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Jazz as an Imperfect Metaphor for Democracy: The Asian American Woman's Experience

An Honors Thesis Presented

by

Irene Choi

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Introduction

In a concert introduction at New York City's Federal Hall, Wynton Marsalis said: "jazz music is the perfect metaphor for democracy. We improvise, which is our individual rights and freedoms; we swing, which means we are responsible to nurture the common good, with everyone in fine balance; and we play the blues, which means no matter how bad things get, we remain optimistic while still mindful of problems" (2020). From scholars like Albert Murray and Stanley Crouch to famous musicians like Earl Hines, Max Roach, and Dave Brubeck, jazz has been and is still described as a metaphor for democracy (Crouch 2006; Murray 1996; Givan 2021). Proponents of this view argue that jazz and especially jazz improvisation allows for a kind of individual self-expression within a collective group experience, comparable to democracy. In fact, the democratic ideals of jazz are so attractive that jazz was considered a "bulwark against fascism" during World War II and an "ideological weapon against communism" during the Cold War (Givan 2021, 59). Jazz is also hailed as a metaphor for democracy in present day, most visibly in Wynton Marsalis's work with Jazz at Lincoln Center, a highly acclaimed organization whose primary pillars are based on promoting jazz, especially jazz as democracy, to a wider public.

Despite this widely held belief, however, to call jazz a metaphor for democracy assumes that the jazz world is perfectly democratic, where everyone, regardless of identity, is welcomed and accepted as an artist. In reality, jazz has only been welcoming to those of a specific demographic: white or Black men. Anyone outside of that demographic is frequently excluded and receives little to no recognition from audiences, critics, or even fellow jazz musicians. Nor is the United States perfectly democratic; the nation, built up by enslaved Africans, has a long history of injustices towards an extensive list of demographics, including people of color, immigrants, women, queer people, and poor people (Givan 2021, 65). In this paper, I will explore the ways in

which jazz has been undemocratic despite the popular assumption that jazz represents a perfect, ideal democracy where individual voices are elevated within a collective experience. I argue that because most recognition has gone to Black or white male jazz musicians, jazz cannot be a true metaphor for democracy until all voices are given the opportunity to be heard and taken seriously.

I will first explore the arguments for jazz as a metaphor for democracy, relying heavily on the works of Stanley Crouch and Albert Murray, two mentors of Wynton Marsalis whose influences remain strong. I will then focus on two under-represented demographics in jazz and discuss these marginalized experiences, showing that jazz is not perfectly democratic in its traditional practices. One focus group is women, who have been particularly marginalized within the male-dominated field; I will primarily focus on works by Nichole T. Rustin, Kimberly Teal, Sherrie Tucker, and Lara Pellegrinelli, all experts of women's history and positioning in jazz. The other focus group is Asian Americans, who have always faced discrimination in America despite being considered a "model minority" (Fellezs 2007, 73). In this section, I will rely on work by Kevin Fellezs, a professor of music and African American/African diaspora studies at Columbia. Finally, I will analyze the life and work of Jen Shyu, a female Asian American composer and artist who uses jazz and elements of traditional music to raise under-represented voices, including her own. Three interviews with Shyu gave me insight into her experiences, the details of which can be found in the appendix at the end of this paper.

Both women and Asian Americans in jazz are under discussed in academic jazz literature, but the intersectionality of being both Asian American and a woman in jazz is even less discussed. By presenting the experiences of women and Asian Americans in this paper, including the efforts of an Asian American woman, I hope to offer an intersectional analysis of jazz and historically oppressed jazz musicians. This topic is especially important to me because I am a female Asian

American jazz musician. I am a woman who plays trombone, a male-dominated and culturally masculine instrument, in a male-dominated music space. I have personally experienced sexism in jazz—the number of people who comment on my height and question my ability to “reach” the slide is astounding—and most of the jazz ensembles I have seen perform are either entirely male or majority male. I have also experienced discrimination as an Asian American, especially as someone who has spent most of their lifetime in Maine and attended college in Vermont, two of the most white-dominated states in the U.S. I am frequently the only Asian American and often the only person of color in the room at any given time. To this day, I have never seen an Asian American person, much less an Asian American woman, much less an Asian American woman trombonist, perform jazz live on a professional level. With the help and support of mentors, teachers, family, and friends, I have managed to create a space for myself in both the University of Vermont’s jazz program and the Burlington, Vermont jazz scene in general, but constantly being the only Asian American woman in the jam session, the ensemble, or the audience has its tolls. I hope this thesis will not only add to the existing academic canon but will also help bring to light the perspectives of people who look like me.

