festival. The *Pittsburgh Courier* wrote that the Chicago Urban League's festival "raised an estimated \$250,000 for the charitable cause."³⁹² According to the article Sammy Davis Jr. was the chairman of the Chicago Urban League's Financial Council who donated his talent to the show "because he believes deeply that Chicago, the nation's second city needs a strong, vital league to help insure an end to segregation and discrimination there."³⁹³ While reviewers did not interview the group for their thoughts on integration, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross took a stand against segregation by actively participating in these sorts of

³⁹⁰ Rob Roy, "Stars Jam Chicago for Jazz Festival: Satchmo, Kenton, Dizzy, Basie, Duke, Ella Head \$ Million Cast," *Chicago Defender*, August 8, 1959, 19.

³⁹¹ Monson, 165.

³⁹² No author, "Peter Lawford, Frank Sinatra: Sammy Davis Jr. Brought Friends to Chicago Jazz Bash," *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 10, 1960, 23.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*

events. In one of the largest cities in the United States, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross used performance to promote social change.

They also participated in civil rights fundraising events in New York City. In the summer of 1961, the trio performed at Harlem's first jazz festival. An advertisement in the *New York Amsterdam News*—one of the oldest African American newspapers in the country— mentioned some of the participants in the festival.

Count Basie, Gerry Mulligan...Lambert, Hendricks & Ross are among the jazz artists who will appear in Harlem's first Jazz Festival, it was announced Tuesday. The Festival, sponsored by the Freedom Fund Committee of the N.Y. Branch NAACP will be held on June 16 and 17 at the 369th Regiment Armory, 141st street and 5th avenue.³⁹⁴

Founded in 1953, the Freedom Fund Committee hosted dinners, entertainment, and other fundraising activities to finance the civil rights cases fought by the NAACP. Though the festival was short lived, all of the proceeds went directly to the NAACP.

The trio also volunteered their time by performing at one of the most unusual locations for a jazz festival— the Lorton Reformatory in Laurel Hill, Virginia. Lorton was the only prison that held all levels of prisoners' together— low, medium, high and max— in dormitory style cells. According to the *Washington Post*, African Americans inhabited 19 of the 23 prison dormitories revealing the bleak results of institutional racism and the prison industry. In a prison full of primarily African American inmates, serving charges ranging from minor felonies to multiple counts of homicide, Catholic Prison Chaplain Father Carl Breitfeler created an outdoor jazz festival in 1957, that brought in some of the top names in jazz.³⁹⁵ Lambert, Hendricks & Ross took a stand in support of the humane treatment of prisoners by donating their time to the Lorton Reformatory Jazz Festival. Father Breitfeler wrote that the festival was “not a coddling or

³⁹⁴ No author, “First Harlem Jazz Festival June 16-17,” *New York Amsterdam News*, May 27, 1961, 17.

³⁹⁵ For further details see “Desegregation of Lorton Housing Ordered Halted,” *Washington Post*, May 25, 1963, D2

pampering of prisoners but an annual reminder that prisoners are understood and thought of as human beings. These are the things that money cannot buy so it's only fitting that they not be obtained with money...rather, through the large and generous heart of jazz.”³⁹⁶ Journalist Robert Asher's review of the festival described the joy and exuberance experienced by the prisoners as well as the artists who performed in 1960, and provided an insightful comparison with a riot by a mob of angry young white men at the Newport Jazz Festival that same year.

Some 1900 free-swinging inmates cut loose yesterday at District's Lorton Reformatory and the warden called it 'therapy.' They didn't riot, as some 'outsiders' did at the recent Newport jazz festival, but the inmates tapped feet, clapped hands, laughed and shouted requests to one of the biggest groups of musicians ever assembled in the Washington area...Lambert, Hendricks & Ross wailed frantically at the Fifth Annual Lorton Jazz festival, an exclusive affair inside the prison walls. You must be an inmate to get an invitation...One inmate explained the feeling of the men in the prison ball field: 'the day after the festival is over we start thinking about the next. Ninety percent of us are jazz fans and this is the biggest day of the year for us.'³⁹⁷

While race is not directly mentioned, Asher provides an insightful comparison between the demeanor of convicts who pleasantly clapped and encouraged the musicians, while the Newport Jazz Festival was cancelled as policemen threw tear gas to break up an angry mob of primarily young white men.³⁹⁸ In a single year, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross performed at both the Newport Jazz Festival—the same day as the riot—as well as the Lorton Reformatory Jazz Festival. In choosing to participate at the Lorton festival, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross lent their support to the plight of African American men in the United States, by entertaining the inmates and helping to humanize prisoners in a racially discriminatory legal system.

³⁹⁶ Father Carl Breitfelder, "The Unique and Meaningful Lorton Jazz Festival" *Lorton Jazz Festival of 1960 Transcript*, accessed April 19, 2015, <http://www.readbag.com/dspace-wrlc-doc-bitstream-2041-7554-1-b08f001-001text>.

³⁹⁷ Robert Asher, "1900 Inmates Cut Loose at Lorton Jazz Festival," *The Washington Post*, August 12, 1960, B9.

³⁹⁸ The *New York Times* described the Newport rioters as "mostly college youths aged 17 to 20...one hundred and eighty-two were arrested. All but fourteen were released after police had taken their names and addresses and the names of their colleges." See John S. Wilson, "Newport Jazz Festival Closed Because of Rioting," *New York Times*, July 4, 1960, 9.

While the trio volunteered their time to civil rights fundraising events and other civil liberties activities, they were more openly outspoken about the racial tensions in the United States while performing overseas. During one of the trio's last shows as Lambert, Hendricks & Ross on April 23, 1962, in Bremen, Germany, Lambert commented on the social situation in the United States with a joke. "I'm sure you are all fairly familiar with the story of why jazz came up the Mississippi river on the riverboats. It was because they wouldn't let the band on the bus in New Orleans. Terrible situation over there you know? They don't know what they are doing, it's terrible."³⁹⁹ Referring to the segregation of buses throughout the south that erupted into brutally violent attacks on the Freedom Riders in 1961, Lambert veils his criticism of the United States failure to resolve the race problem in the guise of humor. The trio not only participated in fundraising events in the United States in support of integration causes, but they also employed their success to expose international audiences to the American struggles of Jim Crow while touring overseas.

