

2018-04-17

# Bright Bass Timbres in the "Dark Age" of Jazz: Eddie Gomez, Three Quartets, Transgression, and Transcendence

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BRIGHT BASS TIMBRES IN THE “DARK AGE” OF JAZZ:  
EDDIE GOMEZ, *THREE QUARTETS*, TRANSGRESSION, AND TRANSCENDENCE

By

Tianyuan (Ken) Ge

A DOCTORAL ESSAY

Submitted to the Faculty  
of the University of Miami  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Coral Gables, Florida

May 2018

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Bright Bass Timbres in the “Dark Age”  
of Jazz: Eddie Gomez, *Three Quartets*,  
Transgression, and Transcendence

Abstract of a doctoral essay at the University of Miami.

Doctoral essay supervised by Professor Martin Bejerano.  
No. of pages in text. (82)

This paper offers a case study of the iconic jazz bassist Eddie Gomez. By locating his negotiations of timbre within historical and social contexts, and examining how others have interpreted his sound, I show that jazz bass timbre can communicate meanings and facilitate discourses of identity, authenticity, gender, and race. Specifically, I rely on a close hearing of Gomez’s tone on the 1981 recording *Three Quartets*, framing my analysis in research from the fields of historical musicology, ethnomusicology, African American studies, gender studies, timbral and sound studies, and music phenomenology. In doing so, I portray timbre as a common thread in the stories of jazz musicians, a shared axis of interpretation where musicians, critics, historians, and listeners can either hear or sound their own meanings, thereby further establishing bass timbre as an important hermeneutical vantage point in jazz studies.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As I reflect upon the conclusion of my doctoral studies, I am grateful for the guidance and support that I have received throughout my time here at the Frost School of Music. Thanks to members of the University of Miami jazz faculty—Gary Lindsay, Steve Rucker, Gary Keller, Dafnis Prieto—for the energy and depth of your teaching. Thank you to John Hart and Dante Luciani for providing their feedback and insight as part of my doctoral committee.

A huge thank you to Martin Bejerano for sharing his experience, positivity, and patience as both my advisor and my committee chair.

Thanks to Brian Powell (here at Frost) and Jeremy Allen (at Indiana University) for teaching me how to navigate the big bass astutely, sensitively, and without injury.

Thanks to David Ake for opening my eyes to musicology, and for growing my writing and thinking about music over the last three years. Both your mentorship and the scholar-musician model you exemplify have been inspirational to me.

Thanks also to Melvin Butler and Annie Searcy for critiquing my work, gifting me with rewarding seminar experiences, and filling my reading list to the brim. My thanks to the entire staff of the Weeks Music Library, headed by Nancy Zovac.

Thanks to Ben Stocking, my therapist. I have cherished our time together.

Thanks to Thomas and Anna Joiner, Leslie Hicken, Gary Malvern, Steve Watson, and the amazing faculty of Furman University's music department for having provided

me with such a nurturing college experience. Thank you especially to Matt Olson for introducing me to this thing called jazz.

Thank you to my parents, my family, and my friends, near and far.

Thank you to my wife, Ana. You hold me together, and I love the life we share.

I dedicate this paper to my first music teacher, Maryann Van Horn. Memories of playing violin duets together in her music room remind me how lucky I am to have been set on this path. Rest in peace.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### *Background*

The jazz bassist Eddie Gomez is known for his technical virtuosity, stylistic interactivity, and singular tone quality: a complex blend of the acoustic, woody timbres of the double bass with a nasal, electric affect brought on by amplification. Gomez's "electroacoustic" tone is but one representative of a larger historical shift in jazz bass timbre that, beginning in the early 1970s, was largely facilitated by the advent of piezoelectric pickup technology.<sup>1</sup> Musicologist David Ake has referenced this phenomenon specifically, noting that "acoustic bass players in the 1970s and 1980s tended to have brighter sounds than their counterparts in the decades before and since."<sup>2</sup> Such "stylistic details," he writes, "emerge or recede to mark a given generation"—and so, by the 1990s, the electroacoustic sound had largely fallen out of vogue.<sup>3</sup> Not only had amplification technology improved significantly in the twenty years since, now being capable of reproducing bass frequencies with far less timbral coloration, but jazz musicians were also operating in the wake of neo-traditionalist ideologies that looked

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this essay, I have appropriated the term "electroacoustic" to refer only to the sounds of amplified double bass players in jazz, not the vein of electronically mediated Western art music that, arising in the mid-20th century, is characterized by the work of composers like Pierre Schaefer, Milton Babbitt, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Edgard Varèse, and Pauline Oliveros, to name only a few.

<sup>2</sup> David Ake, *Jazz Matters: Sound, Place, and Time Since Bebop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

nostalgically back to the sound and practices of pre-1970s jazz. The result of these discourses, according to musicologist Peter Dowdall, was a historiographic recasting of the '70s as an era of “indiscriminate use of technology in the absence of a comprehensive assimilation of jazz music’s heritage”:

a dark age of jazz.<sup>4</sup>

This paper offers a historical explication of electroacoustic bass timbre, positioned around a close reading of Gomez’s tone on the 1981 Chick Corea recording, *Three Quartets*.<sup>5</sup> Drawing upon scholarly perspectives from timbral and sound studies, as well as jazz and popular music studies, I consider in what ways electroacoustic bass sounds challenge neo-traditionalist conceptions of jazz timbre, making the case that Gomez and his endeavors fit into a discursive structure of transcendence that has its parallels in the cultural and social milieu of post-1960s America. I suggest that the convergence of electric and acoustic bass timbres in 1970s jazz and fusion was closely tied to an accelerating trend of “semiotic urgency” amongst acoustic bassists. Stemming from the previous decade, this urgency—a desire to transcend stylistic limitations by “giving voice” to the instrument, combined with newly available technological opportunities in both live and studio contexts, dramatically raised the volume of the acoustic bass in jazz, fundamentally altering its timbral profile in the process. This position counters persisting conceptions of the '70s as a transgressive era for the music, an evolutionary dead-end in

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Dowdall, *Technology and the Stylistic Evolution of the Jazz Bass* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 157. Thanks to David Ake for bringing to my attention *Blues & Swing*, a video recorded in 1986, in which jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis expresses this exact sentiment: “We’re in a cultural dark ages now in our country, but if we survive this, we’ll come out of it and people will be interested in things of value again.” See *Blues & Swing*, produced and directed by Stanley Dorfman (Long Beach, CA: Geneon [Pioneer], 1988), VHS.

<sup>5</sup> Chick Corea, *Three Quartets*, with Michael Brecker (tenor saxophone), Eddie Gomez (bass), and Steve Gadd (drums), recorded 1981, Stretch Records SCD-9002-2, compact disc.

which jazz musicians, ostensibly by embracing popular influences and technologies, sell their canonical birthright for a mess of electric sound. If these sounds appear “dated” to us today, it is because of an accumulation (and interpellation) of such discourses. Instead, I argue that these sounds have a reasonable—if only temporally fixated—place within jazz’s ideological legacies of vocality and individuality.

### *Justification*

My scholarly interest in Gomez was born from a broader curiosity about how bass players have made themselves heard throughout the history of jazz. “At one time,” observed the jazz bassist Buster Williams, “the bass just provided a thump, thump, thump, thump accompaniment, and you recognized it by its absence. Now, the bass is a voice to be reckoned with, a voice that helps form the music.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the double bass was as incompatible with early recording technologies as it was “easily overwhelmed” by other instruments on the bandstand.<sup>7</sup> It was, in both live and recorded settings, a presence that was “felt and not heard” amidst textures of drums, horns, pianos, guitars, and voices.

However, as Williams indicates, that all changed. The bass has come to be considered (by some, not all) an equal participant in jazz’s traditions of interaction and improvisation. What began as a set of accompanimental practices, defined and limited by the physical challenges and technological realities that bass players faced, has developed into a tradition of *ideological* practices and narratives, in which bassists have come to see

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<sup>6</sup> Paul F. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 319.

<sup>7</sup> Dowdall, *Technology*, 39.

themselves in the same light as their “treble” counterparts: as a voice to be reckoned with. It stands to reason that the act of being heard—of “giving voice” to what was once voiceless—can never be an innocuous or apolitical enterprise.

To the contrary: it means that jazz bass practices, sounds, and discourses are fundamentally concerned with an aesthetics of identity. Thusly, timbre functions as the sonic site upon which listeners, critics, and performers can map extrasonic meanings and associations. According to musicologist and music theorist David Blake, we can understand “timbre as the musical parameter most directly connected with identity formation” because it carries qualitative (albeit subjectively interpreted) data about a sonic source.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, as the ethnomusicologist Paul Berliner has established, “An idol’s personal sound is commonly the precise object of imitation for learners. It is a clearly discernible, all-encompassing marker of an individual artist’s identity.”<sup>9</sup> That is what I believe the bassist Christian McBride meant when he once aphorized in an instructional video, “Your sound is your signature!”<sup>10</sup> As a final example, a recent article in *DownBeat* magazine reads,

One note, and you know: That’s Miles. Monk. Mingus. Max. It’s Diz, Dex, Bird, Bud, Billie, Horace, Hendricks, or Hendrix... A musician’s “voice” is more than her instrument; it’s who she is and how she expresses herself through her instrument. More than tone, timbre and technique, it’s his totality. And when it’s authentic, you can hear it in one note.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> David Blake, “Timbre as Differentiation in Indie Music,” *Music Theory Online* 18, no. 2 (2012): 3.1-3.5. <http://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.12.18.2/mto.12.18.2.blake.php>.

<sup>9</sup> Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 124.

<sup>10</sup> “2 Minute Jazz #53: Your Sound Is Your Signature,” YouTube video, 2:14, uploaded July 21, 2017, accessed October 10, 2017, <https://youtu.be/JpUyTXs65wM>.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Davis, “The Art of Discovering Your True Voice,” *DownBeat* 79, no. 8 (2012), 94.

Simply put, timbre—often conflated with “sound” or “voice”—lies at the heart of jazz aesthetics. Timbre speaks to notions of originality and authorship, and it is timbre that allows listeners to identify Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk—and indeed, Eddie Gomez—by “hearing just one note.” “Where it is used interchangeably with ‘voice,’” musicologist Gabriel Solis writes, “it [‘sound’] can mean the *distinctive, recognizable gestalt of a musician’s playing* [my emphasis],” the development, attainment, and enunciation of which constitutes a “discourse of identity” that remains central to all jazz cultures.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the significance of sound and timbre in jazz praxis, however, there remains a paucity of timbral studies in the jazz institution. Ake has problematized this disconnect: “discussion of timbral manipulation—employing a variety of tone colors within a musical performance or, for that matter, on one note—seldom arises” in jazz pedagogy, contradicting the fact that “so many important jazz musicians—Lester Bowie, Dewey Redman, Sidney Bechet, Ornette Coleman, Cootie Williams, Miles Davis, Evan Parker, and Bill Frisell, to name only a few—earned their reputations through unique manipulations of timbre.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, jazz education has little in the way of dealing with timbre, apart from emphasizing its aesthetic primacy and offering models for emulation (usually selected from an accepted canon of artists and their recorded output). This is not to say, of course, that jazz institutions are altogether ignoring timbre; rather, I am

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<sup>12</sup> Gabriel Solis, “Timbral Virtuosity: Pharaoh Sanders, Sonic Heterogeneity, and the Jazz Avant-garde in the 1960s and 70s,” *Jazz Perspectives* 9, no. 1 (2015), 47-50.

<sup>13</sup> Ake, “Learning Jazz/Teaching Jazz,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, eds. Mervyn Cooke and David Horn (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 265-266.

suggesting that studies of jazz timbres *in and of themselves* are often overshadowed by more scientific, analytically orthodox interpretations of the music.

A study in timbre is precisely what is required if we are to better understand a musician like Gomez. As one of many acoustic bassists who exploited the technological advances of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Gomez developed a characteristically “electrified” tone that has been the subject of heated debate. Although it is true that he and his contemporaries were making do with the adolescent technologies of their day—though imperfect, “the electronic pickup was felt by many to be a necessary evil,” according to Dowdall—the fact remains that these electroacoustic timbres have rarely, if ever, been taken seriously.<sup>14</sup>

I am interested in confronting these sounds and dialogues, neither validating nor dismissing them. Ake has argued that musicians whose stylistic or sonic output does not fall neatly within the scope of the jazz canon are often subject to a kind of narrative fracturing that results in a “narrower understanding of what counts as ‘jazz’ in America today.”<sup>15</sup> To ignore the offensiveness of Gomez’s tone to some—the discursive elephant in the room, so to speak—would effectively divorce his music and career from cultural and historical context, all the while ruling out potential understandings of how jazz musicians have staked out identity and meaning through timbral configurations. Via Gomez, this project attempts to bring out a larger discussion about how jazz timbres are constructed: ideologically, practically, and historiographically.

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<sup>14</sup> Dowdall, *Technology*, 105.

<sup>15</sup> Ake, *Jazz Cultures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 145.

In summary, there is everything to gain and nothing to lose by considering electroacoustic bass timbres more closely. Timbre seems to be simultaneously an uncontested aesthetic priority and an analytical non-subject in jazz. Unlike other musical parameters, it remains impenetrable, yet all-important—an inscrutable *byproduct* of jazz's emulative processes and relationship with tradition. Studies of jazz musicians tend to eschew timbre in favor of the conservatorial staples of harmonic, rhythmic, and formal analysis. As I will argue throughout this paper, timbre is a significant, yet underrepresented theater in which bassists have asserted themselves throughout the history of jazz. Their efforts were not always successful: some considered these new bass sounds transgressive rather than innovative. But, by deconstructing the processes that led to this marginalization, we stand to better hear jazz as “contested ground” that is constantly being challenged and redefined. These discourses can shed light on the historical and cultural contexts in which they were created—and conversely, help us explain the dialogues and musical sounds cultivated by those realities. Such a perspective enriches the idea of jazz as inextricable from cultural practice, thereby further establishing bass timbre as an important hermeneutical vantage point in jazz studies.

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Gomez uses his beautiful tone to sound like a humming baritone voice, resonating in plucked space, until he solos with his bow, moving occasionally into a chilling falsetto register. Beautiful.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Will Layman, “Chick Corea/Eddie Gomez/Paul Motian: Further Explorations,” *Pop Matters*, January 19, 2012, accessed January 1, 2018, <https://www.popmatters.com/153358-chick-corea-eddie-gomez-paul-motian-further-explorations-2495895625.html>.

ugh i [sic] hate that bass sound, but gomez [sic] is undeniably one of the most talented musicians to ever play bass.<sup>17</sup>

As the above quotes might indicate, Gomez's sound is not for everyone. And I wish to take both kinds of reactions seriously. The first quote—taken from a glowing review of Corea's 2012 recording, *Further Explorations*—characterizes an ontology of identity.<sup>18</sup> In Gomez's timbre, the reviewer hears an expression of transcendent vocality, perhaps even locating the same individual "materiality" that Roland Barthes identifies in the "grain of the voice."<sup>19</sup> The second—taken from the comments section of a YouTube video of Gomez from 1983, performing with the fusion group Steps Ahead—certainly lacks the decorum of the former, but nevertheless demonstrates an ontology in which canon trumps taste. This unnamed YouTuber, despite being offended by Gomez's tone, still understands him to be one of "the greats" of jazz.<sup>20</sup> Few could deny Gomez his place in the canon; nevertheless, a brief biographical sketch may prove useful.<sup>21</sup>

Born in Santurce, Puerto Rico in 1944, Edgar "Eddie" Gomez was raised in New York City, and began his musical studies on bass at the age of eleven. He attended the prestigious New York High School of Music & Arts, where he studied with the renowned

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<sup>17</sup> "Steps Ahead - Pools (Live at Copenhagen)," YouTube video, 11:44, uploaded February 26, 2016, accessed January 1, 2018, [https://youtu.be/dLE\\_IBg9abk](https://youtu.be/dLE_IBg9abk).

