Introduction – French music and jazz: cultural exchange

Orléans to New Orleans and back again . . . The lure and influence of jazz upon composers of French modernist music was acknowledged by an article in *The Musical Quarterly*, published as early as 1935.[1] Conversely, as Mervyn Cooke points out, the practice of jazz improvisers 'Jazzing-up classical music is as old as jazz itself,'[2] while for musicians like Dave Brubeck, 'Jazz has always been a hybrid music.'[3] Despite this longstanding double trajectory, there has to date been no dedicated book to test out detailed *musical* interactions in respect of the seeming special affinity between French 'classical' music – predominantly of the early twentieth century – and jazz.

In part, this situation arises as a consequence of certain trends in more recent scholarship, especially, though by no means exclusively, on jazz. It has been crucial to expand the interdisciplinary basis of jazz studies beyond anecdotal biographies, embracing fundamental sociopolitical questions and establishing jazz as an autonomous art.[4] A pertinent summary of this historiographic discourse and its own problematics is offered by Jeremy Barham.[5] In fact, the sheer plurality of disciplines involved and approaches adopted has 'engendered increasingly contentious scholarly traditions'[6] and, among other outcomes, there is a risk that 'jazz as a *musical* phenomenon becomes submerged, concealed or lost'.[7] Thus Barham furthers concerns raised in the 1990s by Gary Tomlinson and Mark Tucker. Furthering Barham, I argue that, while it would rightly be deemed essentialist to

[1] M. Robert Rogers, 'Jazz Influence on French Music', *The Musical Quarterly*, 21/1 (January 1935), 53–68. This is by no means the first critique; see Chapter 2. On the complex status of New Orleans, see Chapter 1, n. 38.

[2] Mervyn Cooke, *Jazz* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 112.

[3] Dave Brubeck, 'Jazz Perspective [1951]', *Perspectives U.S.A.*, 15 (Spring 1956), 22–8; reprinted in David Meltzer (ed.), *Reading Jazz* (San Francisco, CA: Mercury House, 1993), 202–7: 203.

[4] For an accessible introduction for non-jazz specialists, including to 'Jazz as "Critical Music"' and 'Jazz and the Academy', see Andrew Bowie, 'Jazz', in J. P. E. Harper-Scott and Jim Samson (eds.), *An Introduction to Music Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 176–85.

[5] Jeremy Barham, 'Rhizomes and Plateaus: Rethinking Jazz Historiography and the Jazz-"Classical" Relationship', *Jazz Research Journal*, 3/2 (2009), 171–202: 171–4.

[6] *Ibid.*, 172. [7] *Ibid.*, 173.

offer musical interpretation of jazz without appropriate and sensitive socio-cultural understanding, the opposite is also the case: to ignore the actual musics created would be to grossly undervalue the musicians concerned, performers and composers alike, and simply to lose out. This need to study and celebrate the music (just as true for French music) constitutes an important priority, as does viewing jazz positively rather than defensively across relevant wider arenas, including those of tonality and so-called classical music. Cooke's declaration that 'Currently one of the least fashionable ways of looking at jazz is from the perspective of "classical" music' may be read as a cue for serious reinvestigation since, as he also suggests, 'those who insist on [. . .] incompatibility [. . .] cut themselves off from the richness of allusion and crossover'.[8]

This book thus aims to offer a distinctive, in-depth study of this intertextual phenomenon, situated within and being very much of its historical-cultural and critical-analytical contexts. The account is presented from two differentiated perspectives, geographical locations and time frames: 1900–35 and 1925–65.[9] Firstly, it charts the 'conversations' of the title that were initiated by French modernist composers, primarily of the interwar years, with early jazz and its predecessor forms such as ragtime; secondly, it focuses upon those conversations initiated especially by 'modal jazz' musicians of the 1950s and early 1960s with French musical impressionism and trends such as neoclassicism. At one level, there is the sense of a selective French musical reading of early jazz balanced by a jazz history of early twentieth-century French music. Beyond this overview, the book presents a series of case studies, ranging from Debussy to Brubeck.