They also revealed their political leanings in the music that they performed. In 1962 the trio participated in the Dave and Iola Brubeck album *The Real Ambassadors*, which was a musical parody of the State Department jazz tours. They wrote this piece as a tribute to Armstrong's denouncement of President Eisenhower's poor handling of the desegregation of Little Rock in 1957. Armstrong refused to participate in State Department jazz tours overseas, when segregation was still rampant in the United States. In tribute to Armstrong's bravery Brubeck hired Louis Armstrong, Carmen McRae, and Lambert, Hendricks & Ross to record a musical that he wrote about the glaring contradictions in the United States diplomatic strategies at home and overseas. Historian Penny Von Eschen describes the album as a satire of the

³⁹⁹ Dave Lambert quoted from "Newstalgia Downbeat—Lambert, Hendricks & Ross-Live in Germany 1962," accessed August 15, 2015, <http://crooksandliars.com/gordonskene/newstalgia-downbeat-lambert-hendricks->.

American diplomatic strategy of using “black musicians as symbols of the triumph of American democracy” overseas “when American was still a Jim Crow nation.”⁴⁰⁰ The Brubeck’s undoubtedly chose Lambert, Hendricks & Ross to sing “Whose the Real Ambassador?” because the group was integrated. Together they sing:

...It is evident we represent American society,
Noted for its etiquette, its manners and sobriety
We have followed protocol with absolute propriety.
We’re Yankees to the core...⁴⁰¹

The irony and political message of this lyric, is that Brubeck chose the integrated trio to play the role of the American diplomats. President Eisenhower’s State Department was unsurprisingly almost exclusively white and male, and therefore not only having a black man but also a white woman play the role of the state department satirized the racism and sexism of the American political system of the time. While the album was critically a success, the music was performed live only once at the Monterey Jazz Festival in 1962. Attempts to produce the work as a musical failed because it was deemed to controversial and too political at the time.

Lambert, Hendricks & Ross were involved in another record that supported social activism—*A Jazz Salute to Freedom*, a double-album that was advertised as a “catalog of modern jazz issued through the years by Roulette Records and its subsidiary label, Roost.”⁴⁰² The liner notes provide a brief history of CORE (The Congress of Racial Equality) as a group of students, both “white and Negro, schooled in the direct and passive techniques that Gandhi had used to free India from the British.” The notes describe sit-ins in Chicago, freedom rides through the upper south, and in “1960, in Greensboro, North Carolina, the current wave of direct action was

⁴⁰⁰ Penny Von Eschen, “The Real Ambassadors,” *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies*, ed. by Robert G. O’Meally, et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 192.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid, 88

⁴⁰² James Farmer, liner notes to *A Jazz Salute to Freedom*, CORE C100, 1960, LP.

sparked as a group of students began a sustained drive to integrate the city’s lunch counters.” The liner notes acknowledge the contributions of the artists as well as the president of Roulette Records, Morris Levy, for producing the record.⁴⁰³ *A Jazz Salute to Freedom* was marketed in trade publications such as *Billboard* with the slogan, “CORE needs the help of the record industry to continue its fight for Freedom and Equality for all Americans.”⁴⁰⁴ The album cover was featured as part of an *Ebony* article on the 1964 Monterey Jazz Festival. The caption read, “The Congress of Racial Equality seize the opportunity to raise funds for their organization through the sale of album *A Jazz Salute to Freedom* as fans listen to jazz from the bandstand.”⁴⁰⁵ Even after Lambert, Hendricks & Ross broke up in 1962, their music continued to help fund the civil rights struggles in the United States.

6.5 TELEVISION INTEGRATION

Lambert, Hendricks & Ross represented integration onstage— but they also performed it in front of the television camera. In doing so, the group helped to bring desegregation into many American households. However, because seeing a black man and a white woman on screen together was so controversial at the time, the kinds of television shows they could appear on

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ No author, “CORE: A Jazz Salute to Freedom,” *Billboard*, September 21, 1963, 59.

⁴⁰⁵ Louie Robinson, “Monterey and All That Jazz: Five sessions gross some \$120,000 at seventh annual seaside festival,” *Ebony*, December 1964, 55.

were extremely limited.⁴⁰⁶ Historian Wini Breines argues that even showcasing African Americans on television in the 1950s was extremely rare. She describes the media of the 1950s in the United States as “a white time in America...Black people were practically invisible in the mass media, and when they were not, their portrayals were racist, as in the ‘Amos and Andy’ and ‘Beulah’ television shows.”⁴⁰⁷ Because of these unwritten standards in the industry, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross only appeared on independent television shows. The trio’s drummer Jimmy Wormworth recalled,

From what I understand we could only do syndicated T.V programs, like the *Playboy’s Penthouse Party* when Hugh Heffner still lived in Chicago and that’s where they taped the show. It came on here (NYC) on an independent channel, but what I remember somebody saying was, “the networks don’t want a black guy and a white girl next to each other on TV.” So as far as I know we were never on a network program but we were on quite a few independent programs.⁴⁰⁸

Despite these limitations, promotional materials for their appearances in the African American press often discussed the demographics of the group. The *Daily Defender* ran an advertisement on their appearance of *Playboy’s Penthouse* and specifically mentioned the fact that the trio was integrated. “Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross, one of musicdom’s most sensational interracial combos, will be among the top guest stars appearing on the television show ‘Penthouse,’ channel 7, Sat. 11:30p.m.”⁴⁰⁹ Certain media platforms used the trio’s demographics as a political tool, to draw Americans’ attention to examples of integration. Not only did advertisements like the *Daily Defender* market the group as integrated, but also other newspapers connected the trio

⁴⁰⁶ Syndication in the sense of a television that is not made for a particular network but are created for purchased, and in the case of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross were usually broadcast late at night during non-peak hours.

⁴⁰⁷ Wini Breines, “The ‘other’ Fifties: Beats and Bad Girls,” in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 399-400.

⁴⁰⁸ Wormworth, *No One But Me*, 2012.

⁴⁰⁹ No Author, “Lambert, Hendricks, Ross Penthouse Socks Feb. 13,” *Daily Defender*, February 9, 1960, 17.

specifically to Hugh Hefner modern American alternative culture of cosmopolitan bachelorhood.