<sup>18</sup> Chick Corea, *Further Explorations*, with Eddie Gomez (bass) and Paul Motian (drums), recorded 2010, Concord Jazz CJA-33364-02, compact disc.

<sup>19</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Noonday Press/Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997), 182.

<sup>20</sup> It should not go unmentioned, of course, that I am contrasting reactions to Gomez's timbre sourced from two very different chronological periods. This discrepancy, besides serving to set up my later arguments on Internet jazz discourses, is further mitigated by the fact that Gomez's timbre has remained remarkably consistent in its "amp-forward" quality over his extensive career.

<sup>21</sup> I will explore Gomez's musical influences more fully in Chapter 5.

double bass pedagogue Frederick Zimmerman, and went on to graduate from the Juilliard School in 1963, all the while furthering a budding jazz career.

Bursting into international prominence in 1966 as the new, twenty-one-year-old bass player in the Bill Evans Trio, Gomez stayed with the iconic pianist for eleven years before going on to perform “in many diverse musical contexts, working with Dizzy Gillespie, Freddie Hubbard, George Benson, McCoy Tyner, Hank Jones, Nancy Wilson, Tanya Maria, the All Star groups ‘Steps Ahead’ and ‘New Directions’ and many others, as well as on Grammy-winning recordings with Chick Corea.”<sup>22</sup> He also maintains a substantial career as an educator; in addition to his current duties as artistic director of the Conservatory of Music of Puerto Rico, Gomez has taught at the Berklee College of Music, Stanford University, North Texas State University, Georgia State University, Jacksonville University, Siena Conservatory, and the Conservatorio Liceu. With two Grammy awards and an honorary doctorate from Berklee under his belt, Gomez, as *Time* magazine once published, “has the world on his strings.”<sup>23</sup>

Now, being that Gomez’s canonical valuation is in no immediate danger, I find myself unwilling to concede that critiques of his sound—like the one above—are “merely” a matter of taste. “Taste classifies,” writes the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, “and it classifies the classifier.”<sup>24</sup> Debating what constitutes a desirable jazz bass timbre is an act of social and cultural demarcation, in which “subjects, classified by their

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<sup>22</sup> “Biography,” [eddiegomez.com](http://eddiegomez.com), accessed January 1, 2018, <http://eddiegomez.com/biography.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 6.

classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar.”<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, the scholarship associated with the “new jazz studies” shows us that where there is critique, there is also erasure. For example, musicologist Christopher Washburne, writing about the smooth jazz saxophonist Kenny Gorelick (known professionally as Kenny G), has argued,

Regardless of Gorelick’s bad jazz, ‘jazz-lite,’ or whatever you want to call it, distaste for his music does not justify his exclusion from the historical narrative, and thirty million records sold along with their consequential presence on the jazz scene are issues that need to be addressed... It is troubling to me that we, as music scholars, choose to write about our own favorite music, searching for those [Gunther] Schuller-esque gems, while ignoring the mundane, the music that actually plays a role in the everyday lives of millions. I am not advocating giving up on those gems, rather, I am suggesting that if we seek to understand ‘jazz’ in its entirety, gems and all, we must examine the wide variety of jazz styles and their myriad manifestations. Studies of smooth jazz may, in fact, reveal much about contemporary society and will definitely serve as an important backdrop in revealing why those gems are so special in the first place.<sup>26</sup>

Washburne makes the compelling and straightforward case that we must interrogate the “bad” along with the “good,” if we wish to further piece together the endless historical and cultural jigsaw puzzle of jazz.

Washburne’s attitude has a precedent in Robert Walser, who, in his influential essay “Out of Notes: Signification, Interpretation, and the Problem of Miles Davis,” shows how much there is to be gained by recovering what lies at the margins of discourse and canon. He points out that while there has been “no lack of writing about Davis, and

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Christopher Washburne, “Does Kenny G Play Bad Jazz? A Case Study,” in *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate*, eds. Christopher Washburne and Maiken Derno (New York: Routledge, 2004), 143.

no shortage of praise for his accomplishments,” critical and historical discourses are at a loss as to how to deal with the “‘mistakes,’ the cracked and missed notes common in his performances.”<sup>27</sup> Walser then poses a question quite relevant to our discussion:

How are we to account for such glaring defects in the performances of someone who is indisputably one of the most important musicians in the history of jazz?<sup>28</sup>

Although Gomez has not quite amassed the iconicity or prestige of a Miles Davis, he shares the trumpeter’s conundrum, for “he cannot be denied a place in the canon of great jazz musicians, yet the accepted criteria for greatness do not fit him well.”<sup>29</sup> Despite his stellar resume and unprecedented level of virtuosity on the acoustic bass, Gomez’s twangy, anachronistic sound flies in the face of what many jazz musicians, educators, and fans consider to be a “good” bass tone. If, as Walser has suggested, Davis’s so-called “missed notes” are better represented by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s theory of signification than judged against “classicized,” Eurocentric ideals, it would require no paradigmatic leap at all, then, to consider how an alternate reading of Gomez’s timbre could make sense of the electroacoustic bass phenomenon as more than simply a matter of poor taste.

### *Methodology*

Given this model set by jazz scholars like Walser and Washburne, we now arrive at the question of methodology. How we are to go about making sense of electroacoustic

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Walser, “Out of Notes: Signification, Interpretation, and the Problem of Miles Davis,” *The Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (Summer 1993), 343.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 345.

bass timbres? Why does this sound rub some people the wrong way? For that matter, who are these people?

The neo-traditionalist figures to whom I alluded earlier certainly comprise one such faction and, in fact, have singled out Gomez in particular. Consider the well-known jazz drummer Jeff “Tain” Watts, who once disparagingly noted that

[Gomez’s] bass was from the cello style of bass playing that’s increasingly in abundance. I couldn’t get with that at all. It’s bass based on an amp sound as opposed to getting the wood to vibrate by pulling the strings. A good bass sound comes from the body of the instrument rather than the fingerboard and the strings—Ray Brown as opposed to Eddie Gomez, the leading proponent of the cello school these days.<sup>30</sup>

Watts’s policing tactics epitomize the discursive relationship between music and noise that Jacques Attali once theorized; “All music,” he argued, “any organization of sounds is a tool for the creation and consolidation of a community, a totality.”<sup>31</sup> Musics that threaten communities by challenging the borders that define them are deemed transgressive, rendered into noise: in the case of Kenny G, excommunicated from the realm of “real” jazz; in Gomez’s case, painted not as a bass player at all, but as a cellist. Deconstructing these arguments will comprise one avenue of understanding, at the same time providing crucial historical and sociocultural contexts of race, gender, technology, and genre.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Dowdall, *Technology*, 148. Originally cited in Michael Bourne, “Blindfold Test,” *DownBeat* (February 1987), 46.

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 6.

<sup>32</sup> The bulk of this analysis will occur in Chapter 4.

Instead of considering such well-trodden statements in and of themselves, however, I have also elected to include the perspectives of jazz fans. Perhaps my decision to contrast glowing critical praise for Gomez with unmoderated YouTube bashing has already hinted at this strategy. My hope is to shed some light on how listeners might negotiate their own tastes, experiencing Gomez's timbre against the backdrop of historiographic and ontological utterances circulated by actors inhabiting the more prominent arenas of jazz discourse: actors like Watts, along with other jazz traditionalists like Albert Murray, Wynton Marsalis, and Stanley Crouch. In other words, how do fans and listeners engage with, dispute, or subscribe to the dominant timbral aesthetics of jazz?

Toward that end, I show how Gomez is discussed on the popular online forum, *TalkBass*. My strategy of looking to online dialogues was inspired by musicologist Ken Prouty's work on bringing the virtual jazz community, with all its attendant cultural operations, into a scholarly outlook that has tended to devalue (or altogether overlook) its discursive contributions. Prouty's analysis of the *Wikipedia* entry on jazz, for instance, shows the considerable efforts of Internet communities in debating, delimiting, and defending the boundaries of what counts as jazz. These discussions are valuable because they constitute what Prouty has called a "knowledge economy of jazz" that remains somewhat inoculated against the "traditional gate keeping" of critical and scholarly

discourses.<sup>33</sup> A close reading of *TalkBass* discourses thus comprises another avenue of understanding.<sup>34</sup>

Besides analyzing discourses about timbre, we must also attend to the sounds themselves. The problem, however, is that timbre remains a notoriously elusive and slippery subject. According to Solis, “jazz is not the only genre in which timbre has been very difficult to address systematically or analytically. In fact, there is a relative dearth of writing on timbre in all music, in part because it *is* so difficult.”<sup>35</sup> In their research on timbral perception, Kai Siedenburg and Stephen McAdams have pointed out (somewhat meta-humorously) that timbre is often relegated to a catch-all, “wastebasket” role in musical analysis—an umbrella term for everything that isn’t covered by traditional methodologies of pitch and rhythm.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, “there is essentially no received system of timbral gradation within most musical traditions or in Western music theory, as there is for pitch and rhythm—common practice engagement with timbre is generally metaphorical and idiosyncratic.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ken Prouty, “Creating Boundaries in the Virtual Jazz Community,” in *Jazz/Not Jazz: The Music and Its Boundaries*, eds. David Ake, Charles Hiroshi Garrett, and Daniel Goldmark (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 70.

<sup>34</sup> These discourses will be introduced in Chapter 3.

<sup>35</sup> Solis, “Timbral Virtuosity,” 48.

<sup>36</sup> Most research on timbre, they note, is characterized by “a curious habit in introductory sections of articles on timbre, namely to cite a definition from the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and to elaborate on its shortcomings”—they are referring to ANSI’s definition of timbre as “that attribute of auditory sensation which enables a listener to judge that two nonidentical sounds, similarly presented and having the same loudness and pitch, are dissimilar.” The psychologist Albert Bregman found this definition unsatisfactory, going so far as to call timbre “an ill-defined wastebasket category.” I suppose this means that I, too, am now participating in the meta-discourse of timbre. See Kai Siedenburg and Stephen McAdams, “Four Distinctions for the Auditory ‘Wastebasket’ of Timbre,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 8 (October 2017), 1.

<sup>37</sup> Solis, “Timbral Virtuosity,” 48.

One might empathize, then, with the strategy of breaking down timbre via spectrographic analysis. Scholars like David Brackett have used this method to great effect, providing a kind of visual “transcription” of timbre.<sup>38</sup> Musicologist Lawrence Wayte, in fact, has used spectrography to analyze the timbral differences between the electric bassists Jaco Pastorius and James Jamerson, concluding that Jaco’s timbre was nothing short of “revolutionary” in comparison to the archetypical, “reference standard” sound that Jamerson demonstrated.<sup>39</sup> For the purposes of this project, however, the visual benefits of spectrography are minimal at best, serving to highlight little other than the obvious fact that electroacoustic bass timbres are somehow “different” than acoustic ones. My interest is less in pointing out how Gomez’s tone deviates from a norm, and in what frequency ranges, than in analyzing how that difference is *perceived*, judged, and interpreted. In pursuit of the latter, I will engage with Gomez’s recorded tone on the 1981 recording *Three Quartets*, thereby positioning myself as a listening subject.<sup>40</sup> The observations drawn from this close hearing will not only outline a qualitative sketch of electroacoustic bass timbre, but allow us the opportunity to reconsider the favorable, unfavorable, and ambiguous interpretations circulating around Gomez’s sound.

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Posed in the form of research questions, my objectives in researching Gomez and bass timbre are as follows:

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<sup>38</sup> David Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>39</sup> Lawrence A. Wayte, “Bitches Brood: The Progeny of Miles Davis’s *Bitches Brew* and the Sound of Jazz-Rock” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2007), 253-269.

<sup>40</sup> This methodology will be deployed in Chapter 3.

- 1) What were some important historical, technological, and ideological contexts for the timbral shift among acoustic bass players like Eddie Gomez that began in the late 1960s and early 1970s?
- 2) How have these “electroacoustic” or technologically mediated acoustic bass timbres been received by critics, perceived by listeners, and positioned (or repositioned) in jazz histories?
- 3) How has the electroacoustic jazz bass phenomenon played into traditionalist and neo-traditionalist discourses, and how do discourses about jazz timbre involve notions of race, gender, authorship, and identity?
- 4) What are some alternative cultural, historical, and aesthetic interpretations of the electroacoustic bass phenomenon?

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of some historical and theoretical literature informing my research on Eddie Gomez and electroacoustic bass timbres. For concision's sake, I will refrain here from listing the primary sources (interviews, radio broadcasts, online forum discussions, and audio recordings) and the more context-specific secondary sources (certain journal articles and books) used to support my arguments in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. It is my goal in this section, rather, to establish a broader historical and theoretical subtext for approaching the discussions that follow, building upon my earlier assertions regarding a scarcity of literature on jazz bass timbres.

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The role technology has played in changing (and preserving) the sound of jazz cannot be underestimated—especially when it comes to the bass. Peter Dowdall's recently published book, *Technology and the Stylistic Evolution of the Jazz Bass*, provides a chronologically organized history of how the bass has changed, both culturally and musically, with the technological advancements of the 20th century. He contends that technology has affected the jazz bass in three fundamental ways: in “technologies that are intrinsic to the instrument itself, those that are extrinsic and, in the nexus of the two, the ways in which their implementation have impacted on the jazz ensemble; in short, the way technology has actually transformed jazz as an art form.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Dowdall, *Technology*, 6.

Given the temporal scope of this project, I will be focusing mainly on Dowdall's work in identifying technological and stylistic shifts from 1951 onwards; in particular, I attend to the inception of the Fender Precision Bass in that year, its expulsion from the ranks of "authentic" jazz, the concomitant divergence of electric bass and acoustic bass styles until the late 1960s, the timbral experimentation of the 1970s and, following that, the rise of neo-traditionalist jazz aesthetics in the 1980s and 1990s. However, it would be helpful to quickly rehash Dowdall's history of jazz bass practices before 1951, beginning with the "gradual establishment of the string bass as the preferred jazz bass instrument" going into the 1930s.<sup>42</sup>

While the bass, by virtue of its superior rhythmic buoyancy, came to replace the tuba in jazz, its lower volume and fundamental "incompatibility with the earliest recording technology" had a hand in establishing the bass as a "felt and not heard" presence in the music. Dowdall historicizes the World War II-era as a time of "growing sophistication of bass playing styles," in which recording technology played a key role in "disseminating the innovations of the bassists in the bands of [Duke] Ellington and [Count] Basie among others." Specifically referenced here are Jimmy Blanton, Ellington's highly-featured bass soloist, and Walter Page, whose work in his own Blue Devils band, as well as Basie's orchestra, was instrumental in establishing the 4/4 "walking bass" convention in both big band and small group idioms. This period is also significant for Dowdall in that it saw the first "incursion of electrical technology into the area of live jazz performance": that is, for the first time, bass players were being

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

amplified with microphones. The immediate post-war years are characterized by a further “transformation in string bass style and presentation brought about by both improvements in the instrument’s intrinsic features and extrinsic technological innovations including the introduction of tape recording.” These years also saw jazz bassists’ initial—and often negatively received—“attempts to emancipate the instrument from its traditional role.”<sup>43</sup>

The introduction of the Fender electric bass in 1951 was a watershed moment; in his article “‘A Bastard Instrument’: The Fender Precision Bass, Monk Montgomery, and Jazz in the 1950s,” musicologist Brian Wright provides some fascinating insights into Montgomery’s role in pioneering the electric bass in jazz, why the electric bass came to be rejected from “straight-ahead” jazz idioms, and how the instrument challenged or subverted jazz’s “purely acoustic” aesthetic codes.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, despite the stylistic and aesthetic fissuring of jazz into the 1960s, these “many jazzes” were largely underwritten by a strong “aversion to technological mediation in performance.”<sup>45</sup> The electric bass and the acoustic bass would remain largely relegated to their respective domains of popular music and jazz until the advent of fusion in the late 1960s, all while a “gradual transformation of the electric bass from a string bass substitute to an autonomous instrument with its own stylistic language” was taking place.<sup>46</sup>

Younger acoustic bass players, desiring the “hearability” of the electric bass, began experimenting with new pickup and amplification technology around the end of

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 1-11.