Immediately, complexities and questions emerge. The first complexity involves matters of definition. As noted perceptively almost eighty years ago: 'Many have attempted to define rag-time, blues and jazz, but most have

[8] Mervyn Cooke, 'Jazz among the Classics, and the Case of Duke Ellington', in Mervyn Cooke and David Horn (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 153–73: 153.

[9] Jeffrey H. Jackson's *Making Jazz French: Music and Modern Life in Interwar Paris* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003) offers a valuable cultural history of the phenomenon, which may be seen as complementary to my more musically grounded, interwar enquiries. A more recent sequel, Matthew F. Jordan, *Le Jazz: Jazz and French Cultural Identity* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010), develops Jackson's cultural territory, adopting a broadly similar structure. Equally, mention should be made of Vincent Cotro, Laurent Cugny and Philippe Gumplowicz (eds.), *La Catastrophe apprivoisée: Regards sur le jazz en France*, Jazz en France (Paris: Outre Mesure, 2013) and, published during the production process for the current book, of Andy Fry, *Paris Blues: African American Music and French Popular Culture 1920–1960* (University of Chicago Press, 2014).

fallen into the error of trying to make too definite distinctions among them.'[10] And, despite all the advances in jazz historiography, there remains much truth in this assertion. Other complexities pertain to the following: theories of relationship; issues of metaphor; the contingency of cultural themes such as national identity, modernism, eclecticism, ethnicity, gender; issues of gaps and overlaps; the establishing of extents and boundaries. Although the French music–jazz theme is interpreted here in a generous fashion, some topics inevitably lie outside its scope: these include interplay between French cinema and jazz, which could be a fascinating separate book,[11] or that between French music and popular culture, more broadly interpreted. While a starting date around 1900 is fairly self-evident though still far from straightforward,[12] a finishing date around 1965 is partly pragmatic, but also a matter of recognition that beyond this time the picture becomes increasingly complex. Peter Dickinson talks similarly of wanting to trace a strand of 'jazz influence' from ragtime through 'to about 1960, after which everything became too confused'.[13] For Darius Brubeck (son of Dave Brubeck) too: 'The evolutionary hypothesis [. . .] works deceptively well up to this point [1959], but for the longer future and beyond, the organic analogy with its corollary of artistic progress breaks down.'[14] The reader will already have become aware of some 'scare quotes' in the opening paragraphs highlighting terms that are problematic and/or remain to be properly explored beyond the initial statement: clarifications are given at the earliest opportunity in the ensuing chapters.

As for the many questions, those of a detailed nature tend to be contextually derived and are tackled on a case-by-case basis. However, the fundamental large-scale questions that have catalysed and driven this study are along these lines: why is there a particular affinity between the two musics? What does jazz offer to (interwar) French music and its composers; reciprocally, what does French music offer to (modal) jazz and its practitioners? How varied are these musical-cultural relationships between French music

[10] Rogers, 'Jazz Influence on French Music', 53.

[11] Excellent sources are found in the writing of Gilles Mouëllic: *Jazz et cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2000) and *La Musique de film* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma/SCEREN-CNDP, 2003).

[12] Chapter 1 begins cultural scene-setting at 1889 and Chapter 6 references much nineteenth-century repertory. Equally, Roy Howat has identified cakewalk-like pieces of Debussy from the 1880s: Roy Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music: Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, Chabrier* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 256; see too Chapter 3 of this current book.

[13] Personal correspondence with the author (31 October 2013).

[14] Darius Brubeck, '1959: The Beginning of Beyond', in Cooke and Horn (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, 177–201: 200.

and jazz? How might music materials (for example, chordal constructs, genres, forms, timbre) be transformed from one setting to another; conversely, what important constant elements (such as motive, melody, chord, rhythm, or modality) may emerge? How might new musical and cultural meanings be generated through these interactions? Are there potential downsides to cultural exchanges of this kind? Since each case study generates its own discrete conclusion, embracing answers to parts of these questions, there is no separate, overall conclusion, which would give a falsely end-stopped impression. Preliminary responses to these questions are, however, offered at the close of this introduction.