While I argue that jazz is an imperfect metaphor for democracy, I believe that jazz can become more democratic by making the jazz space more accessible and welcoming to a wider array of historically marginalized demographics. This is not to say that jazz democracy is the only available metaphor. Other models, such as anarchy, can also be compared to jazz improvisation (Bell 2014, 1016-17), a potentially worthwhile exploration given the many issues with both jazz as a metaphor for democracy and American democracy itself, though this goes beyond the scope of this paper. I chose to study jazz specifically as a metaphor for democracy because it is one of the most popular arguments in jazz discourse. While I do not discount other approaches to jazz or

government, I believe that the pursuit of an equitable democratic system in jazz is still worthwhile. American democracy should and can be about addressing the inequities that are created and exacerbated by social and economic structures and can be a successful model if it can address its own shortcomings (Ralph 2002, 130). That said, historically discriminatory practices in jazz must first be recognized and fully acknowledged before proper action can be taken, an endeavor admittedly easier said than done, but nonetheless within our reach.

Jazz as a Metaphor for Democracy in Theory

Perhaps the most well-known proponent of jazz as a metaphor for democracy is Wynton Marsalis, the artistic director of Jazz at Lincoln Center and one of the most successful jazz artists of the modern era (Stewart 2007, 278). Marsalis and his long-time teachers Albert Murray and Stanley Crouch argue that democracy, or the free expression of the self within an organized system, is perfectly aligned with jazz. Especially considering that jazz is a truly American art form (Crouch 2006, 168), the argument for jazz as a metaphor for democracy is compelling for several reasons. For one, the individual self is highly valued in both jazz and American society. In his essay “Time, Place, and Metaphor in Musical Experience and Ethnography,” ethnomusicologist Timothy Rice argues that “we are all individual music cultures,” each made of a variety of parts: the subject’s cultural surroundings, the subject’s geographic location, the subject’s body, and the time frame within which the subject lives (2003, 156). All these parts, each in constant flux and interacting with each other, make up the complex system of experience known as the individual. Composer and writer Vijay Iyer agrees with this idea and ties it with jazz: as groove-based music, the playing of jazz presents itself in the body, which “depends upon experiences [...] embedded in an encompassing biological, psychological, and cultural context” that is then used for expressive playing (2002, 389). Thus, every person as an individual music culture has a story to tell and the

jazz musician is able to tell their stories through music performance. Jazz is such an effective vehicle for storytelling because its roots in blues language “enables the narrator to deal with tragedy, comedy, melodrama, and farce simultaneously,” allowing for rich expression and “the juxtaposition of contrasting narrative and musical ideas” (Murray 1996, 4-5; Stewart 2007, 285). Improvisation by an individual is key to this style of storytelling, allowing for a wide, flexible range of personal expression.

Indeed, a widely held goal for many jazz musicians is to be the storyteller of their own experiences, a storyteller with a distinct and unique style. Writer and jazz critic Ralph Ellison explains that “the subtle identification between [the musician’s] instrument and his deepest drives [allows] him to express his own unique ideas and his own unique voice. He must achieve, in short, his self-determined identity” (2002, 60-61). Iyer agrees with this, saying that “an individual’s tone, rhythmic feel, and overall musical approach are seen as “an indicator of who he or she ‘is’ as a person; while sounding like an already well-established musician is a compliment, having an immediately recognizable, distinct sound is the greatest compliment (2012, 399). While other musical art forms such as Western classical music allow for personal expression, the individual classical musician is expected to create a rendition of a written-out piece of music, portraying the experiences of the composer, not the individual; this is contrary to jazz, where the combination of personal sound and solo improvisation allows for the constant creation of music right in the heat and pressure of the moment (Crouch 2007, 175). At the same time, one individual’s developed sound is not necessarily better or worse than another individual’s developed sound because “no matter what class or sex or religion or shape or height, if you can cut the mustard, you should be up there playing or singing or having your compositions performed” (Crouch 2007, 179). This is

directly comparable to the U.S. Bill of Rights, which protects the individual's right to freedom of expression no matter their background. All stories are worth telling; all stories deserve to be heard.