<sup>44</sup> Brian F. Wright, “‘A Bastard Instrument’: The Fender Precision Bass, Monk Montgomery, and Jazz in the 1950s,” *Jazz Perspectives* 8, no. 3 (2014), 281-303.

<sup>45</sup> Dowdall, *Technology*, 8.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

the 1960s. Dowdall contends that “the desire to be heard was more important to the younger players than the maintenance of classic conceptions of string bass tone favored by the old masters. An imperfect technology was better than none at all if it expanded the bassist’s expressive potential.”<sup>47</sup> This “electrification” of acoustic bass timbre in the 1970s sparked debates among musicians and critics that were marked by “considerable vitriol.”<sup>48</sup> Yet a discursive antecedent to these “tone wars” can be found in the “Dixieland wars” of the 1940s, which Bernard Gendron explores in his essay, “‘Moldy Figs’ and Modernists: Jazz at War (1942-1946).” Gendron argues that these “wars of words” were predicated upon “points of discursive repulsion” comprised of “interconnected binary oppositions: *art—commerce, authenticity—artificiality, swing—jazz, European—native, folk culture—refined culture, technique—affect, modern—traditional, black—white, fascism—communism, and right wing—left wing.*”<sup>49</sup> The rise of electric timbres in 1970s jazz brought these binary oppositions to one another’s doorsteps.

Kevin Fellezs, in his book *Birds of Fire: Jazz, Rock, Funk, and the Creation of Fusion*, argues that while “musical mixture is not in itself news,” the ‘70s contained a unique form of “critical heat... because of the disparate, even diametrical, ways in which jazz, rock, and funk were positioned as *genres* at the time.”<sup>50</sup> The efforts of young musicians during that era, among them Tony Williams, John McLaughlin, Joni Mitchell,

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Bernard Gendron, “‘Moldy Figs’ and Modernists: Jazz at War (1942-1946),” in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 50-51.

<sup>50</sup> Kevin Fellezs, *Birds of Fire: Jazz, Rock, Funk, and the Creation of Fusion* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 4.

and Herbie Hancock, “troubled genres by *staying between them*, creating an informal, even feral, set of musical practices and aesthetics. In doing so, they articulated a way of being both inside and outside of genre categories, disturbing assumptions about musical traditions, including the ways in which membership (legitimacy), mastery (authority), and musical value are ordered.”<sup>51</sup> Important to our discussion of Gomez, who was also signifying across genres via timbre, is the understanding that genre can obfuscate the links between sound, ideology, and identity, precisely because it is such a fundamentally *positional* construction. Fellezs gives the example that “while fusion artists shared free jazz artists’ aesthetic struggles, because of fusion musicians’ simultaneous engagements with popular music, their aesthetic and political challenges have been overlooked,” continuing that “the links between fusion and an apolitical [and, I would add, commercialist] stance are no more ‘natural’ than the connections between free jazz and particular political ideologies”; finally, by mixing the once “distinct aesthetics and histories” of jazz, rock, and funk, so too did fusion upend the social formations of race and gender associated with each of those genres.<sup>52</sup>

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My thinking on music and gender is greatly influenced by Susan McClary’s book, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. McClary’s work makes sense of Western music as a gendered discourse, in which masculine-feminine binaries undergird how music is composed, theorized, analyzed, and heard. For instance, she argues that the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 42.

fundamental tension-and-release principle of Western tonality, “with its process of instilling expectations and subsequently withholding promised fulfillment until climax,” mirrors traditional binary gender codes through its dualist constructions of major-minor and consonance-dissonance.<sup>53</sup> Although *Feminine Endings* examines mostly European art music, it is useful here in establishing that jazz is subsumed within the gendered assumptions of Western musical thought. “Throughout its history in the West, music has been an activity fought over bitterly in terms of gender identity,” McClary argues. “The charge that musicians or devotees of music are ‘effeminate’ goes back as far as recorded documentation about music, and music’s association with the body (in dance or for sensuous pleasure) and with subjectivity has led to its being relegated in many historical periods to what was understood as a ‘feminine’ realm. Male musicians have retaliated in a number of ways: by defining music as the most ideal (that is, the least physical) of the arts; by insisting emphatically on its ‘rational’ dimension; by laying claim to such presumably masculine virtues as objectivity, universality, and transcendence; by prohibiting actual female participation altogether.”<sup>54</sup>

Ajay Heble’s book, *Landing on the Wrong Note: Jazz, Dissonance, and Critical Practice*, re-examines McClary’s work in *Feminine Endings* from a jazz perspective; his chapter “Nice Work If You Can Get It: Women in Jazz,” co-written with literary scholar Gillian Siddall, builds upon McClary’s efforts in “exposing some of the ways in which conventional aspects of musical practice frequently taken for granted as natural and

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<sup>53</sup> Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 12.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

autonomous, are, in fact, powerfully, if not necessarily consciously, caught up in reproducing, transmitting, and inculcating prescribed cultural attitudes toward gender and sexuality” by pointing out that “the structures of masculine dominance that we see inscribed in the public culture of jazz are also... reinforced through the very conventions of musical practice.”<sup>55</sup> Heble’s and Siddall’s argument is that jazz is “implicated in such frameworks of assumption,” pointing out that while the “genteel posture associated with piano playing” has historically been coded as feminine, “certain instruments such as drums invite stances and body movements that bear the social stamp of masculinity because they require an overt display of physical activity... the customary stance required to hold and play the trumpet and, particularly, the saxophone constitutes a more explicit display of the body. [Gender theorist] Judith Butler’s contention that ‘gender is constructed through specific corporeal acts’ is, we suggest, exemplified in jazz performance... one of the reasons women have been discouraged from playing horns is that these instruments invite an explicitly sensual (if not sexual) kind of performance that transgresses socially prescribed notions of feminine sexuality.”<sup>56</sup> If anything, Heble and Siddall remind us that women have been systematically marginalized in jazz, and that this exclusion is reproduced in its musical aesthetics. Moreover, their observations on physicality are particularly relevant to my discussion of “effortful virtuosity” in Chapters 4 and 5.

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<sup>55</sup> Ajay Heble and Gillian Siddall, “Nice Work If You Can Get It: Women in Jazz,” in *Landing on the Wrong Note: Jazz, Dissonance, and Critical Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 142-144.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 149. Although the “customary stance required” of brass and woodwind players is, of course, a practical matter related to ergonomic breathing techniques, wind musicians (trumpet players in particular, as Krin Gabbard has shown) can lend their iconicity to overtly gendered inscriptions.

In her recent book, *The Kind of Man I Am: Jazzmasculinity and the World of Charles Mingus Jr.*, Nichole Rustin-Paschal argues that masculinity is neither monolithic in its construction nor intrinsic to males, showing that jazzmen and jazzwomen alike have had to come to terms with “the unavoidable fact of masculinity’s privilege within jazz,” as in the case of Mary Lou Williams, whose status as one of jazz’s great pianists “refuses the authentication of masculinity through maleness and maleness alone.”<sup>57</sup> The masculinity that ensconces jazz bass aesthetics is not something actualized or articulated by musical timbre, but rather a collectively imagined, individually realized ideal that is indelibly bound up in how jazz is parsed and authenticated—as per Rustin-Paschal’s appropriately entangled coinage of “jazzmasculinity.”

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Ken Prouty’s *Knowing Jazz: Community, Pedagogy, and Canon in the Information Age* sets a precedent for my discussion of the online music community, *TalkBass*. Prouty’s research on the internet jazz forum *All About Jazz*, for instance, reveals that “users regularly engage in debates that heretofore were regarded as the realm of jazz critics and scholars, at least insofar as they are made public.”<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, “the message boards reveal a virtual jazz community that is fractured, with claims and counterclaims to authority about jazz forming the backbone of discussion. Users can make known their opinions about jazz artists (and each other), bringing into public light

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<sup>57</sup> Nichole Rustin-Paschal, *The Kind of Man I Am: Jazzmasculinity and the World of Charles Mingus Jr.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2017), 16.

<sup>58</sup> Prouty, *Knowing Jazz: Community, Pedagogy, and Canon in the Information Age* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 119.

what had historically been private”; investigating such dialogues can reveal insightfully “unique ethnographic moments” that cannot be found elsewhere.<sup>59</sup>

For me, notions of musical community inevitably point back to Howard Becker’s *Art Worlds*, in which the sociologist points out that “all artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number, of people. Through their cooperation, the art work we eventually see or hear comes to be and continues to be.”<sup>60</sup> The last three decades’ scholarly movement toward deconstructing single-authored, “great man” jazz narratives owes much to Becker’s significant set of observations. As it pertains to our case study of Gomez, we must remember this: while jazz timbres are, for many, inseparable from their authors, so too are those authors enabled by a number of social, institutional, economic, and temporal factors.

Issues of authorship are paramount in jazz discourse. As the philosopher Michel Foucault has argued, the social power of authorship is characterized by a “curious unity” that merges the boundaries between the author of a work (as an individual human being) and the work itself (as a representation of its creator).<sup>61</sup> The result is a conflation of the two. We can see this concept at work when musicians invoke the names of the great artists of the jazz tradition: for instance, the names “John Coltrane” or “Miles Davis” or “Charlie Parker” do not simply refer interchangeably to the lives, musical personas, and oeuvres of those artists—rather, authorship renders them into *a single discursive unit*. As

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 1.

<sup>61</sup> Michel Foucault, “What Is An Author?,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 103.

Foucault argues, “the author’s name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture. It has no legal status, nor is it located in the fiction of the work; rather, it is located in the break that founds a certain discursive construct and its very mode of being.”<sup>62</sup> A fundamental confusion over who authors Gomez’s bass timbre is, I believe, at the core of most critiques of his sound.

Yet we must realize, as per Foucault, that “it would be just as wrong to equate the author with the real writer as to equate him with the fictitious speaker.”<sup>63</sup> Ake has acknowledged this distinction in his book, *Jazz Matters: Sound, Place, and Time Since Bebop*, by assigning separate names for “John Coltrane,” the human performer on the iconic recording of “Giant Steps,” and “Trane,” the “musical persona configured and represented in that performance.”<sup>64</sup> Indeed, the two could not be more different: “As a public figure John Coltrane was known to be self-effacing, introspective, even shy. The Trane of “Giant Steps” is determined, confident, and relentless.”<sup>65</sup>

At the same time, it is this basic conflation of author and work that enables the idea that instrumental jazz musicians can “say something” at all. African American music scholar Ingrid Monson, in *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*, disapproves of the one-to-one transplantation of language and discourse metaphors onto music, arguing that “conceptual difference” is “‘heard’ primarily through the physical

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>64</sup> Ake, *Jazz Matters*, 14.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

presence of sound, not in its various written representations... This generalization of the metaphors of writing and discourse in poststructuralist thinking... has limits when applied to nonlinguistic discourses (systems of signification). The overuse of these metaphors in reference to music, indeed, has tended to lead inquiry away from its discursive (relational) peculiarities.”<sup>66</sup>

Nevertheless, tropes like “jazz is conversation” hold very true to many, if not most musicians and critics, and therefore cannot be discounted. Monson herself acknowledges, “While I don’t particularly like the fact that language has suggested itself as the general model of relationality, the metaphors of discourse and writing seem to be here to stay. We need to remember that they are metaphors placing language at the center of the universe and may or may not be fully applicable to nonlinguistic phenomena such as music.”<sup>67</sup> As one example of this incompatibility, while “the famous duet between Eric Dolphy and Charles Mingus [their recording of the Mingus composition “What Love”]” seems to mimic a verbal conversation, if one were to “transcribe the notes and play them on the piano, they wouldn’t sound very much like the conversation on the recording, for it is the relatively non-notable timbral and dynamic inflections produced by the players that are the principal means of signifying the iconicity.”<sup>68</sup> Regardless, linguistic metaphors remain central to many (if not most) jazz musicians’ and educators’ conceptual approaches to improvisation.

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<sup>66</sup> Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 207-208.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

In *Saying Something*, Monson also brings up relevant issues of race, attending specifically to the problematic issue of “colorblindness”—the notion of jazz as a racially-unbounded, universal tradition.<sup>69</sup> Notions of universality and transcendence of racial barriers in jazz are, Monson argues, acceptable until they are not, for “when emphasis on universality is used to gloss over ethnic tensions or to deny the African American origins and leadership of the music, however, musicians are quick to emphasize the ethnic particularity of jazz,” with the caveat that “universalist and ethnically assertive points of view, it must be emphasized, often coexist in the same person and are best conceived as discourses upon which musicians draw in particular interactive contexts.”<sup>70</sup> Her ideas on the ethnic ownership of jazz are echoed plainly in the neo-traditionalist movement of the 1980s, in which “Young Lions” like the trumpeter Wynton Marsalis have staked out a rigid definition of jazz as an African American sound.

Sound, Monson reminds us, is not only given meaning through social construction, but is understood through experience. “The phenomenology of sound, in other words,” she writes, “is extremely important to the *way* in which music signifies and cannot be bracketed off as irrelevant to processes of social construction. While the physical aspects of sound are nonlinguistic, they very quickly become implicated in relational discursive processes, such as intermusicality, and may in turn be commented upon by audience members with words. There is a constant interplay among sound, discursivity, language, and representations thereof that takes place when human beings

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 202.

make and listen to music that must be considered with its own particularities in mind.”<sup>71</sup> Thusly, our exploration of timbre will draw equally from macro perspectives of how society shapes understanding and micro perspectives of individual, phenomenological experience.

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In summary, I have intended to provide additional historical and theoretical context for the reader in this chapter. Note, however, that this literature will be purposed toward a project of musical interpretation, not historicization. As the musicologist Tobias Pontara has argued, “To critically interpret music is at a very minimum to put forward a verbalized or in principle verbalized account of it. Critical interpretation is what the music critic, not the performer of music, engages in. It is constituted, as the standard view has it, by a mixture of descriptive, meaning-ascribing, and evaluative discourse.”<sup>72</sup> This project is one of those “meaning-ascribing” endeavors, an act of “historical imputationalism.” In other words, when I interpret the timbre of a jazz musician like Eddie Gomez, I am constituting meanings that exist outside of his sound. I am not “uncovering” or “discovering” any kind of intrinsic meaning within the music. Rather, I am attempting to bring together 1) my own hearings of bass timbre, 2) others’ hearings of bass timbre, and 3) a collection of historical, critical, and scholarly voices that render this

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 208-209.