Given the size of the fields involved, a project on French music and jazz could never be comprehensive. Instead, to do justice to the topic, I have sought to balance breadth and depth by adopting a part structure. Part I (chapters 1 and 2) offers extensive coverage of contexts, both historical-cultural and critical-analytical, which are intended to support the composer/topic-based studies that follow, while also being of intrinsic interest. Parts II and III (chapters 3–9) reflect my longstanding curiosity about crossovers between French music and jazz, and aim to provide accessible, further contextualized, music analyses. These essays are broad in scope, but allow for thorough musical treatment of particular 'locations' and their connecting 'relations'. On the one hand, the choice of topics is a personal one, so that another book might offer entirely different, equally valid, subjects. On the other hand, I have included some of the most representative exponents of French music–jazz interplay (Debussy, Milhaud and Brubeck), while not ignoring some who have typically been excluded from the canon (George Russell and Jack Hylton). Although it would have been perfectly justifiable to present case studies on Bix Beiderbecke or Duke Ellington, I have chosen to focus on French and jazz repertories from balancing pre- and post-World War II time frames that share a special interest in modality. The chapters mix predominantly new contributions with two revised republished essays, one of which had become out of print. In particular, 'Crossing Borders II: Ravel's Theory and Practice of Jazz' (*Ravel Studies*, 2010) has acted as a blueprint for this current project.

Chapter 1 presents a wide-ranging historical-cultural survey, charting the main developments chronologically from French and jazz perspectives, as well as across the two domains, with attention paid to gaps: areas that do not receive dedicated treatment in Parts II and III. Implicit are interrelations of historical period and geographical location, plus those that link the French music–jazz dialogue with a range of attendant cultural themes or interwoven 'voices'. Very loosely *poietic* in its emphasis upon creative acts and compositional voices, this chapter complements the second one, which

is more *esthesic* – critical, interpretative and analytical – in character.[15] Needless to say, the two are far from mutually exclusive but, in practice, the first concentrates more on 'what?' and the second more on 'how?'

Chapter 2 likewise demonstrates the scope of the topic, this time via critical discourse about relations between matters French and matters jazz-based. It outlines issues in the writings of some French critics and theorists: for instance, Hugues Panassié, who raised the status of 1930s African-American jazz, through to Jacques Derrida's much more recent interview with Ornette Coleman. These critical explorations develop cultural themes from Chapter 1, which are picked up again in individual case studies. Cultural exchange between French music and jazz is viewed in the main as productive and positive, but its contradictory facets and potential negatives are also identified. While no single methodology is advocated, in preparation for Parts II and III the second half of the chapter theorizes 'cultural flow' as an inclusive 'intertextuality' (after Lawrence Kramer, Carolyn Abbate and Michael Klein),[16] which may more occasionally constitute a more precise, historically grounded influence, or individual 'borrowing' (along well-tested lines of T. S. Eliot versus Harold Bloom and, more recently, David Metzer).[17] From an analytical yet hermeneutic stance, Dmitri Tymoczko especially demonstrates fascinating harmonic comparisons across differentiated musical settings;[18] issues of transcription and aural approaches to jazz analysis are also noted. Consideration of the potential effects and meanings created by the interactions raises the crucial matter of extraneous variables; equally, the need for flexibility and an appreciation of plurality is acknowledged.

Part II explores, in a loosely chronological sequence, the impact of early jazz upon French music across 1900–35. Chapter 3 examines the influence

[15] This terminology is discussed in Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, Eng. trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton University Press, 1990).