However, with both jazz and the rights of the American citizen, there exist boundaries for self-expression. While the individual is important, the whole must be considered as well. Teal argues that the malleability of jazz's "loose and contested" genre boundaries allow it to represent a wide range of geographically and culturally important values; jazz is able to represent "America, diversity, risk, African American experience, creativity, freedom, sophistication, populism, New Orleans, New York, or San Francisco, among plenty of other ideas, places, and identities" (2021, 51). Thus, while the individual is given plenty of freedoms, one person's rights cannot infringe on the rights of others. This idea applies on the small-scale as well: for the jazz musician, a solo must be made up of "coherent statements through improvised interplay with the rest of the musicians... [taking] its direction from the melodic, harmonic rhythmic, and timbral elements of the piece being performed" (Crouch 2006, 175). In other words, the improviser must express themselves while "making the changes," or following the harmonic structure of the piece, while also taking into consideration the tempo, groove, and style of the piece. Even as the musician improvises alone during a solo, they must listen carefully to what the accompanying musicians in the group are doing to create a unified sound. Though in general, one musician takes the improvising spotlight at a time, the power must be shared.

In a similar vein, the Constitution, like the blues, "assumes that any man or any woman can be unfaithful... assumes that nothing is innately good, that nothing is lasting—nothing, that is, other than the perpetual danger of abused power" (Crouch 2006, 168). Disdain for a single person in power and a reverence for the power of the people is an American value "since our democracy tells us that the little David of the common man can knock down the Goliath of wealth,

unfairness, privilege” (Crouch 2006, 171). The checks and balances that exist in the U.S. government act as the chord changes do in jazz: limiting individual power (Crouch 2006, 171). Also, though jazz musicians are expected to create their own sound, there is also an expectation that every novice jazz musician must interact with the already-existing canon. Jazz’s ties to African musical practices make an apprentice/master dynamic important, especially because jazz is an oral and aural cultural form where learning by ear without the use of sheet music is traditional (Stewart 2007, 288). A dedication to studying those who came before is also essential; according to Murray, the skill of improvisational storytelling comes from “a deliberate choice of mentors, role models, functionals, and hence *true* fathers” (1996, 104-105), just as Americans look to the Founding Fathers, who in turn looked to the Ancient Greek model of democracy as inspiration. Stepping outside of the box requires an intimate understanding of the box itself. That said, the Constitution allows space for adaptation. As the “improvising jazz musician must work right in the heat and the pressure of the moment, giving form and order in a mobile environment, where choices must be constantly assessed and reacted to in one way or another” (Crouch 2006, 175), Constitutional amendments may be made as the needs of the people change over time. While confined by certain musical elements as discussed, the jazz musician can create change if it is communicated properly to the rest of the group. One of the most famous examples of individuals highlighted within the constraints of a group setting is Duke Ellington’s jazz orchestra of the 1920s and 30s. Ellington wrote music with specific members of his band in mind and often encouraged his sidemen to take his written ideas and improvise upon them in the moment, taking a democratic approach to jazz; he once called his band a group of “tonal personalities” (Russell 1999, 52). Though some constraints are in place, improvisation and the freedom of constant reinterpretation are highly valued in both American democracy and jazz.

That said, Crouch and Murray focus on more traditional jazz forms, excluding discussions of other jazz styles such as avant-garde, free jazz, and jazz fusion from their writings on democracy. Crouch has stated very clearly his general disgust for the avant-garde and jazz fusion, calling these musical innovations “entertainment cliches” (2006, 4). Marsalis himself is infamous within certain circles because of his conservative view of the boundaries of jazz; to Marsalis, a piece is only jazz if it contains elements of swing, blues feeling, improvisation, groove, and sometimes a “Spanish tinge” regarding Latin jazz styles (Stewart 2007, 281). This excludes avant-garde, free jazz, jazz-rock fusion, classically influenced jazz, and others from the “true definition” of jazz entirely and is thus not included in Marsalis’s metaphor for democracy. However, writers of the Black Arts Movement such as Amiri Baraka praised not only blues and bebop but free jazz as well, calling it a reinforcement of “the most valuable memories of a people” that simultaneously “creates new forms, new modes of expression, to precisely reflect contemporary experience” for the Black community (1968, 267). Baraka also lauded musicians like Sun Ra for their devotion to complete separation from the racist mainstream, tying free jazz to attempts to separate from Euro-American cultural expectations for Black Americans in the 1960s (Thomas 1995, 237). The ideals of free jazz align well with this desire to separate from the norm, but still manages to promote a prominent level of interaction between musicians and musical conversations even without the harmonic and melodic structures found in traditional jazz (Hodson 2007, 175). Regardless of Crouch and Marsalis’s beliefs, avant-garde and other sub-genres remain a part of jazz culture and must be recognized in discussions of jazz democracy.