<sup>72</sup> Tobias Pontara, “Interpretation, Imputation, Plausibility: Towards a Theoretical Model for Musical Hermeneutics,” *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 46, no. 1 (June 2015), 3.

whole constitutive enterprise, to use Pontara's words, "plausible and relevant."<sup>73</sup> This comes as close to doing right by the music as I can hope.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SPATIALITY AND EMBODIMENT IN *THREE QUARTETS*

Since its inception in 1998, *TalkBass.com* has been “uniting the low end,” serving as the “premier online community for bass players.”<sup>74</sup> As of January 2018, the site has 263,196 registered members, who have so far generated 1,418,533 independent discussion threads, totaling over 21,079,445 individual posts. Within its many sub-forums, *TalkBass* users can buy and sell equipment, disseminate media, field discussions with verified professionals (including the likes of Jeff Berlin, Janek Gwizdala, Lynn Seaton, and the entire bass department of the Berklee School of Music) and, in general, discuss all things bass.

Prouty has argued that online music communities are no different than offline or “real world” groups in terms of boundary creation, contestation, and policing.<sup>75</sup> Simply put, they are just as much about establishing who they are as who they are not. And the *TalkBass* community is defined as much by its quarter million users’ differences as by their shared love of the low end. Structurally, for instance, the website is split between bass guitar and double bass forums. Besides this fundamental acoustic-electric divide, however, are a number of other stratifications, distinguishing between amateurs and professionals, engineers and performers, luthiers and manufacturers, jazzers, rockers, pickers, purists and fusionists, with the occasional guitar player or drummer thrown into

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<sup>74</sup> “Home,” [talkbass.com](https://www.talkbass.com), accessed January 1, 2018, <https://www.talkbass.com>.

<sup>75</sup> Prouty, *Knowing Jazz*, 115-150.

the mix. In the end, *TalkBass* is not so much a guild of bass specialists than it is an online nexus of what Becker has termed “art worlds.”<sup>76</sup>

In pointing out the heterogeneity of *TalkBass*’s constituency, it strikes me that an examination of its discourses will require a certain postmodern sensibility. Consider the particular thread relevant to our purposes, simply entitled “Eddie Gomez.”<sup>77</sup> In recognizing that the original poster (“OP”) of this thread—a user going by the handle of “Bijoux”—begins the discussion in November of 2001, with replies flowing in as late as 2010, we must abandon any expectation of temporal coherence. Online forum discussions are typically open-ended, and never truly conclude without the intervention of a moderator. Moreover, the format of these discussions create an illusion of linearity; despite the fact that each thread is organized by date, every message descending neatly after the other, each subsequent post may or may not be responding to its immediate predecessor.

Consequently, the “Eddie Gomez” implicated in this thread becomes quite untethered in space and time; as we shall see, the *TalkBass* users tend to freely associate, bringing up several different recordings, historical periods, and locations germane to Gomez’s career. But rather than attempting to restructure the thread into a semblance of continuity, I will indulge the flow of the conversation, appropriating certain points as launchpads for 1) locating Gomez within a cultural and technological sketch of jazz bass timbre, 2) addressing his timbre from a phenomenological perspective, and 3)

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<sup>76</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 1.

<sup>77</sup> “Eddie Gomez,” *TalkBass*, posted November 27, 2001, accessed January 1, 2018, <https://www.talkbass.com/threads/eddie-gomez.32447/>.

considering how his timbre signifies upon the electric bass sounds of popular music. In that sense, *TalkBass* provides a kind of discursive housing for my arguments.

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On November 27, 2001, “Bijoux” observes,

I just noticed that I have tons of recordings with Eddie Gomez and yet I have a hard time listening to them, I was just forcing myself to listen to his playing and he is truly a bad dude, his phrasing is really melodic and creative, but I have a hard time dealing with his sound, his sound is always pick up like, I've been browsing and cannot find one record where the bass seems to be recorded with mic only, I'd appreciate if any of you guys know of such records with Eddie Gomez and would like to share, I guess the best that I found was *You Must Believe in Spring*<sup>78</sup> by Bill Evans, but it's still not what I am looking for, it only has a better pick up sound, thanks, looking forward to hear from you all.<sup>79</sup>

Replies float in over the course of the day. “I don’t have a lot of Eddie Gomez on record,” user “Mike Goodbar” writes, “but I really dig his playing, tone and all (even though it is not the kind of tone I would personally go for in my playing). It has a certain dry “stinging” quality that seems to go well with his style of playing.” Both Bijoux and Goodbar express a kind of hesitant appreciation; they are clearly fans, but Gomez’s “pick up like” tone leaves something to be desired.

I find it intriguing, however, that Bijoux attests to have *forced* themselves to listen to Gomez. What can we make of this act of musical stoicism? Bad music, as Christopher Washburne and Maiken Derno note in *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate*, is rarely

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<sup>78</sup> Bill Evans, *You Must Believe in Spring*, with Eddie Gomez (bass) and Eliot Zigmund (drums), recorded 1977, Warner Brothers Records 8122-73719-2, compact disc.

<sup>79</sup> For reasons of clarity and concision, I will refrain from footnoting every *TalkBass* quotation, as they all come from the same thread. Additionally, I have preserved all spelling and punctuation as originally posted, with the exception of album names. All recordings referenced by *TalkBass* users will be reformatted and cited for a more consistent reading experience.

sought out for listening; rather, it's usually "played in the wrong contexts for the wrong reasons; music that is forced upon us in all kinds of possible and impossible situations as we attempt to navigate through the saturated soundscapes of our complex postmodern lives."<sup>80</sup> This is not to say, of course, that people avoid bad music *discursively*. Quite the opposite: distinguishing between good and bad musics can help establish "the positionality of the musician and/or listener as a racialized/ethnicized/gendered/classed subject."<sup>81</sup> It seems to me that one hardly needs to hear music in order to criticize it (indeed, often one doesn't). Why force oneself to listen, then, when less problematic sounds abound?

Washburne and Derno offer a possible exploratory option, making a "basic delineation between *real* experiences of auditive discomfort vs. the passing of aesthetic judgments as strategic acts of positioning oneself within a *discursive* landscape."<sup>82</sup> Taken with my earlier suggestions about Gomez's assured canonical status, it stands to reason that Bijoux experiences dissonance between what he or she *hears* in Gomez's timbre versus what he or she *knows* about Gomez as a reified jazz artist. Therefore, if we are to further examine Bijoux's (and, I imagine, many other listeners') discomfort, we must set out to explore the former, auditive experience. And, because "the former may seem to depend on idiosyncratic psychological factors such as past experiences and personal

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<sup>80</sup> Washburne and Derno, "Introduction," in *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate*, eds. Christopher Washburne and Maiken Derno (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1-2.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

associations”—in other words, “highly individualized factors that are hard to theorize”—we need a new strategy to explain how electroacoustic bass timbres can cause dissonance.

Goodbar, as it turns out, points us in the right direction: “One of my favorite performances by Eddie is on *Eliane Elias Plays Jobim*.<sup>83</sup> It happens that on this particular recording, his tone is fuller and more ‘woody’ than on, say, Chick Corea's *Three Quartets*.” As Goodbar seems to indicate, we ought to find a representative sampling of Gomez’s electroacoustic tone on the iconic 1981 recording *Three Quartets*, which Corea’s website touts as “one of Chick’s most enduring albums, a towering achievement of passionate interplay among true jazz legends.”<sup>84</sup>

In the section that follows, I present my own hearing of bass timbre on the third track of *Three Quartets*, “Quartet No. 2, Part 1,” which, informed by my experience as a double bassist, will provide an opportunity for us to explore a variety of phenomenological and ontological explanations for Washburne and Derno’s notion of “auditive discomfort.” This is not to say, of course, that historical and discursive considerations will be left by the wayside. Rather, I am saying that if we are to better understand those contexts, it would be best to deal immediately with the qualitative aspects of Gomez’s sound so that we may proceed with a clear image of what this timbre actually sounds like.

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<sup>83</sup> Elaine Elias, *Eliane Elias Plays Jobim*, with Eddie Gomez (bass), Nana Vasconcelos (percussion), and Jack DeJohnette (drums), recorded 1990, Blue Note CDP 7-93089-2, compact disc.

<sup>84</sup> “Three Quartets (1981),” [chickcorea.com](http://chickcorea.com), accessed January 1, 2018, <http://chickcorea.com/blog/albums/three-quartets/#.WoC3J2aZOu4>.

“Quartet No. 2, Part 1” opens with an extended, rubato introduction from Chick Corea’s piano. Tenor saxophonist Michael Brecker enters at 1:50, offering a variation on Corea’s opening melodies. His initial gesture—a swiftly rising fourth from E<sub>4</sub> to A<sub>4</sub>—makes me suddenly aware of a pronounced reverb applied to the horn. The long decay of the note adds a feeling of location to my experience. Echo and decay, as media scholar Peter Doyle has argued, can help listeners imagine spatiality in musical recordings, making it seem “as though the music was coming from a somewhere—from inside an enclosed or architectural or natural space or ‘out of’ a specific geographic location.”<sup>85</sup> Doyle, whose work posits “the existence of a coherent spatial semiotics operating in popular music recordings,” thus touches upon a larger politics of spatiality in recorded music, in which “‘place’ and ‘space’ had become part of the larger musical equation, a new component in the musical totality.”<sup>86</sup>

In *Three Quartets*, space and place work to reinforce understandings of the music as neoclassic, a kind of “chamber jazz.” By its title alone, “Quartet No. 2, Part 1” conjures more associations with European art music than anything else, being devoid of the cryptic wordplay with which jazz composers often name their works. This was certainly not lost on pianist and jazz writer Monika Herzig, who historicized *Three Quartets* as a product of Corea’s compositional autonomy: “After the success of his

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<sup>85</sup> Peter Doyle, *Echo and Reverb: Fabricating Space in Popular Music Recording, 1900-1960*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 5-6.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35. Of course, echo and decay mean and function differently to different people. For example, Doyle contends that the imagined space in certain “echoic southern recordings” “largely arose out of musicians’ and producers’ need to deal with, to “rise above” the acoustic shortcomings of the spaces in which they worked: for musicians, it was bars, dance halls, tent shows, ramshackle juke joints and “chicken shacks”; for producers it was cheap, often cramped, undercapitalized studio spaces, or hastily adapted hotel rooms, public meeting halls and so forth.”

fusion group Return to Forever and a decade of touring, Corea's career is well established and he has the freedom and resources to experiment with new directions. Classical music, especially the music by Bela Bartok and Ludwig van Beethoven, had been a strong influence on him for a while and his vision for the new compositions is to transfer the intimate setting of a classical string quartet to an acoustic jazz quartet."<sup>87</sup> Corea himself draws explicit connections between his authorial vision and Western classical music:

I thought of Steve Gadd, Michael Brecker, Eddie Gomez, and myself playing; and I thought, "You know, I'm gonna write a piece for us that is like chamber music, like a string quartet." That's why I called it *Three Quartets*. The string quartet is one of the classic orchestrations of chamber music, such a beautiful orchestration. And the saxophone quartet is one of the classic orchestrations of jazz. So I thought of it more or less as a piece of music written for this chamber group: I kind of combined the classical chamber music with the jazz quartet individuals I had in mind and wrote the suite of music in about a week and a half. It came out very easily because I could envision how one piece would move to the next, how one would feature primarily one player, then it would come around like this... It was like a mini-suite, featuring these soloists and orchestra.<sup>88</sup>

All this is to say that, even though I know that the reverb effect was likely applied in post-production, I cannot help but imagine Corea and Brecker in a concert hall, performing a stark, acoustic duet for a darkened, hushed audience. The idea is that only on a stage designed for (America's) classical music could a saxophone reverberate in such a fashion.

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<sup>87</sup> Monika Herzig, *Experiencing Chick Corea: A Listener's Companion* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 74.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

Enter Gomez. At 3:30, Corea brings an end to the piano-saxophone duet, his ascending chords establishing the new tonality and tempo of a bass solo, all underscored by the subdued brushwork of drummer Steve Gadd. My illusion of “acoustic chamber jazz” is all but shattered, for what Herzig describes as a “thick, quasi-electric” bass sound jumps out of the mix.<sup>89</sup> Gomez, opening with a three-note motive of E<sub>3</sub>-F<sub>3</sub>-G<sub>3</sub>, is operating in a soloistic tenor range analogous to Brecker’s opening tessitura. But his “dry” timbre, a “direct injection” of the bass pickup’s signal into the engineer’s mixing board (“DI”), altogether lacks the “wet” reverb of the saxophone.

This “discrepancy of reverberation” has a few implications. First, it disrupts the spatial field established in the initial moments of the track, thus subverting perceptions of this music as an elevated, high art discourse. *Three Quartets* is neoclassic jazz in the sense that it conveys a Western classical sensibility and decorum. And, as we know, Western classical composition and jazz differ fundamentally in their ontologies of authorship; Solis has argued that “it is problematic in the best of circumstances to suggest that a jazz performance, created through a dialogic, collaborative, improvisational process, might have a single author.”<sup>90</sup> But it doesn’t seem right to suggest that *Three Quartets* is uniformly co-authored, either. Corea is indubitably the mastermind here: the compositions (besides an off-the-cuff rendition of Charlie Parker’s “Confirmation” closing out the recording) are all his own. Unlike many jazz recordings, which represent the documentation of a band’s live repertoire, the compositions from *Three Quartets* were

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>90</sup> Solis, “‘A Unique Chunk of Jazz Reality’: Authorship, Musical Work Concepts, and Thelonious Monk’s Live Recordings from the Five Spot, 1958,” *Ethnomusicology* 48, no. 3 (Fall 2004), 331.

never toured. Notably, the only other performance of “Quartet No. 2, Part 1” occurred in 2003 at the Blue Note in New York City—with the same personnel—during a retrospective celebration of Corea’s career.<sup>91</sup> If anything, this reifies the 1981 recording as *the* “work,” rather than the other way around. Perhaps a “hierarchy of authorship” would be a more fitting characterization, then. Gomez’s timbre is subsumed within the politics of that hierarchy; from an authorial perspective, we can hear him as the odd man out of the band, his obtrusive timbre denying us the illusion of the concert hall. Surely, if the presence of an electrified timbre in this context points to anything, it is towards the sound of the electric bass guitar, with all of its accompanying connotations of commercialism and mass appeal. Contrastingly, the upright bass has been configured by many into a “symbol of purist resistance against the forces of commercialization.”<sup>92</sup>

My second point is rooted in the work of David Blake, who has argued for a relativistic theory of timbre predicated upon the phenomenologist Edward Casey’s idea that “we make sense of the world through perceptual dyads premised upon a “somatic axis,” i.e., our embodied, perceiving selves.”<sup>93</sup> Timbre helps us make sense of the dyad “near-far,” a perception of distance that “requires both the embodied subject and the perception of directionality to exist.”<sup>94</sup> In accordance with this theory, a shorter reverberation equates to a shorter perceived “distance” from the listening subject to the sound source, and vice versa. While Corea’s piano, Brecker’s saxophone, and Gadd’s

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<sup>91</sup> Chick Corea, *Rendezvous in New York*, recorded 2003, Stretch Records 038-023-2, 2 compact discs.

<sup>92</sup> Dowdall, *Technology*, 10.