Hugh Hefner propagated his promiscuous, intellectual, and jazz consuming life-style on his short-lived television series *Playboy's Penthouse*. In the format of a variety show, *Playboy's Penthouse* offered audiences the feeling of sexual and intellectual sophistication, and an alternative to mainstream American culture. He filmed the show in a Chicago studio and created an environment that attempted to make audiences feel as though they were personal guests at one of his house parties. On his show Hefner often featured comedians and jazz musicians that he felt represented his aesthetic of the sophisticated bachelor. As Ethan Thompson writes, "Hefner wanted *Playboy's Penthouse* to be a different kind of television show, as *Playboy* itself had been a different kind of magazine...Hefner was most explicit about *Playboy's* attempt to cultivate an alternative masculinity."⁴¹⁰ Part of that difference for Hefner was openness towards sexuality—and the soundtrack to this aesthetic was jazz. Though Hefner made his living in the exploitation of women, he was partially responsible for the disillusionment of the domestic ideology in Post World War II America. Hefner's show was one of the only televised platforms open to jazz musicians and a vocal group like Lambert, Hendricks & Ross. Though Hefner is heavily criticized for his overt sexism, he was one of the only people in television that championed the music of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross. Hefner helped to get their faces as well as their music on television, at a time when most networks would not even consider it.

Lambert, Hendricks & Ross appeared on the show in 1959. Hendricks and Lambert arrived on screen in tuxedos and Ross wore a strapless evening gown with along train that she draped over her arm. Playboy bunnies and other jazz luminaries such as Tony Bennett

⁴¹⁰ Ethan Thompson, *Parody and Taste in Postwar American Television Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 76-77.

surrounded the trio, as they sat at a fireplace. Heffner joked with Bennett and kindly asked Annie Ross if they wouldn't mind singing something. The Count Basie rhythm section accompanied the group, and Annie Ross casually pulled Joe Williams between herself and Jon Hendricks to sing "Everyday I Have the Blues." Considering at the time that most networks refused to show African American's on television, the fact that Annie Ross put her arm around Joe Williams and sang trumpet fills behind his solo was an anomaly in the television industry. While Heffner was at the forefront of integrating television in the late 1950s, it is important to note that his target audiences as well as his party attendees were all white. While Heffner used the group to help create his alternative form of masculine bachelorhood, which was extremely restrictive towards women, he was the first person to televise Lambert, Hendricks & Ross. By breaking the rules of social respectability and creating an alternative identity, Heffner created a unique position of agency for himself in the entertainment industry in which he could include interracial vocal jazz groups on his show.

Against the backdrop of network television programs, Heffner's integrated model was extremely unusual at the time. White entertainment such as the *Perry Como Show*, *Maverick* and the *Ed Sullivan Show* dominated the television industry. Nat King Cole was one of the only African Americans to host a television show—but even that was short lived. Media and communications scholar Phoebe Bronstein argues that Nat King Cole's show was cancelled because it challenged stereotypical representations of African Americans on television. "Cole's image—a 'decent, well-mannered, highly educated human being'—proved too controversial for sponsors as it did not fit within the historic and racist confines of on-screen blackness."⁴¹¹ Like Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, Cole was perceived as threatening to southern audiences because he

⁴¹¹ Bronstein, "Televising the South," 32.

challenged stereotypes of African Americans, and often featured white guests. Bronstein suggests that, “integrations —especially black men and white women on-screen together —was a major Madison Avenue worry.”⁴¹² Television was unwilling to present interracial mixing because of the ban on interracial marriage in the southern United States, on the one hand, and on the other the deep-seated racial anxiety that haunted all of the United States.

One of the earliest advocates for integration in the television industry was Steve Allen. His prime time variety show aired on NBC from 1956 to 1960 and featured a kind of “who’s who” of jazz artists. Allen established a legacy of television that would later influence late night television hosts such as Jay Leno and Johnny Carson. As a jazz pianist and aficionado himself, Allen often featured jazz musicians on the show in hopes of exposing a larger audience to the music. On November 23, 1958, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross was featured singing repertoire from *Sing a Song of Basie*. After being criticized two years earlier for kissing Lena Horne on the cheek following her performance on the show, Allen fought for integration on the television screen. He voiced his views in an article published in *Ebony*.

Television needs the Negro performer and benefits by his contributions to the medium. I consider it unfortunate that this idea is still not generally accepted by the television industry. Certain producers or performers feel that if they use a high percentage of Negroes that perhaps viewers in the South or elsewhere might object. This always seemed to me to be ridiculous thinking. I don’t hold with it. And as proof that it is ridiculous, I think I have gotten about two letters or cards that could be said to represent that kind of negative, evil thinking.⁴¹³

As an early advocates of televised integration, *The Steve Allen Show* was one of the few opportunities available to Lambert, Hendricks & Ross in the late 1950s.

⁴¹² Ibid, 35.

⁴¹³ Ben Alba, *Inventing Late Night: Steve Allen and the Original Tonight Show* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005), 102.

As individuals Lambert, Hendricks & Ross also appeared on a few television fundraisers for the Civil Rights movement. For example, Jon Hendricks participated in a syndicated telethon to help raise funds for the Freedom Riders. *Jet* magazine published a photo editorial of the event with a photo of Jon Hendricks and Lena Horne. The caption read, “Singer Lena Horne, star of the CORE TV telethon to benefit Freedom Rides, goes through the act close-up to Jon Hendricks, of Lambert, Hendricks and Ross. The telethon brought \$49,000 in pledges and the sponsors collected \$25,000 in cash.”⁴¹⁴ CORE raised funds with the aim of desegregating public transportation in the Southern United States. While many freedom riders endured brutal violence, Lambert, Hendricks and Ross aided in the process of desegregation by using their media exposure to draw awareness to the civil rights struggle.

6.6 A RETROSPECTIVE ON CIVIL JAZZ

In hindsight, Jon Hendricks and Annie Ross are more vocal about the challenges that they experienced, and often say that race was not something that was discussed openly in the late 1950s. Hendricks articulates his reflections on the racial tensions of the time. “The whole social situation in the United States, underwent a change; the whole so-called racial situation, and I say so-called because there is really only one race and that is people. We had in the States a

⁴¹⁴ No author, “Photo-Editorial,” *Jet*, July 27, 1961, 65.

background of slavery, which caused this social situation...⁴¹⁵ Hendricks enacted his beliefs by touring with an integrated group, despite the discrimination that he faced.

Similarly, Annie Ross faced discrimination as a woman in a male dominated industry. She remembers the importance of her contributions.

I broke a lot of barriers- if in those days a hip jazz performer was supposed to be a black American male; I wasn't your typical stereotype of what a jazz singer should be. Oh sure, we had Ella, Sarah, Dinah and countless unsung heroines but I was neither black nor American. So I had to create a new image...⁴¹⁶

Ross was not a prototypical jazz singer but she found a means to create her own style and in doing so became successful. Her work was not without its difficulties, however. In a 1985 interview Ross discussed the limitations of activities available to a woman on the road. "This was pre-women's Lib, remember, and a woman just couldn't go down to the bar and strike up a conversation or go out on the town. So I felt, enough was enough."⁴¹⁷ Ross rejected notions of mainstream female respectability and instead chose to engage with her male peers as equals off the bandstand.