The American value of pulling oneself up by the bootstraps also aligns well with jazz, a music that stems from the struggles of Black people in America (DeVeaux 1991, 533). Jazz itself has its roots in African American musical forms such as spirituals, blues, and ragtime, all “songs

of sorrow charged with satire... they were more than releases, temporary releases, from servitude. The blues were the gateway to freedom for all American Negroes” (Campbell 1939, 105). From the forced enslavement of Africans and the continuation of prevalent racism and discrimination against African Americans throughout American history, jazz musicians have used the blues to get rid of the blues (Crouch 2006, 171), bringing their most painful experiences to a head in performance (Crouch 2006, 171; Gennari 2006, 351). For Murray, the musical break, a common feature of jazz where the group stops playing while a lone musician solos, represents “grace under pressure, creativity in an emergency, continuity in the face of disjuncture... to establish your identity, to write your signature on the epidermis of actuality which is to say entropy” (1996, 95). In a similar vein, Murray also wrote that the anecdotes most representative of American democracy “are those that symbolize (1) affirmation in the face of adversity, and (2) improvisation in situations of disruption and discontinuity” (1996, 94). Crouch, a longtime associate of Murray, agrees with this statement (2006, 168), writing:

Our art tends to pull for the underestimated and the outsider, perhaps because many of us originate in groups and classes that were once outside the grand shindig of American civilization, noses pressed against the ballroom’s huge windows. We have great faith in the possibility of the upset. There is no American who doesn’t understand well the statement: ‘They said it couldn’t be done, but we did it.’

Jazz is no stranger to dissent. For example, the mid-to-late 1940s saw the birth of bebop, a style of jazz characterized by fast tempos, complex harmony, and virtuosic improvisation distinct from the popular swing-style jazz that came before it. Bebop was a “statement of separation from the American social mainstream—separation in music, dress, and behavior” (Mohamad 2021, 50) in a time of deep segregation and systemic violence against African Americans. Black jazz musicians also voiced dissent via the compositions themselves; one example is Billie Holliday

singing “Strange Fruit,” a piece describing the horrifically common lynchings of Black people in the U.S. South, in a venue designed to collect funds for the American Communist Party in 1939 (Mohamad 2021, 49). Jazz as rebellion continued into the 1960s as musicians began to stretch the genre further, connecting with the Black Arts Movement’s goal of advancing Black culture and opposing white Euro-American culture (Thomas 1995, 237). As Crouch wrote, jazz is David against Goliath, where Goliath is anything from mainstream music culture to American racism.

However, it cannot be assumed that all jazz musicians think the same way about their music, just as it cannot be assumed that all Americans think the same way about America’s complex history. The history of jazz itself is nonlinear, full of disagreements and inner turmoil on topics such as tradition and innovation, race politics, commercial success versus individual expression, and even the very definition of jazz as a genre (DeVeaux 1991). As mentioned previously, Marsalis’s traditionalist view of jazz’s boundaries is controversial to many. However, disagreements within the culture do not make it undemocratic. Even Marsalis, who runs Jazz at Lincoln Center following a formalist-leaning rhetoric, welcomes different interpretations of the genre in other venues because democracy creates space for different opinions (Stewart 2007, 280; Teal 2021, 88). While the fervent desire for individualism can certainly create internal and external tensions, jazz does allow space for disagreement.

Jazz as a Metaphor for Democracy in Practice

Jazz certainly has democratic elements, especially in its ideals. However, the music that touts a dedication to telling individual stories has failed to tell the stories of certain demographics. The real-world practice of jazz is not only male-dominated, but historiography and criticism has also traditionally focused on the work of Black or white men, despite women’s active participation in jazz since its beginning. A democracy can only be a true democracy if every individual has the

same rights as everyone else, not just certain groups of people. In this section, I explore jazz as a male-centered space that exhibits discriminatory, exclusionary behavior towards women and Asian American jazz musicians. I argue that this long-lasting refusal to recognize women and non-Black or white people within the jazz culture prevents it from being truly democratic in practice despite its theoretical appeal.