<sup>93</sup> Blake, “Timbre as Differentiation in Indie Music,” 4.1-4.5.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

drums co-inhabit a certain plot point on Casey's axis, Gomez is seemingly desynchronized from the imagined plane upon which his bandmates reside. In contrast to his colleagues, whom we locate at a comfortable distance, Gomez appears *near*—much too close for comfort, as the song goes. The sound intrudes into one's personal acoustic bubble, its "closeness" somewhat resembling the "close miking" of the human voice. Consider what Doyle has to say on the matter:

Whereas the arm's-length mic placement located the listener in comradely proximity to the voice, close miking bespoke a familial or sexual closeness. At the same time the apparent lack of physical effort from the singer suggests a certain offhandedness, something of the quality of "cool," a knowing withholding of excessive affect. The production suggests smoldering rather than explosive affect.<sup>95</sup>

While the "smoldering" of recorded closeness might fortify the intimate, understated aura of a crooner, it is precisely the inverse—the "explosiveness"—that constitutes the hyper-masculinized authenticity typical of jazz bass aesthetics. This authenticity, rooted in the big band tradition of the 1930s and 1940s, extols an aesthetics of effort: a "no pain, no gain" approach predicated upon pushing an unamplified, gut string bass sound through the bandstand. Dowdall summarizes it this way:

Until the late 1950s the traditional jazz bass setup consisted of a high bridge supporting gut strings. It required considerable strength to overcome the resistance of a string suspended up to an inch above the fingerboard. Still more effort was necessary to produce a long, full tone once contact with the fingerboard had been made. Due to gut's elasticity and inconsistent density, the extra pressure required to clamp the string down made it difficult to achieve reliable tuning. Resistance caused by this high action tended to reduce the duration of notes, rendering them more detached as the fingers were repositioned. Thumb position for these early bass players was particularly awkward. Here is the string action is at its

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<sup>95</sup> Doyle, *Echo and Reverb*, 149.

highest and without the assistance of the thumb at the back of the neck providing leverage, the bassist's excursions into the upper range of the instrument required a great deal of brute force to produce an acceptable tone. As jazz evolved, its growing complexity and refinement, together with the unrelenting increase in dynamic levels, would have left these bassists feeling much like the hyperventilating tuba players whom they had so convincingly displaced twenty years earlier.<sup>96</sup>

By the early 1970s, however, steel strings had become the norm. Their smaller gauge and higher tension allowed for lower string heights and greater agility, while their overall superior reliability and intonation presented an attractive alternative to the traditional high-actioned, "workhorse" approach that monopolized pre-1960s jazz.

Thus, my hearing of Gomez in this instance is not only relational to historical and ideological expectations, but being that timbre is so closely tied in with physicality, it is also necessarily *embodied*. That close-miked sound is rich with details, normally to which only the bass player herself is privy: the click of the string as it is depressed onto the fingerboard; the quieter click as it is released from the board; one hears a deadened "clap" of the right hand onto the strings, as many bassists do when subdividing their phrasing. Together, these have the effect of placing my aural self quite close to Gomez's own performing body.

I might as well be bent over the instrument myself. As cellist and musicologist Elisabeth Le Guin has argued in her "carnal" approach to interpreting the works of 18th-century Italian composer Luigi Boccherini:

My role constitutes itself as follows: as living performer of Boccherini's sonata, a work which he wrote for himself to play, I am aware of acting the connection between parts of someone who cannot be here in the flesh. I have become not just his hands, but his binding agent, the continuity, the

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<sup>96</sup> Dowdall, *Technology*, 51-52.

consciousness; it is only a step over from the work of maintaining my own person as some kind of unitary thing, the necessary daily fiction of establishing and keeping a hold on identity... As this composer's agent in performance, I do in this wise become him, in much the same manner as I become myself. And my experience of becoming him is grounded in and expressed through the medium of the tactile.<sup>97</sup>

Le Guin describes an embodied link between performer and performer-composer. So too,

In a live performance (and to some extent in a recorded one) not only will the performer feel things such as those I have described, but the listener-observer will feel them too, or will at least feel that the performer feels them, through the subtle physical identification that comes with proximity and close attention to another human being. Such matters communicate themselves entirely without the benefit of a verbal exegesis, and are a proper, if always only contingent, part of the performed work of art.<sup>98</sup>

Le Guin's "cello-and-bow thinking" maps extraordinarily well onto our situation.<sup>99</sup> If we return to Gomez's E<sub>3</sub>-F<sub>3</sub>-G<sub>3</sub> motive, for instance, I can tell that Gomez is playing the E<sub>3</sub> from thumb position on the D string, rather than on the slimmer G string, which has a number of ramifications. First, transposing a note onto a lower, thicker string requires a higher fingerboard position. The combination of a thicker, more inert string with a shortened effective string length yields a "darker" timbre with a substantially faster drop-off in the note's decay. Second, thumb position requires a significant modification in technique and posture. It means removing the thumb from its normal location on the neck of the instrument, rocking the hips backwards to bring the torso down over the fingerboard, and bringing the side of the left thumb's knuckle down to bear on the string. The thumb then acts as an anchor, allowing the bassist to easily reach intervals of up to a

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<sup>97</sup> Elisabeth Le Guin, *Boccherini's Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 24.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

perfect fifth on one string without shifting hand position (for reference, a “hand’s worth” of string below thumb position equates to roughly a major second or minor third). Third, while such an advanced technique facilitates access to the upper half of the instrument, the bassist must navigate a physical “break” significant enough that the shift in posture is at least semi-permanent. That Gomez elects to begin his solo in this posture thus illustrates a certain intentionality: not only does he intend to exploit the upper register, but he shows no indication of leaving it. The pickup on his bass sustains mid-range frequencies while deemphasizing the frontal attack of the pizzicato, liberating Gomez from the aforementioned “deadened” timbral quality of that tessitura. He has essentially built a summer home in a region of the instrument that earlier generations of jazz bassists only visited fleetingly.

Even as Gomez completes his solo (4:35), returning to his lowest register, I am struck by the diminished “punch” of his two-feel accompaniment, as well as the bright, “growling” sustain of each half note. My listening body, returning to an upright posture just as Gomez exits thumb position, notices that the overall smoldering *legato* of each note has not changed with the shift in register; in fact, it is now exaggerated, each pizzicato note blooming into the next. Gone is the expected percussive attack of the double bass that “moves air” in the same way an electronic subwoofer might. Instead, the liquidity of Gomez’s accompaniment is punctuated by those close-miked, “bass player only” sounds: “ghosted” or muted accents, right-hand string rakes, left-hand pizzicato techniques like pull-offs and hammer-ons, and a liberally applied vibrato. In Gomez’s hands, such ornamental nuance techniques replace the normative, explosive affect of

unamplified jazz bass playing with a more subtle, gentle rhythmicity. What would have been virtually inaudible a decade earlier now resides at the forefront of Gomez's sound.

This fundamental reconfiguration of what Berliner has described as the bass's "characteristic patterns of articulation" is disorienting, and sometimes leads to "negative ramifications for the group"; as the trumpeter Lonnie Hillyer once complained, "I don't know what's happened to bass players since they started using amplification. At times, it's indistinguishable where the beat is in their playing."<sup>100</sup> According to drummer Ronald Shannon Jackson, this can actually undermine the rhythmic coherence of a band: "If the bass is not right, I don't have the freedom to play whatever I want. I can't play different rhythms without clashing. I'm not at liberty even to think about playing different rhythms, because I will be trying too hard to keep the time together."<sup>101</sup>

All of the micro-level observations I have made about Gomez's sound and practices thus far form a macro-level impression of timbre in *Three Quartets*. This is not to say, however, that timbre is static. Rather, it is better understood as a semiotic posture upon which musical practice is deployed. As music theorist William Echard (by way of musicologists John Shepherd and Peter Wicke) has argued,

A posture is a relatively fixed energetic state. It does not have the gross temporal dynamics of a gesture, but it does have a distinctive character recognizable to viewers by its visual form, and to the one posing as a particular combination of bodily sensations, a distribution of energy in and upon the body. There are many instances in which musical events or textures seem to be both static and energized, imbued with the character of

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<sup>100</sup> Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 397.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 412.

a movement without the movement actually taking place. It is this family of impressions to which the term *posture* is meant to apply.<sup>102</sup>

For Echard, timbre is a “detemporalized,” “quasi-physiological” presence that is actuated and given “life through gestural icons.”<sup>103</sup> In other words, timbre has a countenance of continuity—a “changing same,” if you will—but it cannot be understood outside the context of how, when, and where it is performed.<sup>104</sup>

While my own experience of bass timbre in *Three Quartets* may be grounded in a bodily empathy, it is no guarantee of how others might hear Gomez, detect (or erase) his body in performance, or pass judgment on his tone. In fact, I can just as easily see how this timbre could be heard as *disembodied*. From that perspective, in rejecting the acoustic sound of the double bass, Gomez cloaks his performing body in a technologically mediated sound, thereby straying into the realm of the unnatural. Remember that these sounds could have been mystifying to some listeners, especially around the time that they were first created. For example, as Bill Milkowski recounts in his biography of the legendary fretless electric bassist Jaco Pastorius, there was some initial confusion over what instrument was actually being played on Pastorius’s 1976 debut recording. Pastorius, who had pried the frets from his Fender Jazz Bass, filling the indentations with putty and smoothing the fingerboard over with liberal amounts of epoxy, had introduced the world to a new kind of electroacoustic timbre that combined the volumetric power of the Fender with the expressive capabilities of an upright bassist.

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<sup>102</sup> William Echard, “‘Gesture’ and ‘Posture’: One Useful Distinction in the Embodied Semiotic Analysis of Popular Music,” *Indiana Theory Review* 21 (Spring/Fall 2000), 107.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>104</sup> Amiri Baraka, *Black Music* (New York: Akashic Books, 1968).

The keyboardist Joe Zawinul, mistaking Pastorius for the latter, reportedly asked over the telephone, “Hey kid, do you play electric bass, too?”<sup>105</sup>

There are multiple timbral models that support a thesis of disembodiment. Blake, citing the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s idea of motility, posits a kind of “musical motility” in which an “intentionally produced sound” renders a “projection of the self outward through sound.”<sup>106</sup> In a similar fashion, the musicologist Mark Slater’s work homes in on a human “impetus” to “identify the causal source of a sound” and to “attribute identity” to that sound.<sup>107</sup> Slater, in proposing an ecologically informed theory of timbre, introduces a useful distinction between proprietary and efferent sounds. Proprietary sounds “belong”; they form familiar, sensible causalities; when we see a bass, we tend to map our own timbral expectations onto it. Conversely, we hear non-proprietary timbres from an efferent modality, which “emphasizes the nature of information as emanating from something rather than being imposed on it.”<sup>108</sup> In other words, our auditory inferences are couched in scaffolds of familiarity—but even when dealing with the unfamiliar, we speculate on timbre’s possible identities.<sup>109</sup>

Slater’s work has a precedent in the writings of music theorist and semiotician Naomi Cumming, who argued that “it is a basic psychological proclivity not to hear sound as an uninterpreted quality, but to hear it as bearing information that is adaptively

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<sup>105</sup> Bill Milkowski, *Jaco: The Extraordinary and Tragic Life of Jaco Pastorius* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2005), 87.

<sup>106</sup> Blake, “Timbre as Differentiation in Indie Music,” 3.1-3.5.

<sup>107</sup> Mark Slater, “Timbre and Non-Radical Didacticism in the Streets’ ‘A Grand Don’t Come for Free’: A Poetic-Ecological Model,” *Music Analysis* 30, no. 2/3 (July-October 2011), 370.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 373.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 371-372.

useful... ‘Mental representations’ of sound are not, then, aural recordings of pure acoustic properties, but assessments of a sound’s source and connection with other moving bodies, whether inert or living.”<sup>110</sup> “Timbral iconicity,” for Cumming, is “so basic as to be scarcely avoidable,” a biologically-mandated conduit:

When listening to a performer, you do not hear his or her sounds as disembodied, but as humanly produced (with or without electronic modification), and as carrying a load of onset noise and shaping which gives them their “active” characteristics. It is not only her acting performer’s body, and the instrument’s natural resonance, but the surrounding acoustic venue that contributes to her “sound,” and gives her an apparent “body.”<sup>111</sup>

Technological mediations, including the “amplified sounds and artificial reverberant properties” we discussed earlier, tend to “displace attention from [Gomez’s] own embodied actions, to suggest that he has either eluded embodiment or transcended it.”<sup>112</sup>

In a similar vein, composer Linda Dusman has theorized that acousmatic performance—the composer Pierre Schaefer’s term for music in which the sound source is obscured or hidden—“happens solely in the ears of the audience,” further reasoning that “the listener must supply the emotional, physical, and intellectual understanding of the sonic object, with no performer to buffer the implications of that involvement... This music ‘happens’ to us, and we have no idea what sounds to expect... As the final trial, we are the sole interpreters of the work.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Naomi Cumming, *The Sonic Self: Musical Subjectivity and Signification* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 118.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 124-125.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Linda Dusman, “No Bodies There: Absence and Presence in Acousmatic Performance,” in *Music and Gender*, eds. Pirkko Moisala and Beverly Diamond (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 339.

Dusman's work on perceptions of acousmatic performance translate quite well into how recorded music is perceived in general, for recorded jazz, especially, carries a baggage of "the real." As Ake has pointed out, "jazz recordings tend to cloak their constructedness."<sup>114</sup> Attali identifies this very same pretense:

The advent of recording thoroughly shattered representation. First produced as a way of preserving its trace, it instead replaced it as the driving force of the economy of music... For those trapped by the record, public performance becomes a simulacrum of the record: an audience generally familiar with the artist's recordings attends to hear their live replication. What irony: people originally intended to use the record to preserve the performance, and today the performance is only successful as a simulacrum of the record.<sup>115</sup>

Moreover, as I implied earlier by comparing Gomez's "direct" signal to the close-miked, sexual closeness of crooning, "unnatural" sounds can disrupt gendered understandings of timbre. Dusman argues that

There are certain kinds of sounds that are most acceptable because they are emitted by "natural" human beings... Removing the body from both sonic production and performance creates a doubly unnatural performance experience. From the audience's perspective, while tape music obviously does not originate in the body of a performer, it would at least be more natural if it did. Moreover, listening to this unnatural music while having one's own body rather than the body of the missing performer foregrounded doubles the feminizing and homosexualizing threat. In acousmatic performance there is no body on which to transfer that anxiety, no possibility of the safety of voyeurism. To use a metaphor of sexuality, the only possible mode of engagement is autoerotic.<sup>116</sup>

I am aware, however, that pitting Gomez's obviously technologically-altered sound against the pretense of an "acoustic environment" (an exceptionally well-

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<sup>114</sup> Ake, *Jazz Matters*, 45.

<sup>115</sup> Attali, *Noise*, 85.