While her options were limited offstage, Ross refused to tolerate segregation. She recalls sitting in a restaurant in Las Vegas with three black members of the band and being told the restaurant was booked. "We just sat, and finally they served us." She went onto describe the racist climate that she experienced while touring. "At the time, blacks were not allowed to stay in the hotels...so I stayed in a motel with the troupe."⁴¹⁸ Even though Ross describes her integrationist views openly, Hendricks remembers both Ross and Lambert feeling hesitant

⁴¹⁵ Jon Hendricks, "In My Opinion," *Jazz Journal*, July 1968, 5.

⁴¹⁶ Annie Ross Unpublished Memoir, Box 7 Folder 2, Annie Ross Collection, Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University Libraries.

⁴¹⁷ Annie Ross, interview with Ernie Santosuosso, "Reminiscing with Annie," *Boston Globe*, January 28, 1985, Box 3 Folder 9, Annie Ross Collection, The Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University Libraries.

⁴¹⁸ Annie Ross, interview with Dany Margolies, "It's a Breeze to Vocalese," *The Malibu Times*, February 18, 1999, Box 4 Folder 4, Annie Ross Collection, The Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University Libraries.

initially about touring. He suggested that they form a live group after recording *Sing a Song of Basie*, and he remembers that it, “created a bit of a consternation, because there had been no racially integrated jazz singing group of that type ever. I saw the trepidation on Dave and Annie's faces. And I understood it...”⁴¹⁹ While they were initially hesitant about touring, and did experience limitations in where they could perform, Hendricks proclaimed that the group’s reception was extremely positive. “Everybody loved us. We were the United States of America.”⁴²⁰ While the trio was certainly not the norm even within jazz, together they created their own style that was relevant and reflective of the times.

As race relations came to the fore in American society, newspaper reviews shifted from avoidance of race to an emphasis on the integrated nature of Lambert, Hendricks and Ross. Art Peters of the *Philadelphia Tribune* wrote that the, “background of the members of the trio is as varied and unique as their arrangements. John Hendricks, a Negro, hails from New York. Miss Ross was born in London, came to this country at an early age and received a classical music education before embarking on a nightclub career as a singer. Dave Lambert, white, is an accomplished musician and arranger.”⁴²¹ Similarly the African American Newspaper, *New York Amsterdam News* portrayed the trio as follows: “The group was magnificent—magnificently integrated and magnificently eloquent in unison and solo moments.”⁴²² Together they expanded the role of the voice in jazz as well as who was allowed a voice in the United States at that time.

⁴¹⁹ Jon Hendricks, interview with Chip Deffaa, “All that Jazz Keeps of Scat Boppin’: Jon Hendricks Plans Spirited Performances at the Blue Note,” *New York Post*, August 7, 1995, Box 4 Folder 2, Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University Libraries.

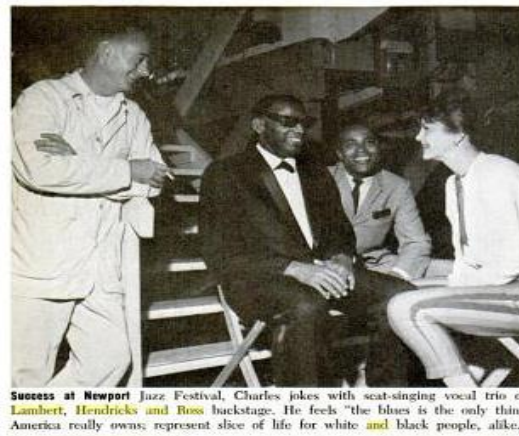
⁴²⁰ Hendricks, “All that Jazz Keeps of Scat Boppin.’”

⁴²¹ Art Peters, “Toothache Creates Headache For Lambert, Hendricks, Ross,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 6, 1961, 5.

⁴²² No author, “Stardust Time in Kings and Queens,” *New York Amsterdam News*, November 7, 1959, 22.

I close with a review that encapsulates the significance of the group. In the September 1960, edition of *Ebony* magazine, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross was featured in a photo at the Newport Jazz festival with Ray Charles. They are all shown laughing together.

[Figure 6.1](#) Lambert, Hendricks & Ross featured in *Ebony*, September 1960, 106. ⁴²³



The quote below the photo states, "Charles jokes with scat-singing vocal trio of Lambert, Hendricks and Ross backstage. He feels 'the blues is the only thing America really owns; it represents a slice of life of white and black people alike.'" ⁴²⁴ Through performance Lambert, Hendricks and Ross became the popular faces of the socio-cultural changes that occurred in the United States during the late 1950s into the early 1960s. Charles discloses the power of music as a tool of integration and a sign of hope during a turbulent point of racial stratifications in the United States.

Performing at CORE fundraising events, and presenting integration onstage, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross attained success by moving beyond and between social norms of gender and race. As Monson explains, "the enduring effect of modernism in jazz has always been the deeper

⁴²³No author, "The Soul of Ray Charles," *Ebony*, September 1960, 104.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*

presumption that through one's musical and artistic practice it is possible to break beyond the limits of any given pre-given category."⁴²⁵ By creating and performing as a mixed gender and integrated group, Lambert Hendricks and Ross revealed to audiences the possibilities of integration for a new and modern American society. Together they represented change and hope for equality and integration.

⁴²⁵ Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 317.

7.0 CONCLUSION: THE LAMBERT, HENDRICKS & ROSS LEGACY

The legacy of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross spans several decades and has influenced numerous groups like the French vocalese sextet Les Doubles Six and solo singers such as Bobby McFerrin, Al Jarreau, and Kurt Elling. While numerous solo artists drew inspiration from the trio, since this dissertation is focused on a vocal jazz group, I conclude this dissertation with a discussion of the legacy of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross on today's current vocal jazz groups. The New York Voices, Take 6, and The Manhattan Transfer are arguably the most successful contemporary vocal jazz groups that perform vocalese. The Manhattan Transfer became a household name in the 1980s, the New York Voices is a Grammy Award winning ensemble, and Take 6 is the most awarded a cappella group in history. Unlike Lambert, Hendricks & Ross—who were firmly positioned within jazz—these contemporary groups are influenced by numerous genres. An analysis of these groups reveals that the stakes of the voice in jazz today have in some ways changed, and in some ways remained the same.

How the stakes of the voice in jazz have changed is primarily based on repertoire. Besides singing vocalese, Take 6 is mostly known for its gospel a cappella arrangements. The Manhattan Transfer sings the most vocalese out of the three groups, but they also frequently perform pop, and doo-wop. The New York Voices repertoire spans jazz standards, arrangements of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, Paul Simon tunes, and original compositions. Though their

repertoire is varied, what all three groups have in common is an affinity for using the voice as an instrument.