Jazzmasculinity and Women in Jazz

Throughout jazz history, male voices have been elevated over others, creating a distinctly masculine culture of jazz that “tends to value qualities or ideas associated with black masculinity, including ‘aggression, competition, arrogance, discipline, and creativity associated with men’”, a concept Rustin calls “jazzmasculinity” (2017, 5; Teal 2021, 64). Taylor also argues that because jazz is so dependent on the relationships between individuals, fraternity is a key component of jazz culture that excluded women (2008, 56). This jazzmasculinity comes through regardless of the race and gender of the individual artist (Teal 2021, 64). Of course, women have traditionally found little space within this hyper-masculine culture of jazz, especially given the cultural perceptions of the ideal American woman: white, upper-class, and relatively idle, ultimately leaving power to men (Tucker 2000, 89-90). Though certain musical activities were deemed appropriate for women, these musical accomplishments were seen as charming domestic hobbies rather than professional skills, more a showcase of sweet femininity rather than skillful (male) artistry.

For example, piano and voice were seen as appropriately feminine while instruments like trumpet, trombone, saxophone, or drums were explicitly masculine. While some women did play so-called “masculine” instruments even in this era, these women were more seen as “freaks” or “gimmicks” than musicians (Taylor 2008, 56; Tucker 2000, 6). Saxophonist and scholar Yoko Suzuki also argues that skilled female jazz musicians were considered masculine and thus

homosexual (Suzuki 2022, 159); this of course shows not only the extreme sexism of the era but also homophobia, though the relationship between jazz and sexuality goes beyond the scope of this paper. Piano was only an acceptable instrument due to its connections to accompaniment or ensemble playing, a role well-suited for a woman because it is outside of the spotlight; even then, women pianists such as Mary Lou Williams found far less popular success than women jazz singers. Stylistically, more aggressive solo piano styles such as Harlem stride were only for men, no matter the actual skill level of the woman pianist. For example, aggressive musical battles between stride piano players in the 1920s, known as “cutting contests,” developed a “masculine fraternity [that] may have been one way pianists could claim for themselves an instrument that had from the previous century been largely associated with femininity,” made even more masculine by the exclusion of women pianists of the era such as Lil Hardin Armstrong and Lovie Austin despite being “among the most hardworking and visible black artists of their day” (Taylor 2008, 48, 56). Armstrong and Austin both played accompaniment parts—a role often under-appreciated despite the musical sensitivity required—outside of the spotlight, though both were also strong composers; thus, neither made recordings as soloists or bandleaders and received little recognition for their contributions to the genre.

On the other hand, women vocalists were acceptable because jazz musicians, particularly instrumentalists, did not see singing as a skillful activity, closer to entertainment rather than art (Taylor 2008, 56). Paradoxically, singing was one of the only ways a woman could find popular success because of its status as “professional entertainment” and musical commodification; women instrumentalists found much less popular success. Of course, this distinction between “instrumentalists” and “singers” is superficial; the voice is as much a musical instrument as the piano and is equally difficult to master. However, even modern scholarly work in jazz gender

studies tends to avoid discussion of vocalists despite the high density of women singers and the importance of blues singers in the early history of jazz, focusing instead on women instrumentalists. While the study of women instrumentalists is undeniably important, the lack of singers presented in jazz history “[gives] the impression that once African American men gain access to instruments, they abandon the voice in favor of tools that do a more efficient job of achieving musical sophistication, the basis for their musical evolution and potential legitimization in the white world” (Pellegrinelli 2008, 31), putting more importance on instrumental ragtime, a male-dominated activity, over vocal blues, a more traditionally female role. The parentage of jazz is thus symbolically gendered: the blues is feminine, a “natural product of the untrained voice associated with the body and sexuality of its performers”, whereas ragtime is masculine, associated with “instruments as tools and technical skill” (Pellegrinelli 2008, 31-34). While male instrumentalists are considered artists and serious musicians, female singers are considered amateur “comediennes” at best, allowed to be “muses that inspire male creativity”, perhaps as sexual or romantic companions (Pellegrinelli 2008, 35-42). In fact, female sexuality and the objectification of women’s bodies is key to discussions of blues and jazz history. For example, jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald had difficulty finding work as an up-and-coming singer simply because of her appearance; despite her obvious talents, bandleader Chick Webb initially refused to hire Fitzgerald because “she was too ugly” (Nicholson 2004, 36). As Pellegrinelli notes, secondary sources show that many women singers in New Orleans were prostitutes, a phenomenon that white male critics and people of the Black middle class saw as dangerous due to its potential for “promoting loose sexual mores, racial mixing, and the corruption of youth” (2008, 43). Eliminating these women from the discourse effectively “gives exclusive control over the music and sexuality to men” while also maintaining jazz as a “serious” male domain (Pellegrinelli 2008, 43). When

women were allowed on stage, the sexualization of their bodies was not only accepted but expected by the popular masses, creating an image of women that was sexy, entertaining, and maybe even talented, just not artistic.