<sup>116</sup> Dusman, "No Bodies There," 340.

engineered one, but a pretense nonetheless) belies the fact that *all* of these sounds are products of technology. The sound scholar Jonathan Sterne argues that hearing reproduced sound in terms of an imagined “real” source—and conversely, understanding sound reproduction as a mediation of the real—constitutes a problematic, acousmatic paradigm. Sterne maintains that such paradigms undergird the entire history of sound recording, indicating that “functional, aesthetic, social, and philosophical issues were bound together from the very beginnings of sound reproduction.”<sup>117</sup> His thoughts on hearing “the real” in recording are worth reproducing at length:

Acousmatic understandings of sound reproduction (which conceptualized it as splitting copies of sounds from their ontologically separate sources) depended on three prior conditions: (1) the emergence of audible technique as a way of abstracting some reproduced sounds (such as voices or music) as worthy of attention or “interior,” and others (such as static or surface noise) as “exterior” and therefore to be treated as if they did not exist; (2) the organization of sound-reproduction technologies into whole social and technical networks; and (3) the representation of these techniques and networks as purely natural, instrumental, or transparent conduits for sound.<sup>118</sup>

Conventional accounts of sound fidelity often invite us to think of reproduced sound as a mediation of “live” sounds, such as face-to-face speech or musical performance, either extending or debasing them in the process. Within a philosophy of mediation, sound fidelity offers a kind of gold standard: it is the measure of sound-reproduction technologies’ product against a fictitious external reality. From this perspective, the technology enabling the reproduction of sound thus mediates because it conditions the possibility of reproduction, but, ideally, it is supposed to be a “vanishing” mediator—rendering the relation as transparent, as if it were not there. Inasmuch as its mediation can be detected, there is a loss of fidelity or a *loss of being* between original and copy. In this philosophy of mediation, copies are debasements of the originals...<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 216.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

For Sterne, “‘original’ sounds are as much a product of the medium as are copies —reproduced sounds are not simply mediated versions of unmediated original sounds”; rather, “the very idea that a reproduced sound could be faithful to an original sound was an artifact of the culture and history of sound reproduction.”<sup>120</sup> In fact, “copies [as an ontological entity] would not exist without reproduction, *but neither would their originals.*”<sup>121</sup>

But even if we can debunk the ontological myths surrounding recorded sound, the fact remains that such notions are inextricable from how many people understand (and reinscribe understandings of) jazz. As Ake points out, “Recordings not only catch and store sounds; they also allow us to hear those sounds as many times as we wish.”<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, as Prouty has argued, the proliferation of previously unavailable recordings on the Internet in recent years has shown no sign of slowing or receding.<sup>123</sup> Listening to recordings has become the everyday sonic norm against which relatively rarified live performances are judged and understood. The myth of records as a mediation of how things “really were” or “actually sounded” is here to stay.

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 218, 282.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>122</sup> Ake, *Jazz Matters*, 41.

<sup>123</sup> Prouty, *Knowing Jazz*, 145-150.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### AUTHORSHIP IN THE WAKE OF JAZZ TRADITIONALISM

Recall that in our *TalkBass* thread, user “Bijoux” expressed having a “hard time dealing” with Gomez’s tone. Via the bass timbre on *Three Quartets*, we have explored how phenomenological and ontological expectation work together to configure recorded jazz as an embodied, replicative experience—one that, given the discursive hegemony of recordings in jazz, has far-reaching consequences for how we conceive of the music as authored. The remainder of the thread will serve to highlight issues of authorship in the discourses surrounding Gomez.

Gomez’s tone is less concerning for others than it is for Bijoux—for instance, user “Goodbar” is fairly accepting of the electroacoustic sound, citing artistic license: “If Eddie wanted to get a different sound, I’m sure he’d be able to get it. This just happens to be his conception—the sound he hears in his head.” Others vouch for Gomez while simultaneously expressing disapproval, arguing that he may not have had the only say in the matter. As user “anonymous0726” claims,

I have a recording that he made in Japan and was recorded sans pickup—beautiful tone! He has the same problem that I, Miroslav [Vitous], Gary Peacock,...[sic], have—and that is that if you get that vocal, open quality out of the bass, it doesn’t amplify well. I hate the sound that Gary gets with the amp, but his tone in the studio (acoustically) is really awesome. Same with Miroslav. If I ever figure out how to amplify that type of tone, I’ll certainly (keep it a secret) let you guys know...[smiling emoji] Until then, I’ll continue to cringe with each note that comes out of the amp...”

Eddie was playing a wierdo [sic] bass on the *Three Quartets* stuff. [Samuel] Kolstein still had it for sale at his site last time I was there. Last

time I saw Eddie live was with Eliane [Elias], and I think the thing he was playing was a big, French bass. He had some kind of pickup that was incorporated into the bridge adjusters and then wired together similar to an Underwood. He said it was Japanese, but I forget the manufacturer. He was playing through an SWR combo with a couple of 10" or 12" speakers. It sounded amplified, but wasn't bothersome at all. Also remember that when a lot fo [sic] those albums were recorded, the amplified sound was in vogue.

Agreeing, user "Monte" adds that "His live sound has supposedly really been nice since he ditched the SWR and started using the Acoustic Image Contra. Equipment DOES make a difference." User "Bass Boy" reiterates anonymous0726's last point, pointing out that "The fact that many albums were recorded with 'the dreaded bass direct' doesn't help. Look at what they did to Ron Carter in the 80's (*Third Plane*<sup>124</sup>)." This argument is rebutted the very next day; on November 28, 2001, user "brianrost" writes, "Ron did it to himself. Saw him live last year...He endorses the AMT mic but at that gig he used it to mike his AMP!!?? [puzzled emoji] And he was getting that metallic buzzing tone you hear on the records, clear as a bell [eye-rolling emoji]."

Still others play devil's advocate, surmising that Gomez may have intentionally compromised his tone in pursuit of other musical goals. "I've always thought the Eddie Gomez sound was due to his incredibly low action so that he could do all that Scott LeFaro [sic] style stuff. I assumed that was where the string sound was coming from," writes user "Gideon." Bass Boy counters Gideon's hypothesis, offering secondhand knowledge about Gomez's string height:

I always thought that as well. One day while I was at college my bass teacher had to send in a sub as he was going on a short tour. The sub told

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<sup>124</sup> Ron Carter, *Third Plane*, with Herbie Hancock (piano) and Tony Williams (drums), recorded 1977, Milestones Records M-9105, compact disc.

me about when he went to NY to get a lesson with Eddie (about twenty years ago I think) He said that when he played Eddie's bass the strings were so high he had a hard time playing it!

User “bassgeek” follows up, confirming Bass Boy’s anecdote:

I saw Eddie a year ago and sat about 3 feet from his bass. He was using the above-mentioned pickup through an Acoustic Image amp. The sound coming out of his bass was very natural and woody, moreso in the low register than high. The action was also on the high side. His hands must be strong as hell. As for his recorded sound, it must not bother Eddie too much since it is fairly consistent from album to album.

Any hope of hearing Gomez’s timbre as somehow single-authored, produced solely from the musical agency of one individual, is now lost as we consider these varied reactions. Further complicating matters of taste and equipment are the decisions of recording engineers and live sound technicians, who had just as much to do with the proliferation of amplified sounds as the preferences of the bass players themselves. Gomez himself has claimed that his “bass sound was tinkered with a bit in the mix” on *Three Quartets*, “favoring the electric side.”<sup>125</sup> He has even expressed some regret, stating in a 2012 interview:

Listening back, it’s too twangy and trebly for me now, but in the contexts of the records, it’s very clear and makes the bass sound like a solo instrument, which it is. My sound has changed. My likes and dislikes have changed. I’m wanting to hear that older sound, the sound of Paul Chambers and Ray Brown. Sometimes on these straight ahead tracks, the bass should sound like it’s going straight through the microphone, and not have that direct pickup sound. It should sound embedded in the rhythm section, and not stand out, a little bit like drums.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Chris Jisi, “Eddie Gomez,” [bassplayer.com](http://bassplayer.com), May 27, 2014, accessed January 1, 2018, <https://www.bassplayer.com/artists/eddie-gomez>.

<sup>126</sup> Ted Panken, “Sweet and Low,” *Jazziz* (July 2012), 40.

The unresolvable questions brought up here hardly assuage doubts about Gomez's ownership over his timbre. What does he actually sound like? Did he mean to sound this way? Where does the sound *reside*—in his hands, his bass, or the amplifier? But it is not my goal to rescue Gomez from such lines of questioning; instead, I am interested in how all of these agents operate—Gomez included—within the discursive legacy of the 1970s, how it is remembered, and how it is positioned in jazz history. Consider, for example, the pianist Ethan Iverson, who succinctly captured the prevailing traditionalist sentiments regarding amplified jazz bass timbres on his blog:

At least 80% of the swinging acoustic jazz records made between 1970 and the advent of Wynton Marsalis have a godawful bass sound. In performance, it was all amplified pick-up, and when recording the bass, the engineers usually put that pick-up directly to tape. To compound the problem, often the strings of the bass were far closer to the fingerboard than in the Sixties and Fifties, making for a walking line that was heard but not felt, a state of affairs that was acceptable for some but not for most. This 70's bass set-up did enable the player to "liberate the bass" and perform melodies and take long solos more like a guitarist. But the ultimate aesthetic value of this liberation—at least in the context of straight-ahead jazz—was questionable.

A fun sentimental listen is Chick Corea's *Three Quartets* with Michael Brecker, Eddie Gomez, and Steve Gadd. This record is from 1981: it's just about the last gasp of the old guard from before the Young Lions exploded on the scene. The three pieces on the record are uniformly all-acoustic, all swing-feel pieces. Still, these quartets sound like electric fusion, not acoustic jazz. It has to do with the tones, the sound, and the attitude. Maybe it's kind of a good record; these are surely four of the greatest instrumentalists in history, after all, and singly and together they participated in actual electric fusion masterpieces of the Seventies. But the problem with *Three Quartets* is that fusion's icy machismo is neither glorified by electric amplification nor tempered by any earthiness. Instead, it lives in some half-life of badly recorded, too-slick instrumental virtuosity exhibiting a false sense of security.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ethan Iverson, "The 'J' Word," [ethaniverson.com](https://ethaniverson.com), accessed January 1, 2018, <https://ethaniverson.com/the-j-word/>.

In narratives like Iverson's, Wynton Marsalis and the "Young Lions," to borrow from a recent political catchphrase, made jazz sound great again, effectively putting an end to what was perceived as a "godawful" sounding era of regressive '70s jazz. Though upon first glance it might seem that we are working backwards by examining the critical backlash against Gomez's brand of bass tone, it may be more productive to see jazz traditionalism and conservatism as both predating and cutting through the fusion era, rather than as a reactionary movement confined to the 1980s and '90s.

Sociologist and jazz scholar Andrew Sanchirico proposes a three-part historical model of cultural conservatism in jazz. Cultural conservatism was first applied to jazz by Ralph Ellison, who "considered the individual assertion of the jazz musician within and against the group to be analogous to the democratic process—at least as jazz functioned during its pre-bop period, when the music was an integral part of the African American community."<sup>128</sup> Ellison considered jazz a representation and affirmation of American democratic ideals, believing that "the democratic nature of American culture had provided blacks with the vision and strength necessary to persevere in the face of adversity."<sup>129</sup> Ellison's ideas were adapted by his friend and colleague Albert Murray, who would go on to mentor the leaders of the Young Lion movement—trumpeter Wynton Marsalis and critic Stanley Crouch. "However, unlike Ellison, who clearly identified jazz dance and its cultural function in time and place," argues Sanchirico, "Murray basically decontextualized the cultural role of jazz dance, removing it from the pre-war black

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<sup>128</sup> Andrew Sanchirico, "The Culturally Conservative View of Jazz in America," *Jazz Perspectives* 9, no. 3 (2015), 293.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

communities, treating it instead as an ahistorical component of African American culture.”<sup>130</sup> Murray’s historical untethering of Ellison’s notion of jazz-as-democracy would form “what became the core belief of jazz music’s cultural conservatism: the abstract notion of jazz as the embodiment of traditional democratic values, which was at once historically defined, but timeless as well.”<sup>131</sup> In pursuit of this definition, Marsalis and Crouch would form the basis for a second-stage, revivalist period of jazz conservatism stretching from roughly 1980 to 2000.<sup>132</sup>

The Young Lions looked back to a “golden era” of jazz that stood in nostalgic contrast to what was perceived as a misguided investment in technology during the 1970s. According to Dowdall, “Nowhere is the neo-traditionalist rhetoric more effusive than with the Young Lions’ attitude toward the bass... the sound they glorified was old-school, gut-stringed and unamplified in the manner of the seminal Afro-American bassists of the 1940s and 1950s.”<sup>133</sup> “Whilst historical preeminence of these and other seminal Afro-Americans is incontrovertible,” this “Afro-centricity was criticized for largely understating the value of musical developments occurring after 1960, particularly those of white jazz artists.”<sup>134</sup> What musicologist Gary Tomlinson once described as “rhetorics of absence” and “rhetorics of transgression” saturated the discursive matter of

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 295

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 296.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 302. Sanchirico concludes that we hear jazz today from a third, “post-revival era” characterized by the wake of these neo-traditionalist formulations.

<sup>133</sup> Dowdall, *Technology*, 147.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 146.

bass timbre and its authorship, situating its authenticity in a decidedly African American masculinity.<sup>135</sup>

By contrast, the hyper-interactive, “cello school” of bass playing ascribed to Gomez—who is from Puerto Rico—was painted as European, regressive, and emasculative. This white-coded model of tastelessness and aesthetic selfishness subverted the top-down model of democratic jazz endorsed by Marsalis, who lamented that “Before the era of five-minute bass solos, when only the greatest of bass players soloed at all, drummers would occasionally get climactic solo spots... Eventually, the bass began soloing after the piano. Pretty soon, songs lost all shape and logic, becoming vehicles for everyone to solo till he got his fill. No wonder many audiences got bored. The failure of this solo-based form teaches us that sometimes it’s better for everyone *not* to have his say on every tune.”<sup>136</sup> In this conservative-democratic model, “the heart of a jazz band is the rhythm section—piano, bass, drums, and sometimes guitar—and their freedom comes through supporting the soloists.”<sup>137</sup>

Examples abound. The trombonist Delfeayo Marsalis, interviewed in a blindfold-style listening test, commented upon hearing Ron Carter’s 1969 recording, *Uptown Conversation*:<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Gary Tomlinson, “Cultural Dialogics and Jazz: A White Historian Signifies,” *Black Music Research Journal* 22, Supplement: Best of BMRJ (2002), 71-105.

<sup>136</sup> Wynton Marsalis and Geoffrey C. Ward, *Moving to Higher Ground: How Jazz Can Change Your Life* (New York: Random House, 2008), 36.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>138</sup> Ron Carter, *Uptown Conversation*, with Hubert Laws (flute), Sam Brown (guitar), Herbie Hancock (piano), Grady Tate (drums), and Billy Cobham (drums), recorded 1969, Embryo Records 521-2, compact disc.

This is a modern bass kind of thing. I don't like that particular sound, but there's something to be said about it. With an electric sound, you could play faster in a certain kind of way better than you could with an acoustic sound. But, to me, [Scott LaFaro] was the one who did this. Bill Evans, knowing that he couldn't possibly compete with Oscar Peterson and Wynton Kelly to create his own trio sound, I think he said, "We're gonna go more to that European thing," which is like the symphony orchestra, where you don't have any string sound. You don't have anything that would be kind of aggressive.

There's another great record [featuring LaFaro], *The Arrival of Victor Feldman*. I saw the record cover when I was at Berklee. It's like three white guys on a beach with loud colors and I was like, "Pshh, I gotta buy this record." I love playing it for bass players 'cause only one, Delbert Felix, knew that it was Scott LaFaro. They're not used to him playing that aggressively.