As a music student at Ithaca College, tenor saxophonist and singer Darmon Meader decided to form the New York Voices in 1987 with classmates Kim Nazarian, Peter Eldridge, Caprice Fox, and Sarah Krieger. The *Los Angeles Times* described them as, “a little bit of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, a little bit of Jackie & Roy, some Double Six of Paris and more than a sprinkling of Manhattan Transfer.”⁴²⁶ Today the group is made up of Meader, Eldridge, Nazarian, and Lauren Kinhan and they are often described as part of the Lambert, Hendricks & Ross lineage in reviews.

Inspired by the Hi-Lo’s, The Four Freshman, and Singers Unlimited, the New York Voices heard Lambert, Hendricks & Ross as a more free wheeling point of influence to their work. Peter Eldridge describes the importance of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross’ energy.

The first thing about them that sort of rubbed off on us was they were very raw. It felt very in the moment, and just kind of throwing it out there. A lot of the groups, the more contemporary groups, had already started to make their recordings very polished and very studio. And they were just this like live—we are doing this one take and let’s see what happens— and some of it’s really loose and some of its wonderful. There was just such and energy about it, such a spontaneous feeling to the music.⁴²⁷

Eldridge went on to discuss how the aesthetics of the vocal jazz group has changed in favor of a more technically precise sound. He argues that what is lost with the advent of technology is what made the Lambert, Hendricks & Ross sound unique—that is, the imperfections of their voices as they attempted to imitate instruments. Since the voice in jazz is often perceived as technically inferior to the instrument, it is interesting to note that Eldridge designates an engineered, and in a sense more technically precise, sound as less desirable.

⁴²⁶ James Liska, “Exuberant New York Voices,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 16, 1989, 6.

⁴²⁷ Peter Eldridge, interview with Lee Martin, Adrienne Arsht Center, Miami, Florida, January 15, 2015.

Lauren Kinhan expands on Eldridge's comment by emphasizing the dramatic quality of the trio. She describes the strengths of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross' sound as more visceral.

I think those kinds of groups... are iconic moments in time... they really were extraordinary in defining a genre. I think what I have always really appreciated about them, is it had a raw energy to it. It wasn't perfect—to the extent that everything was absolutely right all the time—but there was grit, and guts, and passion, and angst, and all of that in it.⁴²⁸

According to the New York Voices, an overly polished and technical studio sound, sacrifices the emotion or the soul of the music. They appreciate the imperfection of the voice because of its production by the human body, which they contrast with technical fidelity. Even in recreating the sound of instruments in vocalese, for the New York Voices the technicality of a sound that is produced in the studio separates the voice too far from the body—and thus from what, in their definition, is an important quality of the vocal jazz group.

The free wheeling energy of the trio during improvisation was also a point of influence on the New York Voices, particularly for Darmon Meader.

This was the first time I heard a group where people were really doing full-blown choruses of improvisation. As a saxophonist and singer, that was something that came kind of naturally to me, but I never heard anybody doing it. I was like, "Ah there's some other people out there that dig this, cool." Dave Lambert was just as good as Jon too. I mean the stuff they laid down was slammin,' it was like, "Ah, alright this is fun." So that was the aspect that I just found really appealing, because that's such a small little niche—that vocal improvisation thing—in terms of people that really want to dig way into it. I loved that.⁴²⁹

Meader was drawn to the improvisations of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross because it resonated with his own skills as both an instrumentalist and vocalist. When asked about how he approaches scat singing, Meader replied, "my scat syllables reflect my saxophone playing primarily. Because I'm so used to playing phrases on the tenor sax, I naturally gravitate to syllables that

⁴²⁸ Lauren Kinhan, interview with Lee Martin, Adrienne Arsht Center, Miami, Florida, January 15, 2010.

⁴²⁹ Darmon Meader, interview with Lee Martin, Adrienne Arsht Center, Miami, Florida, January 15, 2010

have that similar articulation.”⁴³⁰ Not only does he choose syllables that mimic the sound of his tenor saxophone, but he also physicalizes saxophone fingerings on his microphone to help him articulate his scatting. When asked why he physicalizes an imaginary saxophone when scatting he replied,

Somehow it just sort of happens that the way my fingers sit on the microphone—it just works to kind of move them—and I think it helps me articulate a little bit subconsciously...I can match my scat line exactly to saxophone fingerings if I want to, but I don’t do that very often. I wish I could play saxophone and sing at the same time because it would be fun to synchronize the two...The only time I use my sax fingerings as an assist is if I’m working on a very challenging harmonic passage on a scat solo that I do not have completely in my body and ear. In those situations, I can start on a specific note in the chord—and I’ll know I’m starting on the seventh—and I can then follow my fingerings through the next few bars to get me through that particularly difficult passage.⁴³¹

While Hendricks often holds an imaginary tenor but has never actually played the instrument, Meader relies on his knowledge of playing saxophone in order to scat. His physical connections to the technical skills that he developed on the saxophone are what anchor him while improvising.

What is interesting in the above example is the point of intersection between body, voice, and instrument. Although the voice is perceived as connected to the body, and the instrument is understood as technical extension of that body, in Meader’s case the ultimate goal in improvising is getting the technicality of improvisation into his body—irrespective of whether he is improvising on saxophone or scat singing. While he relies on the technicality of his saxophone playing in order to use his voice to scat the chord changes accurately, he ultimately stresses the importance of technical studies as a means to internalize sound. Meader further explained what he meant by getting the sound into his body.

⁴³⁰ Darmon Meader, interview with Lee Martin, Skype, March 3, 2015.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

In my body, or in my ears, it's getting it to the point where I don't have to theoretically worry about whether I'm going to be on the right or wrong note. There is no doubt that I'm going to sing the right note. If you could stop me at any given point, I would instantly be able to tell you what note I'm on and what the chord is. However, I've gotten so comfortable with the chord progression that while I'm singing, I am not even worrying about that. I'm not going 7th, 5th, 3rd, 9th, or getting super anxious about getting the right note. "Oh no, here comes the flat five chord! Damn, I missed it!" I don't have to worry about that anymore when it's so in my body and ear...My goal is to get to the point where "All the Things you Are" is just as comfortable for me as the blues. It's in my body—harmonically I just know where I am. I've practiced the song a ton on both the sax and voice, to the point where I just sing. It's funny that I mentioned "All the Things You Are," because that is an example of a tune where I do rely on my sax fingerings, specifically at the end of the bridge. I don't have to think anything about the A sections and I can just ride into the beginning of the bridge. However, when I get to "the dearest things I know is what you are," I pay close attention to where I am harmonically, and I use sax fingerings and patterns to zoom right through the end of the bridge and land on the beginning of the last A section super smoothly.⁴³²

The overlap between the body and the technicality of harmony is configured within an ever-fluctuating instrumental and vocal framework. In order to sing comfortably without anxiety, he internalizes the chord progression in his body.⁴³³ Yet in order to get the chords into his body, Meader engages in extensive technical study of the mind, and relies on the physicality of his saxophone playing to remember patterns. What Meader learned from listening to Hendricks and Lambert, and his own musical study reveal is that in improvisation the stereotypes associated with the voice and instruments are over simplified perceptions of a much more complicated and interrelated process.