The lack of recognition of women continued even with the rise of all-women bands in the 1940s, when bandstands were left empty as men were drafted to fight in Europe (Tucker 2000, 2). Previously, women musicians who were not singers or pianists were seen as unskilled sex objects at worst and freaks at best, considered singers who couldn't sing, cross-dressers as women performing masculine activities, and gimmicks or spectacles, "good for girls" no matter their actual skill (Tucker 2000, 6). Any success as a woman instrumentalist brought nicknames like "the female Louis Armstrong," not recognition of their own names; those who looked to work at all were considered "fallen, no matter what kind of femininity they performed on stage" (Tucker 2000, 89). However, as the demand for morale-boosting swing music rose and the supply of men to play it decreased in the early 1940s, women were given the opportunity to play and work while maintaining their status as "good women," creating a sudden boom of women horn players, drummers, bassists, and guitarists. Suddenly, all-women bands, Black, white, and mixed, found themselves traveling all over the U.S., performing in concert halls and radio shows usually dominated by men.

While these women were still seen as temporary gimmicks, they were able to disprove common negative conceptions about women and especially Black women. For one, when pro-segregation cops began to target mixed-race bands, white members would cover their faces with dark makeup to appear Black, challenging the notion that Black women could only be obedient housekeepers or whores while also exposing cracks in the Jim Crow rhetoric of racial purity (Tucker 2000, 155). The most well-known all-girl band, the International Sweethearts of Rhythm,

also confused cops and racist audiences because they couldn't tell who was white and who was "colored", further showing flaws in white supremacist ideals (Tucker 2000, 155). Another group who challenged stereotypical view of Black women was the college co-ed girl orchestra the Prairie View Co-Eds, who showcased young, educated Black women that claimed respectability despite dominant social expectations, a point of racial pride for Black audiences, and challenged worldviews for white audiences (Tucker 2000, 120). However, this shift to all-girl bands did not equate to a shift in cultural expectations; radio shows such as Phil Spitalny's "Hour of Charm" featured sweet, feminine women showcased as beautiful in appearance, domestic, and amateur, perfect as entertainment for men to unwind to after a long day of work. Many of these all-girl groups were also run by men without women's best interests in mind, using the sudden rise in popularity to make money by advertising these groups as promotional gimmicks; many of these women were also mistreated. Nor were all-girl bands perfectly progressive. Black all-girl bands sometimes hired white women, but white all-girl bands never hired Black women. However, though women were expected to return to domestic pursuits once men came back from war, these musicians were able to prove that women could handle the demands of constant touring while developing an impressive career in providing a big, swinging sound.

Of course, women have since become far more accepted in jazz in modern times. In the New York City jazz scene especially, the number of female jazz musicians has increased considerably since the 1940s, allowing for independent male and female music scenes to flourish (Stewart 2007, 257). However, women continue to be a minority and are often still forced into ideals of jazzmasculinity. One example of this phenomenon is Jazz at Lincoln Center's (JALC) Hall of Fame concerts, where historical artists are posthumously honored through live music; Teal argues that these artists are explicitly portrayed through a lens of jazzmasculinity, no matter the

actual individual style of the artists themselves (2021, 64). Teal explores JALC's portrayals of jazzmasculinity through male pianist Fats Waller and female pianist Mary Lou Williams (2021, 64-74). On one hand, Thomas "Fats" Waller is a prime example of jazzmasculinity: nearly six feet tall, 285 pounds, and an oversized personality to match, Waller was an entertainer, virtuoso, and innovator that represented what it meant to be an ideal jazzman (Teal 2021, 64). JALC took full advantage of this larger-than-life character by presenting the Fats Waller Festival, a two-day event featuring three separate interpreting pianists—each representing facets of Waller's legacy—that came to play at the same time, a showcase of his rambunctious skill.