[16] Lawrence Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1995); Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton University Press, 1988); and Michael L. Klein, *Intertextuality in Western Art Music* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

[17] T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent [1919]', in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber, 1951), 13–22; reprinted in *Perspecta*, 19 (1982), 36–42; Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) and *A Map of Misreading*, revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003; orig. publ. 1975); David Metzer, *Quotation and Cultural Meaning in Twentieth-Century Music* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[18] Dmitri Tymoczko, *A Geometry of Music: Harmony and Counterpoint in the Extended Common Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

of predecessor cakewalks, minstrelsy and ragtime on two crucial pioneers, Claude Debussy and his contemporary Erik Satie, during the late years of the Belle Époque (c. 1900–14) and World War I. Contextual coverage of the French and American backgrounds, the composers' experiences of new musics, their related critical writings and our plausible music-interpretative approaches leads to close readings of Debussy's 'Golliwogg's [*sic*] Cake-Walk' and Satie's 'Rag-time du paquebot' from *Parade*, with Stravinsky's music brought in for initial comparison. In addition to first probing the relationship between French music and its cultural other, this case study addresses issues of quotation, paraphrasing and signification, with special reference to Kramer and Metzer. Attention paid to Debussy here balances discussion, in Chapter 7, of Russell's modal jazz rethinking of one of the preludes.

Chapter 4 foregrounds the unique position of Darius Milhaud. A historical introduction to the composer's first-hand experiences in New York (Harlem), via Rio de Janeiro, is followed by a critique of his associated writings and an overview of his jazz-influenced repertory. It is substantiated by a study of the primitivist, balletic *tour de force* of *La Création du monde*, including comparison with popular music and jazz loci. Milhaud's interwar jazzed music is distinguished by its detailed engagement with, and real understanding of, blues scale and timbral issues. This enquiry also supports a later charting, in Chapter 9, of the rapport between Milhaud and one of his most eminent students, Brubeck, and the consequent idea of circularity in classical–jazz relations.

In Chapter 5, Maurice Ravel's engagement, in the later 1920s and early 1930s, with early jazz – especially its precursor-cum-parallel form, the blues – creates a historical successor to Debussy's prewar interest. It offers opportunity to relate the composer's writings on jazz and popular music, as theory, to his compositional practice. Interestingly, Ravel's eclectic theory also holds application beyond his own music (see Chapter 8). His practice generally comprises a mixture of close jazz allusion and some distinct transformation, as jazz both Gallicized and personalized, directed as much by 'unwitting unfaithfulness' to models as by wilful Bloomian 'misreading'. Notably, he is as influenced by other European and American composers, particularly George Gershwin, as by jazz per se. Structurally, this contribution balances a later exploration of Ravel's musical impact upon leading exponents of modal jazz, especially Russell and Bill Evans (chapters 7 and 8). Ravel also provides material, in the shape of *Boléro*, for Jack Hylton's 'jazzing' of French classics.

Part III reverses the formula to investigate, again roughly chronologically, the impact of French music upon jazz across 1925–65. In its concern with

interwar 'jazzed' arrangements of light French classics by the popular but under-researched British bandleader Hylton, Chapter 6 mediates Parts II and III. Its inclusion depends on a broad definition of jazz, but also demonstrates that, while Hylton's role was similar to that of Paul Whiteman in the United States, we are not dealing simply with an American–French exchange. Across many French tours, Hylton cautiously endorsed 'hot' jazz and so partially acclimatized a French public to the art of Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington. This essay presents a jazz history of well-known French pieces recreated across 1925–39 that includes Cécile Chaminade's 'Pas des écharpes', Jules Massenet's 'Méditation' from *Thaïs* and Ravel's *Boléro*. The resultant meanings and relative successes of these arrangements are considered.

Chapter 7 is the first of three to concentrate upon aspects of modal jazz in communication with French music. This most overtly theoretical case study concerns the intriguing Lydian jazz theory of George Russell, a pioneering theorist-composer associated with Gunther Schuller and the Third Stream movement, but generally little-known outside jazz circles. It is Russell's own musical analyses of specific French pieces in his jazz treatise, the *Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization* of 1953, which form the focus of enquiry. With reference to Bloomian critical theory, I argue that Russell provides strong (mis)readings of Debussy's 'Ondine' from the second book of *Préludes* and Ravel's 'Forlane' from *Le Tombeau de Couperin* which effectively reverse any acknowledged influence by reframing these pieces within his theory. Despite its provocation and certain technical issues, Russell's example shows the potential for rethinking binaries in terms of a common prominent attribute, such as Lydian modality.