Meader is not alone in his instrumental approach to singing jazz; all four members of the New York Voices stressed the importance of using their voices as instruments in creating their group sound. Lauren Kinhan describes it as follows: "I was always interested in being a singer

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Interestingly in my own teaching experience, when watching instrumental student juries, I have often seen Professors sing the melody to their students if they get lost in the form of a song to help the instrumentalists find where they are.

that was required to do more than just hold a lyric. I wanted to be able to be an instrumental type singer. So that was always a leading voice in what I wanted to do as a musician.”⁴³⁴ Like Hendricks’ description of himself as horn player without a horn, and Lambert’s affinity for using the voice as an instrument, the New York Voices emphasize the instrumental approach to their singing.

Another group that emphasizes using their voices as instruments is gospel and vocal jazz group Take 6. Formed in 1980, at Oakwood College—a historically black university that is operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church— Take 6 began as a gospel quartet. The group now consists of arranger and tenor Mark Kibble, founder and first tenor Claude McKnight III, second tenor Joey Kibble, second tenor David Thomas, baritone Khristian Dentley, and bassist Alvin Chea. While they are known primarily for their work in gospel, they also record jazz and vocalese. Alvin Chea describes how the group fuses gospel and jazz in their work.

Well gospel is an American idiom, jazz is an American idiom, and we have kind of combined those two things. But it’s all stuff that speaks to our heart. You know when we were in college, I never said, “We are going to sing jazz.” It was just what was coming out. We were harmonizing, and you can only throw six guys into a chord, and its only going to come out a certain kind of ways, if you are not doubling.⁴³⁵

Because they have six singers, Take 6 often performs complex jazz harmonies. Not only do they sing technically demanding instrumental jazz, but they also mimic the sound of the rhythm section. Since the group is a cappella, Chea often sings walking bass lines or beat boxes, while the remaining five members cover the harmony and melody. They in effect take using the voice as an instrument a step further than Lambert, Hendricks & Ross by vocally reproducing the rhythm section as well as the melodic and harmonic parts of songs.

⁴³⁴ Lauren Kinhan, interview with Lee Martin, Adrienne Arsht Center, Miami, Florida, January 15, 2015.

⁴³⁵ Alvin Chea, interview by Brian Pace, “The Pace Report,” *YouTube* video, 33:38, January 29, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXb_ARiCRFw&ab_channel=BrianPace.

One of their most exemplary demonstrations of using the voice as an instrument is their scat rendition of Miles Davis' "All Blues," from their album *Take 6 Live*, recorded in 2000. Alvin Chea opens the piece singing a bass ostinato pattern originally performed by bassist Paul Chambers.

[Figure 7.1](#) Alvin Chea bass ostinato, "All Blues."



remarkable about this recording is how closely and successfully they imitate the sounds of different instruments. At times it seems virtually impossible to distinguish whether they are playing instruments or singing.

Besides scat singing, Take 6 also excels at vocalese. In 1995, they were hired by Quincy Jones to record the vocalese standard, “Moody’s Mood For Love,” along with Brian McKnight and Rachel Farrell. The piece was recorded as part of the album *Q’s Jook Joint*, which won a Grammy in 1997. Take 6 functioned as the harmonic support behind Brian McKnight’s performance of James Moody’s solo and Rachel Farrell’s recreation of Thore Swanerud’s piano solo. Throughout the piece Take 6 mixed scat syllables and fragments of the lyrics in a call and response pattern behind the soloists, functioning like a saxophone section playing backgrounds. The electric bass, synthesized strings, and electric keyboard clearly recontextualized the piece with a 90s pop sound, but the solos and lyrics remained the same. What is interesting in this example is that Take 6 uses the voice not as the melody instrument, but as part of the rhythm section. They serve primarily as accompaniment.⁴³⁶

Another group that emphasizes an instrumental approach to singing and is most well known for their vocalese is the Manhattan Transfer. Performing for over forty years, the quartet has won numerous Grammys, and includes the most vocalese out of the three groups in their repertoire. Consisting of soprano Janis Seigel, alto Cheryl Bentley, tenor Alan Paul, and now Trist Curless on bass who replaced Tim Hauser after his death in 2014. Four years before his death, I had the privilege of interviewing Tim Hauser (1941-2014), the founder and bassist of the group. He recounted the significance of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross as an influence on his own concept of the vocal jazz group.

⁴³⁶ In 2008 they recorded an exclusively jazz album called *The Standard*. They also hired Jon Hendricks to sing the introduction of the piece and scat on their rendition of Miles Davis’ “Seven Steps to Heaven.”

When I heard “Moanin” and “Cloudburst,” I was done! I had been so into vocal groups in high school, listening to rhythm and blues and even before that with the Four Freshman and a lot of the big band groups like the Modernaires, the Pied Pipers, and all the New York street groups that I was listening to...but Jon Hendricks and Dave Lambert and Annie, they took it into a whole other direction by doing vocalese. I didn’t know that’s what it was at the time, but they were putting lyrics to jazz instrumentals and singing them. In doing that, it really made the song very abstract. It wasn’t the standard AABA structure of a song because they’re singing the solos. So it’s really like this abstract painting and that really fascinated me, because it was so musically rich. I was sold on that, and that’s what I wanted to sing. When I put the Manhattan Transfer together, doing vocalese was something I wanted to do.⁴³⁷

Lambert, Hendricks & Ross changed the way that Hauser thought about the voice. The trio’s vocalese provided Hauser with a method that permitted the voice to delve into the harmonically rich language of jazz instrumentalists that he grew up listening to, while still maintaining the uniqueness of the voice through lyrics.