On the other hand, Williams' inclusion in the jazzmasculine swing tradition was JALC's proof that "jazz is a democratic art springing from a diverse community that includes women" (Teal 2021, 68), made even more progressive by the inclusion of tennis player and women's activist Billie Jean King as the host of the concert. This implication that Williams was a pioneering feminist, however, is misleading: Williams herself is known to have said that she's "never had problems with being a woman musician" and "had no intention of being an activist... for feminist causes" (Teal 2021, 71). The music presented in the concert itself also highlighted her work as comparable to more well-known male artists such as Duke Ellington and Dizzy Gillespie, not as the work of an individual that happened to be a woman. Meanwhile, her more innovative, free-standing compositions, written after her conversion to Catholicism as an effort to bring respect to jazz and Catholic African Americans, were briefly mentioned but not performed. Thus, Williams' true individual voice within jazz—the one that was spiritually obligated to serve others, including fellow jazz musicians—is largely ignored for a more convenient portrayal of her work as mainstream, just-as-good-as-the-men's jazz.

Having a strong, feminist figure within JALC's jazz canon supports this ideal of jazz democracy, but as Teal says, "Williams, given her own voice in a democratic system, fought for an entirely different cause through both her life and music" (Teal 2021, 74). This is not to say that there is anything inherently wrong with playing "masculinely". In fact, the gendering of sound is purely cultural and not inherent itself, and as argued by Halberstam, female masculinity has its own history (1998, 120). I do not believe that the great jazzmen of history shouldn't be studied or revered for their skills and innovations. I only ask: is democracy, in this case jazz democracy, really a democracy if individuals are forced into predetermined, restrictive categories or excluded from the scene entirely? Ultimately, what women musicians want is to be accepted at face value without distinctions of gender; in other words, to be considered a "musician" and not a "female musician" (Stewart 2007, 257). While much progress has been made in the last several decades, women continue to experience exclusion, abuse, and assumptive behavior. For example, Suzuki's interviews with women saxophonists revealed that most have heard comments like, "I've never seen a woman playing sax *like that*," implying surprise at a woman's skill (2022, 160). Suzuki's interview with Virginia Mayhew also revealed an incident where a "legendary" male instrumentalist threatened to quit a gig at Birdland, a distinguished jazz performance venue, unless she slept with him, forcing her to hire someone else last-minute (2022, 163). Thus, the foundational sexism within jazz remains alive and cannot be killed so easily. Efforts to include and support women in jazz must be made with recognition to the sexism in the past and its remnants in the present; women's attributions must be heard and acknowledged by all, not just women.

Racial Politics and Asian Americans in Jazz

Racial politics and identity within jazz is an extremely complex subject, one that requires a deep dive into the history of the musical form and the history of the United States. Jazz itself has

its roots in American slavery: the capture of West Africans and the horrific treatment of these people and their ancestors led to the creation of work songs and field hollers, which eventually led to gospel and blues, which eventually led to early jazz. Of course, the end of slavery in the U.S. did not mean the end of racism in the U.S.; the racial tensions that continued between Black and white people in the U.S. can be traced to racial tensions in jazz and has subsequently been a widely discussed topic among academics and musicians alike (see Baraka 1968; Russell 1999; DeVaux 1999). In fact, the agency that jazz has provided to African Americans, who have been treated so poorly in the U.S., is part of the argument for jazz as a metaphor for democracy. However, the vast majority of literature and discussion around race in jazz centers around Black and white perspectives, largely ignoring the perspectives of other people of color who have also faced prejudice and discrimination in the U.S. and been active in jazz history (Shoemaker 2003, 83). This includes the experiences of Latin Americans, Asian Americans, and other minority groups in the U.S., all of whom have experienced exclusion from jazz literature and the jazz scene in general despite their continuous contributions. For the purposes of this paper, I will focus specifically on Asian Americans in jazz.

At this point, though I reference the term multiple times in this paper, I wish to note that the term “Asian American jazz” is difficult to define. For some, Asian American jazz is simply jazz music created and performed by Asian Americans that reflects the Asian American experience and utilizes traditional Asian instrumentation (Fellezs 2007, 81), but for others, it may not be so simple. One issue is that the pan-ethnic term “Asian American” covers such a massive range of peoples, cultures, traditions, and experiences that it cannot be easily generalized. Many only identify as “Asian American” because it is imposed on them by government agencies or employers; at the same time, others prefer “Asian American” to a more specific label like “Nepali