The penultimate Chapter 8 centres on the exquisite creative output of the modal jazz pianist Bill Evans and a range of French music. A valuable opportunity arises to gauge a spectrum of relationships, which extend from neutral intertextual parallels, hermeneutically perceived, through to specific cultural borrowings – some of which then undergo further transformation. Close musical interactions with Ravel (Chopin), Debussy and Messiaen are charted in parts of Miles Davis's album *Kind of Blue*, in which Evans played a crucial role, and in 'Peace Piece' from *Everybody Digs Bill Evans*, both from the late 1950s. Evans's and Davis's affinity with Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand creates a double relationship since the latter work was likely inflected by the jazz Ravel heard on his 1928 American tour. From a critical stance, Evans's approach reveals congruency with Ravel's flexible eclectic theory and, overall, with Eliot's holistic embrace of cultural heritage.

Finally, the focus shifts for Chapter 9 from the East to the West Coast of America and to a one-on-one teacher–student relationship between

Milhaud and Brubeck, at Mills College in California, that offers an attractive microcosm of the whole French music–jazz debate. Whereas, initially, jazz came to Paris as troop entertainment during the later stages of World War I, Milhaud moved to the United States to escape the Nazism of World War II. This locus points up the circularity and fluidity of French music–jazz interactions since Milhaud, as a classical composer whose own catalyst was early American jazz, inspires and expands the compositional ambitions of Brubeck as jazz pianist. The core matters of polytonality, polyrhythm-cum-metre and complex associated questions of influence are carefully examined. Specific comparison is pursued between Brubeck's 'The Duke' and an early theoretical article on polytonality by Milhaud. More interpretatively, further comparison emerges via Brubeck's albums *Time Out* and *Time Further Out* created either side of 1960, and through later choral settings and ballet writing. This is a close, warm relationship, with the resultant musics too showing a distinct affinity but, while Milhaud undoubtedly helped to develop Brubeck's polytonality, it was predominantly Brubeck's own take on polyrhythm that established him as a mature jazz artist.

As demonstrated across this collection of case studies, and by way of an initial summative response to the questions raised above, the following assertions are offered, which may be borne in mind through the book. As for the reasons that underpin a special affinity between the two musics, I suggest several possibilities: the first, which sounds rather glib, is that of historical circumstance from both perspectives. French interest in jazz does emerge from a *fin-de-siècle* fascination with a much wider exoticism, primitivism and kinds of otherness whose colonial roots cannot be denied. Moving beyond vernacular popular music, such interest is generated by the need for American troops newly arrived in France during World War I to be entertained; early jazz suits the immediate postwar Parisian mood so well in its anti-establishment, rebellious qualities and sheer physical release. Meanwhile, African-American jazz linkage with the classics goes back to the training of stride pianists and to a much more equivocal relationship with European cultural hegemony. There is, however, also a sense that both musics share a minority status: French music in struggling to overthrow German symphonic hegemony and claim its identity; jazz and blues as musics of protest against a far deeper sociopolitical oppression. In terms of interwar French music and modal jazz, I propose that there is, generally, a mutual upholding of the worth of the other's music, and of its potential usefulness as a catalyst for change in the face of respective problems of musical stagnation.

Where the cross-fertilization is concerned, both domains share fundamental concerns with modality, timbre and expressivity, yet each offers the other

something slightly different. Positively speaking, this involves new blood to enrich and develop further an established tradition; negatively, one might perceive a threat of dilution or contamination. From both directions, I assert that the resulting musical-cultural interactions are diverse: each spans a spectrum from intertextual parallels through to precise, historically evidenced, eclectic notions of 'source–product' (a transformational process whereby a new product may be created from a given source; specific 'influence'). Within this latter category are several subdomains, including generic allusion, modelling, paraphrase and quotation, with potential emergent meanings ranging, at least theoretically, from homage to mimicry, even theft (see Chapter 2).