While Hauser emphasized the influence of the trio, Janis Siegel mentioned the importance of Dave Lambert on her own development as a vocal arranger. Siegel remarked, “I studied the way Dave Lambert could imply the sound of a whole orchestra with just three parts. That’s minimalism at its finest. I learned to adapt these instrumental arrangements for the Manhattan Transfers’ four voices, which is probably one of my favorite things to do.”⁴³⁸ Drawing on the dialectic of voice and instrument in jazz, Siegel like Lambert writes instrumental music for the voice that implies an entire instrumental ensemble. Though she only has four voices to work with, she realized through the work of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross that she could imply the sound of the big band through arranging. Siegel described this process as the ear filling in the musical blanks.

Not only was Lambert, Hendricks & Ross’ music a direct influence on the Manhattan Transfer, but also Hendricks later became a mentor and a lyricist for the group. In 1985

⁴³⁷ Tim Hauser, interview with Lee Martin, Adrienne Arsht Center, January 15, 2010.

⁴³⁸ Janis Siegel, interview with Lee Martin, Skype, New York, June 16, 2014.

Hendricks was hired as the primary lyricist for their album *Vocalese*, which features 12 vocalese pieces that span the jazz repertoire of Benny Golson, Sonny Rollins, Count Basie, to Clifford Brown. Atlantic records were initially weary of funding the project, however Hauser recalled the moment when they decided to pursue the vocalese concept album.

I said to my partners, “Why don’t we think about representing the best of what we do, and the best of what we do is vocalese...Nobody—today— does vocalese better than us.” It took a lot of convincing; the record guys were saying, “No, it’s not a good idea. It’s going to cost a lot of money and dah da, da, da, da.” I said, “It’s going to work!” I held my ground with him and after about two hours of just screaming and yelling he let us do it. So we called up Jon [Hendricks] and I said, “We want you to write all the lyrics.” He said, “Great!” When we got all done learning the tunes before we recorded the vocals we did a tour to woodshed the songs. We did a tour of bars and houses around Los Angeles and Jon came with us, and every night he sat in the audience and he critiqued our performance. So that way he got us ready for the studio. Then we went in and we did it, we recorded the lyrics. And the album is the third-highest Grammy nominated album of all time.⁴³⁹

The collaboration led to a multi-Grammy nominated album three decades later. The Manhattan Transfer became a household name in the United States, revealing that vocalese was for a time popular among mainstream audiences. Hendricks describes the Manhattan Transfer as part of the vocalese, “Family tree. The Transfer is one of the branches...I love those people. They are like our kids you know.”⁴⁴⁰ Hauser argues that the success of their album was due to the tremendous effect that vocalese has on people. Particularly with Hendricks’ lyric, Hauser remarked, “After you start singing them it seems like they were written originally for the song.”⁴⁴¹ With the help of Hendricks, the Manhattan Transfer carved out a niche position in the music industry by singing vocalese.

⁴⁴⁰ Jon Hendricks, interview with Lee Martin, March 20, 2009.

⁴⁴¹ Tim Hauser, interview with Lee Martin, January 15, 2010.

7.1 THE IMPACT OF AN INTEGRATED TRIO

As can be seen from the next generations of vocalese groups, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross have made a lasting impact on the way that musicians think about the voice in jazz. In addition to questions of what the voice was capable of singing, the trio also challenged the question of who was allowed to sing together. When they started out Lambert, Hendricks & Ross broke the rules with their voices. At a time when jazz vocalists were expected to sing the melody alone, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross employed vocalese to break free of the confinement of normative vocal roles. Vocalese revealed that the voice was capable of recreating instrumental solos and that lyrics had a special capability to connect to audiences. But how did the demographics of the group influence the reception of race and gender in jazz?

While other integrated doo-wop vocal groups existed in the 1950s, such as The Crests, and the Jaguars, they were not singing the music of soloists such as Charlie Parker, or the big band repertoire of Count Basie and Duke Ellington.⁴⁴² Today, the stakes of the voices and the intersections of race and gender have changed. While it is considered socially acceptable nowadays to see an integrated group perform together onstage, Take 6, the Manhattan Transfer as well as the New York Voices are not integrated. While all three groups often perform together, why is it that as individual groups they are either all black or all white? One possible reason for this segregation has to do with where the groups were formed.

⁴⁴² For a discussion of integrated vocal groups of the 1950s see Warner, *American Singing Groups*, and Mitch Rosalsky, *Encyclopedia of Rhythm & Blues and Doo-Wop Vocal Groups* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002).

Both Take 6 and The New York Voices were formed in Universities. Formed at Oakwood College in 1980, Take 6 was formed entirely of black singers because of the fact that eighty percent of the student body was black.⁴⁴³ Similarly, The New York Voices are an all white group in part because they were formed at Ithaca College. According to Ellen Potter, Ithaca College's black student population represented only 3.6 percent of the student body in the mid 1980s.⁴⁴⁴ Both Take 6 and the New York Voices formed in Universities and complicate the current discussion of jazz in academia. It seems that since vocal jazz groups are often formed today at Universities, academia has provided a more segregated environment than previous places where groups formed such as the jazz club or for a recording date.

One of the primary criticisms of the institutionalization of jazz in universities, according to Ken Prouty, is that it moves the music "too far beyond the non-academic jazz community." He reveals that some scholars contend that jazz in academia "is overwhelmingly white, especially when measured against the predominance of African American jazz artists."⁴⁴⁵ Prouty goes on to provide an example from a *JazzTimes* panel discussion on jazz in academia in which participants pointed to issues of access to higher education based on race. He describes the argument that black students often have less access to education due to greater economic difficulties.⁴⁴⁶ Both Take 6 and the New York Voices were formed in university settings where the music program student bodies were of opposite demographic ratios, which reveal one aspect of the complexities of race within the context of current vocal jazz groups and their formation at universities.

⁴⁴³ For more information on the demographics of HBCU's see Marybeth Gasman, *The Changing Face of Historically Black Colleges and Universities* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012)

⁴⁴⁴ Ellen Potter, "Race on Campus," *Ithaca College Quarterly* 1 (2002) accessed December 12, 2015, <https://www.ithaca.edu/icq/2002v2/race/race2.htm>.

⁴⁴⁵ Ken Prouty, *Knowing Jazz: Community, Pedagogy, and Canon in the Information Age* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013). 58

⁴⁴⁶ See Lee Mergner, "Current Trends in Jazz Education," *JazzTimes*, September 27, 2010, <http://jazztimes.com/articles/26564-current-trends-in-jazz-education>.