So Bill Evans was the guy who decided, "We're gonna play the acoustic bass more like a guitar—no string sound, nothing aggressive." And a lot of people have followed suit. Personally, I like, you know, you're playing bass. It's masculine. I don't like that feminine kind of a bass sound.<sup>139</sup>

Tellingly, Marsalis walks back his statement after the identity of the bassist is revealed to be Carter, who is African American:

The bass direct is important for various reasons. This is not indicative of the classic bass direct sound. But for the type of mood that Ron Carter's trying to set, I think this was good for that. ... Ron Carter is such a master of the instrument he can pretty much do whatever he wants to do. He's hittin' some bass tone here. Ron Carter, man. And that's '69? Wow.<sup>140</sup>

In a similar vein, Stanley Crouch once wrote of Charles Mingus that he was

hot to play long phrases like those of the bebop horn players and worked on his facility until he could move across the instrument with a velocity and weighted force that are still far from common. The blessing of extremely large hands and powerful fingers allowed him to execute things that are still quite difficult for most bassists... Unlike too many of those

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<sup>139</sup> Jennifer Odell, "Before & After With Delfeayo Marsalis," *JazzTimes*, October 28, 2015, accessed January 1, 2018, <https://jazztimes.com/departments/before-and-after/before-after-with-delfeayo-marsalis/>.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

who came after him, Mingus never lost the thick, dark sound of the bass register or the strength of the long, heavy bass string. Even when the master bassist followed an idea into the extreme upper register, his instrument maintained its identity, never sounded like a cello.

While Mingus increased the expressive possibilities of his instrument, his artistic needs giving voice to a wide sweep of emotions made musically logical, he didn't reduce the bass to a four-stringed extension of skittering castrati.<sup>141</sup>

Echoing Adorno's infamous "give up your masculinity, let yourself be castrated," Crouch maintains that Mingus's inborn strengths allow him to traverse the transgressive registers of the bass without relinquishing the bass's iconicity as male totem.<sup>142</sup>

The neo-traditionalists may have perceived Gomez (as well as his predecessor in the Bill Evans Trio, the white bassist Scott LaFaro) as taking the easy way out, avoiding the strenuous, "no pain, no gain" path to ownership they ascribed to the timbres of black bass players. The bassist Ben Wolfe, for instance, certainly conceived of his own timbre as embodying his heroes' virtuous struggles with the instrument, sans amplification: "I prefer the sound of every one of my favorite bass players—Paul Chambers, Ray Brown, Oscar Pettiford—without the amp. I want to experience the problems that my heroes experienced—the strings breaking, intonation trouble, a drummer playing too loud."<sup>143</sup>

In a sense, Wolfe and other like-minded jazz musicians are reclaiming the "work of art," the embodied reality of jazz that Ake identifies in his analysis of the squeak heard on Miles Davis's 1961 recording of "Old Folks"; indeed, only by recognizing "the

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<sup>141</sup> Stanley Crouch, *Considering Genius: Writings on Jazz* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2006), 100-101.

<sup>142</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Perennial Fashion—Jazz," in *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*, eds. Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas Kellner (New York: Routledge, 1989), 207.

<sup>143</sup> Dowdall, *Technology*, 147. Originally cited in Stephen A. Smith, "Interview with Ben Wolfe," *All About Jazz*, [www.allaboutjazz.com/iviews/bwolfe.htm](http://www.allaboutjazz.com/iviews/bwolfe.htm).

physical (and also mental) effort necessary” to make this music can we avoid the pitfall of trapping jazz within a rigidly Western, Cartesian frame.<sup>144</sup> However, the *politicizing* of those embodied realities create unacceptable racial and gendered hierarchies, recapitulating a history of essentialist inscriptions upon black bodies that is, to paraphrase Monson, jazz’s “worst discursive legacy”: in *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa*, Monson confronts the “racial coding of the intuitive, natural, and spiritual as black and the intellectual and unemotional as white,” criticizing “activists both black and white” during the 1950s and 1960s for their mishandling of blackness in “the quest to prevent non-African Americans from erasing the centrality of African American culture in the history of the music.”<sup>145</sup> “The fact remains,” Monson concludes, “that this enduring stereotype is ill suited to describe the constant quest for knowledge and its humane expression that underlay the flowering of Afro-modernism in jazz in this period.”<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Ake, *Jazz Matters*, 50-53.

<sup>145</sup> Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 295.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION: RHETORICS OF TRANSCENDENCE

Maybe I'm the oddball here (probably because I'm coming from the "other" bass), but I heard *Three Quartets* this weekend and *loved* Eddie's tone... The reason I found this thread was trying to find out how he got it...<sup>147</sup>

Monson's mode of "humane expression" (which concluded the previous chapter) can help us transition to an understanding of the electroacoustic bass timbres that simultaneously reinforces the music's heritage in African American spaces, times, and peoples, while doing away with the misguided stereotypes that so often accompany such definitions. I propose that we can hear electroacoustic bass sounds as a particular branching off from the expressionism, vocality, and self-realization that occupies such a central space in jazz's history. This will require a reconfigured understanding of 1970s bass timbres as in dialogue, not only with traditional jazz timbres, but with the sounds of the electric bass in popular music.

The electric bass has been problematic to jazz—historiographically, aesthetically, epistemologically—from its inception. The irony, as Brian Wright has shown, is that jazz was actually the "first home" of the electric bass. In late 1951, one of Leo Fender's new Precision Basses made its way into the hands of bandleader Lionel Hampton. Hampton found in the new instrument the powerful low end presence he so desired in his music, recruiting as its champion Monk Montgomery, an upright bassist from Indianapolis. Montgomery, initially a "reluctant trailblazer," grew to appreciate the Fender, and, by

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<sup>147</sup> User "Pacman," in "Eddie Gomez," *TalkBass*.

1953, had become the “public face of the Fender Precision Bass.”<sup>148</sup> His approach was in strict emulation of the double bass—Wright points out that Montgomery “plays it like an upright; he revels in his instrument’s increased volume, but he doesn’t use this newfound sonic presence to break away from the bass’s standard role. Even if it takes up more sonic space than an upright, Montgomery’s Precision Bass simply fills the same musical function.”<sup>149</sup> But despite Fender’s courting of the jazz market, and despite Montgomery’s careful negotiation of timbre, the electric bass came to replace the upright in nearly every genre *other* than jazz.<sup>150</sup>

“The electric bass guitar was initially just that—an electric bass *guitar*,” writes Dowdall. “It was designed so that guitarists could easily switch to performing the bass function with a minimum of adaptation.”<sup>151</sup> The ease with which an electric bass could match or even overpower the volume of an ensemble, combined with a relatively short learning curve—intonation was a non-issue, given its fretted fingerboard—deeply offended musicians who took pride in, again, the work of bass playing. Jazz in the 1950s underwent what Ake calls a “sedimentation of bop performance norms,” yielding a masculinity that valorized both “notions of physical strength (faster, louder, longer, tougher), and complexity (intricate lines, dense harmonic structures).”<sup>152</sup> Double bassists

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<sup>148</sup> Wright, “A Bastard Instrument,” 281-303.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 293. Recall that by the 1950s, upright bassists had been using microphones on the bandstand and in the studio for over a decade; for Wright, their rejection of the electric bass makes plain the “façade” of “rhetorical emphasis on jazz’s supposedly acoustic, unamplified purity.”

<sup>151</sup> Dowdall, *Technology*, 76.

<sup>152</sup> Ake, “Re-Masculating Jazz: Ornette Coleman, ‘Lonely Woman,’ and the New York Jazz Scene in the Late 1950s,” *American Music* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1998), 29-30.

certainly replicated these masculine structures, but given the technological realities of their time, were faced with a paradoxical choice. Increased complexity required lower string heights and, consequently, a reduction in sound output, while a strength-first approach virtually foreclosed any possibility of executing complexity and virtuosity on the level of a horn player. In other words, this inverse relationship between physicality and complexity led to a majority of bassists' embracing the former's status quo.

Furthermore, as historians Elwood Watson and Marc E. Shaw have said, "Masculinities are closely tied to the economic circumstances in which they are formed and re-formed."<sup>153</sup> Besides upending masculinized notions of what I have dubbed "effortful virtuosity," the introduction of the electric bass prefigures an economic anxiety dividing jazz from commercial music and popular styles. Going into the 1960s, "the rising popularity of rock 'n' roll caused the closure of many jazz venues, obliging professional musicians to seek work elsewhere"—for many, this meant putting down the big bass and picking up the electric.<sup>154</sup> Fascinatingly, jazz scholar Krin Gabbard has speculated that film director Spike Lee's portrayal of "sports and patriarchal family life as healthy alternatives to jazz" in 1990's *Mo' Better Blues* indicates an "ambivalence about jazz that may be related to feelings about his father's career as a jazz artist. In the companion volume to *Mo' Better Blues*, the filmmaker has said that his father, Bill Lee,

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<sup>153</sup> Elwood Watson and Marc E. Shaw, "From Seinfeld to Obama," in *Performing American Masculinities: The 21st-Century Man in Popular Culture*, eds. Elwood Watson and Marc E. Shaw (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 2-3.

<sup>154</sup> Dowdall, *Technology*, 78.

an established jazz bassist, refused to play the electric bass during the 1960s and was thus unable to find regular employment.”<sup>155</sup>

This boundary would soften by the end of the decade. Even the most stalwart acoustic bassists found the smaller instrument impossible to avoid—take, for instance, Ron Carter’s brief adoption of the electric bass at the behest of Miles Davis, or Charlie Haden, who was “unable to disassociate the electric bass from what he saw as its artistically corrosive commercial roots,” ultimately swearing off commercial work and selling his Fender.<sup>156</sup> Others, like Bob Cranshaw and Steve Swallow, switched to the electric bass while (initially) following the emulative precedent set by Montgomery. On the other side of the fence were electric pioneers like Jack Bruce of the supergroup Cream, who “transferred his forceful string bass technique to the much smaller electric bass,” infusing his music with “the aggressive spirit of mid-1960s experimental jazz ensembles,” as well as James Jamerson, who established a new benchmark for highly improvisatory bass lines in the R&B and soul idioms, all the while simulating double bass timbres.<sup>157</sup> By 1970, however, there were musicians coming of age who had never known a world *without* the electric bass. Stanley Clarke and Jaco Pastorius, both born in 1951, incorporated jazz’s rigorous standards of virtuosity within their own unique styles, winning a modicum of respect that the jazz world had long denied the younger

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<sup>155</sup> Krin Gabbard, “Signifyin(g) the Phallus: *Mo’ Better Blues* and Representations of the Jazz Trumpet,” in *Representing Jazz*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 121-122.

<sup>156</sup> Dowdall, *Technology*, 81. Ray Brown’s electric work in James Brown’s band is another notable example.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

instrument. And in 1974, *DownBeat* magazine began including the electric bass as the newest instrumental category in their critics' poll.<sup>158</sup>

Gomez, whose career began in the early 1960s, was undoubtedly influenced by both streams: jazz and non-jazz, electric and acoustic. His predecessor Scott LaFaro, whose brief tenure with Bill Evans is considered to be the most iconic iteration of the pianist's work, proved to be Gomez's greatest musical influence. LaFaro's approach to the double bass was unprecedented: in his hands, the tried-and-true quarter-note walking bass line was not a foregone conclusion, but rather a counterbalance to the many complex accompanimental figures at his disposal. His approach was mimetic—LaFaro's rhythmic and melodic interplay was often described as “in conversation” with Evans's piano. As Keith Shadwick, in his biography of Evans, has characterized,

LaFaro sustained melodic ideas often by using techniques associated with classical acoustic guitarists: rapid note repetition to sustain a melodic curve, especially in the upper registers; occasional plunges into the instrument's lowest registers for dramatic effect; and long diatonic and scalar runs interspersed with well-worked pauses and obstinate patterns, often on asymmetric rhythms... LaFaro's timbre was also much more biting, more conversational, than that produced by later bassists.<sup>159</sup>

Hearing LaFaro for the first time, Gomez recalls, was a “defining moment,” not only for himself, but for “all us young bassists at the time.”<sup>160</sup> As can be heard on his first

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>159</sup> Keith Shadwick, *Bill Evans: Everything Happens To Me—A Musical Biography* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2002), 89-90. I interpret Shadwick's use of “biting” to refer to the pronounced clicking sound heard on many LaFaro recordings. Although LaFaro's timbre was fairly conventional (he used gut strings), he used a lower string action in order to facilitate the agility and virtuosity for which he was known. Now closer to the fingerboard, the strings would often strike the fingerboard, adding a “biting” attack to LaFaro's pizzicato.

<sup>160</sup> Jisi, “Eddie Gomez.”

recordings with Evans (*The Secret Sessions*<sup>161</sup> (1966), *A Simple Matter of Conviction*<sup>162</sup> (1966), *California Here I Come*<sup>163</sup> (1967), and *Bill Evans at the Montreux Jazz Festival*<sup>164</sup> (1968)), Gomez models himself after LaFaro's spontaneity and interactivity, zealously engaging the upper registers of the bass to showcase its expressive potential. Like his hero, Gomez conceived of the bass as a lyrical, vocal presence in the music:

I guess I was sort of singled out [for playing in the higher registers of the bass] early on, even though my ideal was, and is, to be known for playing the whole instrument. For me, it starts with singing—hearing my mother sing as a child, and then being influenced by all kinds of vocalists: Sinatra, Nat King Cole, Sarah Vaughan, Pavarotti. It's the purest form of expression. If I could sing, that's what I would have done. Instead I'm singing on the bass. When I solo or play melodies up there, I'm not thinking of a sax or horn player; I think of myself as a tenor bass. I'm going for what they call a lyric tenor sound.<sup>165</sup>

Gomez legitimizes his sound by tying it to not only the timbres of popular singers, but also the cultural prestige of the European operatic tradition. Shadwick, who was aware of Gomez's classical influences, provides a much-needed foil to the disparaging, “cello school” critiques of the jazz traditionalists. Gomez's “heart was set on the cello,” Shadwick writes, “but the instincts of his grade school teacher steered him firmly toward a half-size double bass when he was twelve years old. Two years later Gomez was

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<sup>161</sup> Evans, *The Secret Sessions (Recorded at the Village Vanguard 1966-1975)*, with Eddie Gomez (bass), Teddy Kotick (bass), Joseph “Philly Joe” Jones (drums), Arnie Wise (drums), Eliot Zigmund (drums), Jack DeJohnette (drums), Joe Hunt (drums), John Dentz (drums), and Marty Morell (drums), recorded 1966-1975, Milestone Records 8MCD-4421-2, 8 compact discs.

<sup>162</sup> Evans, *A Simple Matter of Conviction*, with Eddie Gomez (bass) and Shelly Manne (drums), recorded 1966, Verve Records J28J-25073, compact disc.

<sup>163</sup> Evans, *California Here I Come*, with Eddie Gomez (bass) and Joseph “Philly Joe” Jones (drums), recorded 1967, Verve Records VE-2-2545, compact disc.

<sup>164</sup> Evans, *Bill Evans at the Montreux Jazz Festival*, with Eddie Gomez (bass) and Jack DeJohnette (drums), recorded 1968, Verve Records 314-539-758-2, compact disc.

<sup>165</sup> Jisi, “Eddie Gomez.”

already studying with the most famous double bass teacher and maestro to the classical world, Fred Zimmerman, whose glowing, Pablo Casals-like sound influenced him greatly.”<sup>166</sup> Shadwick’s timeline is a bit different from what is described on Gomez’s official website, but the connection between Gomez and the legendary Spanish cellist Casals (who, incidentally, founded the Conservatory of Music of Puerto Rico with which Gomez is affiliated) remains unambiguous.