From a French interwar perspective, I argue that jazz, at one end of a popular music spectrum, plays a crucial role in catalysing a French-inflected neoclassicism that thrives on a witty lightness of touch, as well as on rethinking an eighteenth-century past. Jeffrey Jackson too refers to the apparent contradiction by which 'American jazz [. . .] became a way of articulating a seemingly lost vitality within the French musical tradition'.[19] Engagement with jazz facilitates an extension of scalic reference, especially the notion of flexible melodic blues collections, and access to closed forms beyond those of the dance suite (twelve-bar blues, thirty-two-bar song form); in the process, blues form and classical sonata may each undergo a measure of transformation. Exchange raises the status of rhythm and timbre, promoting new textural possibilities such as discrete melody and rhythm sections, in an ongoing quest for artistic expressivity. Moreover, I propose that, in turn, this French-inflected dissolution of the old binaries of 'high/low' art plays a significant role in the development of cultural modernism.[20] The potential meanings of such exchange range from positive perceptions of a progressive, adventurous and innovative French music, through to a counterposition where jazz is seen to exacerbate French frivolity, even to fuel cultural degeneration.

From a mid 1950s jazz perspective, I argue that French music, especially of the so-called impressionist school which was successful in its reworking of melodic modes, acts in part as an inspirational catalyst for modal jazz, where improvisation is freed from the constraining formulae of the 'changes'. Dorian and Lydian modes present as notable constants. Together with the possibility of more extended, varied forms for jazz, such French music offers an expressive *sensibilité* founded on a rich textural and harmonic palette. A

[19] Jackson, *Making Jazz French*, 118.

[20] For pertinent discussion of this concept of 'high/low' art in an American context, see Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

special musical meeting-place may be identified in seventh and (dominant) minor ninth chords. Culturally, in this postwar period with America having supported the Anglo-French alliance against Hitler's Nazism, French association arguably conveys a certain cachet, subtlety and sophistication. Conversely, these same qualities (combined with a French negrophilia), viewed stereotypically as rather feminine in contrast to a Germanic or jazz masculinity, may figure in perceptions of some white-American jazz as effeminate, or inauthentic. While modal jazz prepares the way for and works alongside an inclusive jazz–classical Third Stream, some accusations of a continuing 'Eurocentricity', with its associated racist history, linger.

In short, I posit that the relationships revealed between French music and jazz are deeper, more varied and more extensive than has hitherto been realized, and that this special cross-cultural kinship has in the main promoted a mutual artistic enrichment. More widely, it is hoped that the study may act as an exemplar for other cross-cultural explorations.

This book may be read variously: from a full through-reading to a more likely scenario of selecting any one part, or chapter therein. For this reason, each chapter is presented as far as is feasible as a self-standing entity: this sometimes involves an intentional, judicious quantity of overlap and cross-referencing to avoid the problem of missing crucial pieces from any one jigsaw. Conversely, it is possible to trace a range of composers, themes, genres and relations across the volume. For instance, Milhaud appears as a searcher on a quest in Chapter 4 and, to some extent, as a source in Chapter 9. Bloomian misreading may be strongly demonstrated by Russell and arguably by Satie; models are relevant to Evans and Ravel; source fragments (jazz and otherwise) are quoted by Debussy and Milhaud, while larger-scale quotations (French and otherwise) are utilized by Evans and, in transcription or arrangement, by Hylton.

This study aims to interest a diverse scholarly and professional musical readership, classical and jazz-based, as well as final-year undergraduate students, postgraduates, well-informed amateur musicians, concert-goers and jazz enthusiasts. Beyond music per se, it is hoped that the book will appeal to cultural historians and art theorists concerned with probing relations between artistic phenomena, and pursuing ideas of eclecticism, cultural transformation and hybridity.