Another added layer of complexity is that while the groups are not integrated in the same way as Lambert, Hendricks & Ross the musicians that they perform with often are. The New York Voices as well as the Manhattan Transfer for example often tour with the Count Basie Orchestra, which is now an integrated ensemble. Similarly Take 6 has done several concerts with the WDR big band, a German jazz orchestra. At times the groups even perform together. Recently the Manhattan Transfer and Take 6 have done several performances together as part of “The Summit” concert series. What these examples reveal is that issues of race have not disappeared but they have changed. Lambert, Hendricks & Ross helped to change attitudes towards race and gender by performing together, and in doing so groups such as Take 6, The Manhattan Transfer, and The New York Voices can now perform together throughout the entire United States, and not fear for their safety or be denied at a room at hotel because of the color of their skin.

Lambert, Hendricks & Ross represented an ideal of integration that in reality was not without its consequences. Though they were able to transcend the constrictiveness of segregation on stage, their music alone was not powerful enough to change the underlying American social hierarchy. The United States is now legally integrated, however violent manifestations of racism and sexism continue to inundate our society. Despite their restrictions, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross redefined not only what a vocal jazz group sounded like but also and what they looked like. Farah Griffin observes that the African American female voice has served as a representation of “national unity at times of crisis and yet is also capable of invoking a crisis in a tenuous national unity as well.”⁴⁴⁷ I argue that while the missing voice of the trio was always the African American female voice, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross’ integrated nature reflected this duality of

⁴⁴⁷ Farah Griffin, “When Malindy Sings,” 104.

unity and crisis in a similar way. The trio represented the possibility of an integrated and united society, while also pointing to the continued issues of racial discrimination and violence through their dedication to civil rights fundraising events. Lambert, Hendricks & Ross sang it best on their 1961 recording of “The Real Ambassadors” with Louis Armstrong.

Oh, we learned to be concerned about the constitutionality
In our nation, segregation isn't a legality
Soon our only differences will be in personality...⁴⁴⁸

Using the voice as a political tool, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross sang what they hoped the United States would become.

At the center of their struggle was the voice, an instrument often regarded as ephemeral, and transcendent. The voice's fluidity allowed them to intersect vocal and instrumental roles, while scrambling expectations of what a woman was assumed to sing, a black man could write, and what a white man ought to arrange. By scrambling the role of the voice in jazz, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross played all over the field of the American social structure. Through the voice they enacted and embodied the composite nature of American jazz that parallels Albert Murray's discussion of American culture. Murray argues,

American culture, even in its most rigidly segregated precincts, is patently and irrevocably composite. It is, regardless of all the hysterical protestations of those who would have it otherwise incontestably mulatto. Indeed, for all their traditional antagonisms and obvious differences, the so-called black and so-called white people of the United States resemble nobody else in the world so much as they resemble each other.⁴⁴⁹

Lambert, Hendricks & Ross exemplified the amalgamate nature of American culture in their intersections of race gender, and of voice and instrument. Vocalese was the idiom through which they validated the plurality of the American voice that temporarily broke free of the sociological

⁴⁴⁸ Lyrics transcribed from Dave and Iola Brubeck, *The Real Ambassadors*, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, Louis Armstrong, with Dave Brubeck, Eugene Wright, and Joe Morello, Columbia, OS2250, 1961, LP.

⁴⁴⁹ Albert Murray, *The Omni-Americans; Black Experience and American Culture* (New York: Da Capo, 1990), 22.

categories of race, and gender, in the United States, as well as instrument, and voice in jazz.

Lambert, Hendricks & Ross' music continues to live on in the music of the Manhattan Transfer, the New York Voices, and Take 6, as well as in University vocal jazz choirs. Kim Nazarian of the New York Voices, stresses the significance of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross' music as a great learning tool for younger generations of jazz singers.

To teach this stuff to kids, it's an exciting thing because it's a different language. If you aren't ready for it, than you really need to break it down so that it is digestible for people and that they do see the light at the end of the tunnel and yes you can sing that double time lick and you can add the lyric and it will swing and then you will go into this other section. So for me it's been a great learning tool and something that I enjoy passing on too, and turning people on because a lot of people don't know, they still don't know who Lambert, Hendricks & Ross is. In working on their music you have to go back in history and you have to go back and listen to the instrumental solo and I think it forces the vocalist to really dive into material that they wouldn't necessarily dive into if they really want to capture the wholeness of what this music is. So for me, I also appreciate the fact that they made me do some homework and go back and listen, you know to the original stuff that inspired them. So it's invaluable education.⁴⁵⁰

The New York Voices are not alone in this endeavor of using the repertoire of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross as well as vocalese as an important teaching tool in the current development of vocal jazz. However, due to the limitations of this dissertation, I will not expand the discussion to include a history of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross' influence on vocal jazz ensembles in academia, though this is a fascinating and important direction for further research.

Lauren Kinhan astutely summarizes the current position of vocalese as a performance genre most often found in high schools and colleges. She argues that vocalese fits well into academia because of its collective nature.

The genre does live on and it lives in academia very well. It's light and it's what you can do as a collective and it's a language, and it's learning. And its living in a cooperative, just like being in a big band, or the combo band in high school and college, it's just that you are in the vocal jazz choir or combo, so it lives in academia very well. I think where

⁴⁵⁰ Kim Nazarian, interview with Lee Martin, January 15, 2015.

the rub is, is getting it to be an art form that is interesting and intriguing beyond the walls of universities. So then you have to put the show aspect to it, you have to say, “Okay what are we going to do that moves it beyond learning?” You have to make it a passionate art form, that you see artists really living and breathing in that art form.⁴⁵¹

While vocalese is a niche form of vocal jazz, it continues to live on in both professional and academic settings. Not only is Lambert, Hendricks & Ross a continued influence in the professional arena of vocal jazz, but also their repertoire is also immensely popular in universities across the country. Most vocal jazz ensembles will at some point include Lambert, Hendricks & Ross repertoire in their performances. Having attended the New York Voices vocal jazz camp at Bowling Green State University for the past seven years I can personally attest to the prevalence of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross not only among young jazz singers, but also the continued performance of their repertoire by professional and non-professional groups.

Lambert, Hendricks & Ross’ recordings are now considered the standard in vocalese repertoire for vocal jazz groups. In closing, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross created a community for the voice within the instrumental idiom of jazz. Furthermore, they brought together a community of Americans looking to the group as one possibility of a new and more integrated society. Their legacy revealed that the voice was capable—at least temporarily—of freedom, which is the ethos of jazz, and is the reason why their music continues to be performed today.

⁴⁵¹ Lauren Kinhan, interview with Lee Martin, January 15, 2015.

APPENDIX A

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

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