Gomez’s aesthetics of vocalicity are also connected to jazz’s instrumental tradition of emulating the human voice, which has been cited as evidence of a persistent West African influence in jazz—particularly, the Yoruban tradition of tonal drumming, or “talking drums.” Monson’s ethnographic work in *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* has identified the centrality of this musical-linguistic connection amongst jazz improvisers: “The importance of communicativeness and the ability to hear is underscored by another type of language metaphor used by musicians: ‘to say’ or ‘to talk’ often substitutes for ‘to play’... To suggest that a soloist ‘isn’t saying anything’ is an insult; conversely, to say that he or she ‘makes that horn talk’ is very high praise.”<sup>167</sup> For Monson, such an endeavor “personifies the horn, once again refusing to separate the sound from the person who makes it.”<sup>168</sup> Berliner’s ethnography has also acknowledged vocalicity’s place in jazz bass narratives:

Players describe the art of bass accompaniment and artists’ individual styles in historical perspective. ‘At one time, the bass just provided a thump, thump, thump, thump accompaniment, and you recognized it by its

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<sup>166</sup> Shadwick, *Bill Evans: Everything Happens To Me*, 175.

<sup>167</sup> Monson, *Saying Something*, 87.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

absence,' Buster Williams observes. 'Now, the bass is a voice to be reckoned with, a voice that helps form the music.' This is also Red Rodney's experience as a soloist. 'Today, even when the bass player's keeping the basic time going, he's creating different rhythmic patterns behind you.' Rufus Reid, interpreting these developments in one historic band, reports that in Bill Evans's trio, it was as if Evans advised LaFaro not simply, 'to walk,' but to become a 'voice.' Through the innovations of LaFaro and others, 'the whole thing evolved,' Reid explains, leading bass players to take the same kinds of liberties melodically and rhythmically that a horn player would.<sup>169</sup>

Furthermore, Gomez establishes a clear debt to the electric bass; he clarifies that "I wanted a sound on the double bass that in opera they call a 'lyric tenor'—a high, clear, very melodic sound that bass guitarists get."<sup>170</sup> Though he remains firmly grounded in jazz culture and society, Gomez's varied interests in popular styles and timbres help him seek out a "pure form of expression" that transcends barriers of genre and aesthetic policing.<sup>171</sup> As a self-described "frustrated singer," his vocal aspirations draw upon male and female singers alike—in fact, this may help explain the pronounced vibrato found at the ends of his phrases.<sup>172</sup> This defies the tendency of jazz discourses to masculinize and

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<sup>169</sup> Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 319. It should be noted, however, that vocality in jazz has typically been coded as feminine, and has subsequently been deemphasized in traditional jazz narratives. Lara Pellegrinelli has argued that "The parentage of jazz... can be read as symbolically gendered: the blues is feminine, a natural product of the untrained voice associated with the body and the sexuality of its performers, whereas ragtime is masculine, associated with instruments as tools and technical skill. Although the specifics of jazz's conception tend to remain as cloaked in mystery as the slivers of the elusive stork, once jazz is 'born,' authors drop vocal forms from their histories. Singing either gives birth to the music or perhaps midwives it, but it does not continue to move forward as part of typical progress-oriented narratives." See Lara Pellegrinelli, "'Separated at Birth': Singing and the History of Jazz," in *Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies*, eds. Nichole T. Rustin and Sherrie Tucker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 34.

<sup>170</sup> Panken, "Sweet and Low," 40.

<sup>171</sup> This notion of a "pure space" has a precedent in Ornette Coleman's desire to escape the dominant sexual codes of his own jazz environment. See Ake, "Re-Masculating Jazz," 36-38.

<sup>172</sup> Marian McPartland, "Eddie Gomez on Piano Jazz," *Piano Jazz*, podcast audio, originally broadcast January 9, 2007, accessed January 1, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2011/08/26/139975002/eddie-gomez-on-piano-jazz>. In full context, Gomez speculates to McPartland, "Maybe I'm just a frustrated singer. I think we all are, all of us instrumentalists. We think about singing."

embody timbre, presenting a disembodied sound that aligns itself more with Cumming, who posited “new possibilities in sonic ‘space,’ with instruments that rely less on personal intensity than on letting new kinds of ‘sound bending’ and reverberation create an evolving ‘sonic self.’”<sup>173</sup> “For a performer who is not rigidly committed to an idea of ‘expressing’ his or her existing self in familiar sounds,” Cumming reasons, “the discovery of new virtualities in sound can *make* and extend a sounding identity.”<sup>174</sup> Likewise, musicologist Ken McLeod has argued that “performance enhancing technologies”—both in music and in sports—can suggest a “cyborgian future” that presents a possible “solution to the inequities of gender, race, class, and sexual preference that are seemingly so embedded in both sports and musical culture.”<sup>175</sup>

With these considerations in mind, let us return once again to “Quartet No. 2, Part 1.” Gomez’s sound exists on an alternate timbral plane from his bandmates, and that alternative, besides asserting the bassist’s own identity and establishing a link to traditions both endemic and external to jazz, has its parallels in the crisis of cultural identity that marked the 1970s in the United States. As historian Beth Bailey has depicted that era, “Looking back to the 1970s, it is striking how very hard the struggles over change were, how angry and ugly and confused the public culture was, as Americans debated the transformation of American life and of American lives ‘from bedroom to boardroom,’ as the saying went, and just about every place else... These struggles over

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<sup>173</sup> Cumming, *The Sonic Self*, 129.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ken McLeod, *We are the Champions: The Politics of Sports and Popular Music* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 105.

gender roles and expectations, set in motion during the 1960s, played out in a society divided by the struggles over race relations and the Vietnam War, fragmented by Watergate and the crisis of political authority, riven by cultural conflict, and angered and dispirited over the collapse of what had seemed an endless cycle of economic growth. The 1970s were an era of new freedoms and opportunities for many Americans—women, people of color—but at the same time, they were the years in which Americans confronted a future that no longer seemed limitless.”<sup>176</sup> Solis, in a similar fashion, has linked the avant-gardism of saxophonist Pharaoh Sanders to a wider context of timbral experimentation in popular African American styles and jazz fusions of the ‘60s and ‘70s.<sup>177</sup> Could we hear an comparable level of intertextuality in the sounds of electrified double bass players?

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Jazz is auto-poetic: its history *is* its aesthetics; that is to say, its creative focus is not an accident, and its evolution is not simply purposive but conscious.<sup>178</sup>

I have argued that Gomez’s bass timbre can challenge and confuse listeners on both aesthetic and phenomenological levels and, in doing so, raises questions of authorship and authenticity that are usually waived for artists of his stature. By “electrifying” his double bass, Gomez diversifies timbre in accordance with Olly Wilson’s notion of a “heterogenous sound ideal” in African diasporic music, at the same

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<sup>176</sup> Beth Bailey, “She ‘Can Bring Home the Bacon’: Negotiating Gender in Seventies America,” in *America in the Seventies*, eds. Beth Bailey and David Farber (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 2004), 108.

<sup>177</sup> Solis, “Timbral Virtuosity,” 47-63.

<sup>178</sup> Jed Rasula, “The Media of Memory: The Seductive Menace of Records in Jazz History,” in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 147.

time subverting jazz's normative conceptions of "acoustic purity."<sup>179</sup> Both Gomez's sound and its critics can be contextualized against a historical narrative of timbral diversity in jazz bass playing, key junctures of which include 1) the inception of the Fender electric bass in 1951; 2) the inverse relationship between rock's rising popularity and jazz's increasing fragmentation through the 1960s; 3) a trend of timbral experimentation and signification across the boundaries of jazz and popular music going into the 1970s; and 4) the rise of neo-traditionalism in the 1980s. The latter movement certainly contributed to the "anachronization" of electroacoustic bass sounds by establishing a new aesthetic norm around nostalgic visions of jazz's purported "pre-electric" era. As we have seen, these discourses locate their authenticity not just in temporal space, but also in racialized, gendered, and economic preconditions.

Studies of jazz bass timbres and their discourses carry broader social, ethical, pedagogical, and scholarly relevancies. Debates over jazz bass tone have circulated competing notions of physicality, virtuosity, and musical labor. Indeed, as Sergio Ospina-Romero, Fritz Schenker, and Allison Wentz have written, "The discussions about music, labor, and value that have long accompanied the history of popular music have recently seemed to bubble to the surface across a range of media... Many of these debates seem to stem from dramatic changes both in music technology and broader economic shifts."<sup>180</sup> The electroacoustic bass phenomenon offers us a unique way of considering how musical worth and effort are configured in jazz communities, as well as larger contexts of post-

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<sup>179</sup> Olly Wilson, "Black Music as an Art Form," *Black Music Research Journal* 3 (1983), 1-22.

<sup>180</sup> Sergio Ospina-Romero, Fritz Schenker, and Allison Wentz, "Musical Labor and Machine-Age Imperialism," *Musicology Now*, February 28, 2018, accessed April 10, 2018, <http://musicologynow.ams-net.org/2018/02/musical-labor-and-machine-age.html>.

war, post-Adorno, post-Benjamin—and certainly, post-Marsalis—anxieties about reproduction and originality, commercialism and prestige, technology and authenticity, and the inevitable gendering and racialization of music.<sup>181</sup>

To entertain the idea of jazz bass timbre as a practically and ethically relevant scholarly endeavor, however, I must bring my own positionality to the forefront. When I consider the lingering tightness of the tendons in my wrists, or the mass of scar tissue accumulated in my right shoulder, or the persistent hip pains developed since my initial forays into playing the big bass, there are indeed feelings of regret. I was, in my own way, pursuing what Dowdall called the “vision of the heroic, unamplified bassist powering the ensemble with sheer determination and muscle,” which, of course, “was as idealistic as it was unrealistic.”<sup>182</sup> Precisely because jazz bass timbre is so entangled with notions of physicality and power, so too are the specters of injury and harm ever present. As teachers of this music, we have an obligation to help students develop their own timbral identities sustainably and safely.

Finally, to address the further musicological implications of this research, consider that not all electroacoustic bass sounds from the ‘70s and ‘80s were deemed transgressive. For instance, I am thinking particularly of the electric-upright hybrid Ampeg Baby Bass, the distinctive timbre of which is considered historically authentic to

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Dowdall, *Technology*, 148. Dowdall cites the bass player Christian McBride’s early career, with which I particularly identify: pursuing that “vigorous, forceful approach to the string bass,” McBride’s “enthusiasm was short-lived, however, once his struggle to be heard beside powerhouse drummers Ralph Peterson and ‘Tain’ Watts took its toll. McBride developed severe tendonitis in both arms. Later, after accepting the futility of performing unaided in these settings, McBride reflected on the sonic results of his unamplified approach: ‘How many times have you heard an acoustic bassist play so hard you hear more string against fingerboard than actual note?’” Originally cited in Chris Jisi, “Jazz Funk: Christian McBride and Chris Wood Double Their Pleasure,” *Bass Player* (October 1998), 39.

salsa and other Latin American musics.<sup>183</sup> And Jaco Pastorius—who had only briefly appeared in our discussion—was another conscientious navigator of timbre. By wrenching the frets from his Fender Jazz, Pastorius folded the inflections of the double bass into his own eclectic brand of “punk jazz,” all the while circumventing the orthodoxies of jazz culture.<sup>184</sup> For someone like Eddie Gomez, this sort of cross-genre experimentation produced a canonically and phenomenologically problematic timbre. But for Pastorius, it yielded a sound that has been reified by critics and fans with relatively little debate. Such a difference in reception suggests to me that, if a historical model of transcendent bass timbre exists, it remains caught up in how these artists and their listeners—ourselves included—position themselves and are positioned within fields of genre, time, place, and identity.

In the ‘70s and ‘80s, bass players took the sound of jazz in wholly new directions—helping to create “many jazzes”—and timbre was a key negotiating point of the historical, social, and aesthetic realities that they lived. By this model, we might also question other marginalized timbral phenomena in jazz—for instance, Ray Brown’s experimentations with the jazz cello, or Ron Carter’s pioneering of the piccolo bass, or Foley’s “lead bass” role in Miles Davis’s band during the 1980s. If anything, that these timbres *can* transgress, transition between, and ultimately transcend expectations of how jazz should sound only reaffirms the need to listen beyond the canon, thereby reclaiming broader, more inclusive structures of freedom.

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<sup>183</sup> Thanks to Marysol Quevedo for reminding me of this important parallel.

<sup>184</sup> Milkowski, *Jaco: The Extraordinary and Tragic Life of Jaco Pastorius*.

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- Elias, Elaine. *Eliane Elias Plays Jobim*. With Eddie Gomez (bass), Nana Vasconcelos (percussion), and Jack DeJohnette (drums). Recorded 1990. Blue Note CDP 7-93089-2. Compact disc.

- Evans, Bill, and Eddie Gomez. *Intuition*. Recorded 1974. Fantasy Records UCCO-90133. Compact disc.
- Evans, Bill. *You Must Believe in Spring*. With Eddie Gomez (bass) and Eliot Zigmund (drums). Recorded 1977. Warner Brothers Records 8122-73719-2. Compact disc.
- . *The Secret Sessions (Recorded at the Village Vanguard 1966-1975)*. With Eddie Gomez (bass), Teddy Kotick (bass), Joseph Rudolph “Philly Joe” Jones (drums), Arnie Wise (drums), Eliot Zigmund (drums), Jack DeJohnette (drums), Joe Hunt (drums), John Dentz (drums), and Marty Morell (drums). Recorded 1966-1975. Milestone Records 8MCD-4421-2. 8 compact discs.
- . *Bill Evans at the Montreux Jazz Festival*. With Eddie Gomez (bass) and Jack DeJohnette (drums). Recorded 1968. Verve Records 314-539-758-2. Compact disc.
- . *California Here I Come*. With Eddie Gomez (bass) and Joseph “Philly Joe” Jones (drums). Recorded 1967. Verve Records VE-2-2545. Compact disc.
- . *A Simple Matter of Conviction*. With Eddie Gomez (bass) and Shelly Manne (drums). Recorded 1966. Verve Records J28J-25073. Compact disc.
- Hall, Jim. *Concierto*. With Paul Desmond (alto saxophone), Chet Baker (trumpet), Roland Hanna (piano), Ron Carter (bass), and Steve Gadd (drums). Recorded 1975. CTI Records ZK-65132. Compact disc.
- Hancock, Herbie. *The Herbie Hancock Trio*. With Ron Carter (bass) and Tony Williams (drums). Recorded 1977. Sony Records SRCS-7051. Compact disc.
- Jarrett, Keith. *Bop-Be*. With Dewey Redman (tenor saxophone), Charlie Haden (bass), and Paul Motian (drums). Recorded 1976. Impulse! UCCI-9056. Compact disc.
- Martino, Pat. *Footprints*. With Bobby Rose (guitar), Richard Davis (bass), and Billy Higgins (drums). Recorded 1975. Savoy Jazz SVY-17252. Compact disc.
- Pepper, Art. *Straight Life*. With Tommy Flanagan (piano), Red Mitchell (bass), and Billy Higgins (drums). Recorded 1979. Galaxy GXY-5127. Compact disc.
- Shaw, Woody. *Little Red's Fantasy*. With Frank Strozier (alto saxophone), Ronnie Mathews (piano), Stafford James (bass), and Eddie Moore (drums). Recorded 1976. Savoy Jazz SVY-17230. Compact disc.