American” because of convenience (Ruiz et al., 2023). The experiences of individual Asian Americans are so varied that generalization can lead to erasure or homogenization. In terms of jazz, though I mostly focus on Chinese American and Japanese American jazz musicians in this paper, a wide range of artists from other Asian cultures like Korean Americans, Filipino Americans, Indonesian Americans, and Indian Americans have also contributed to Asian American jazz, each with their own unique sounds (Fellezs 2007, 75, 94). Similar to the definition of jazz in general, not all Asian American musicians agree on what Asian American jazz is or isn't. For example, while some Asian American musicians such as Fred Ho felt that Asian American jazz must be straightforwardly political, others such as Francis Wong preferred a more easily accessible and spiritual approach (Fellezs 2007, 82). Every individual's experiences are unique, so listening to these stories is crucial to creating a true jazz democracy where all musicians, Black, white, Asian, or Other, are given the space to speak for themselves.

Jazz is very much an African American art form which developed in gathering spaces such as New Orleans' brothels, Chicago's "black and tan" clubs, and the cabarets of Harlem; to say otherwise would be an erasure of jazz history. However, Asian Americans have always contributed to jazz despite the lack of recognition of Asian American jazz as a legitimate sub-genre of jazz, compared to sub-genres like Latin jazz (Fellezs 2007, 76). In fact, Fellezs argues that while "Cantonese opera [does not have more to do] with jazz's 'swing' rhythm than African American musical practices, the historical and social context for jazz musicking has long since reached beyond" strictly Black artistry in the U.S. (2007, 74). Certainly, Asian Americans have participated in the creation of Western popular music since at least the early 20th century and throughout the history of jazz. Just a few examples include Japanese Sousa-style brass bands in the early 1910s; performances of "jazzed up" Chinese folk and pop music 1920s; Japanese American big bands

during the 1930s; and the Forbidden City, a popular club in San Francisco's Chinatown that lasted from 1938 into the 1960s (Fellezs 2007, 74, 78; Zhang 1993, 83-84).

Despite this, however, Asian American musicians have garnered little attention from either the mainstream public or jazz scholars, creating the incorrect perception that non-Black or non-white people did not participate in the development of jazz at all. Ethnomusicologist Deborah Wong argues that “the long history of Other colors in jazz—that is, Asians and Latinos—is consistently refigured as absence. If the very idea of an Asian American jazz is new or strange, this demonstrates—successfully—the American hermeneutics of race as binary: either/or, Black/White” (2004, 67-68). In other words, jazz discourse in general is strictly binary; anything that falls outside the categories of “Black” or “White” is considered inauthentic or is ignored entirely. This exclusion stems directly from the general assumption that Asian Americans are both perpetual exotic foreigners and an acclimated model minority, preventing them from being accepted as “real Americans” or people who have not “truly” faced struggle in America (Fellezs 2007, 70, 73).

The “robust masculine figures” prominently featured in popular jazz discourse completely exclude Asian American men, who are often “stereotyped as either asexual eunuchs or passive males” (Fellezs 2007, 73). In other words, because Asian American men do not fit into the image of what a jazz musician should look like (a Black or white male), they are barred from what is supposed to be a democratic art form. Here then lies one of the primary differences between the African American male experience and the Asian American male experience in jazz: while African Americans males face hyper-visibility, in which mainstream expectations of “Blackness”—expectations that include racist assumptions about Black men—are immediately thrust upon them,

Asian Americans males face invisibility, given no space at all despite their contributions (Kajikawa 2012, 207). Both perceptions are negative, but distinct from each other.

Asian American jazz musicians of all genders are further marginalized due to the model minority stereotype, as discussed by Fellezs (2007, 73):

[This stereotype] positions Asian Americans as noncreative 'nerdy' types, liminally caught between black and white America, serving as a racial 'bufferzone' for whites while viewed suspiciously by other disenfranchised communities of color due to the false belief in the upward social and economic mobility of all Asian Americans. The still active arguments in jazz scholarship concerned with the authenticity and ownership of jazz...cannot escape the inability to hear Asian American musicians as jazz musicians in large part to the distance between stereotypes about black primitive genius, the white bohemian fascination with black emotional freedom, and Asian American exoticism stereotypes, foreign both to American cultural norms and the extroverted emotional display or passionate abandon required of "authentic" jazz musicianship.

The forced invisibility of Asian American jazz musicians has not, however, stopped them from creating a space for themselves. Artists such as tenor saxophonist Francis Wong, pianist Jon Jang, baritone saxophonist Fred Ho, and others were on the forefront of the Asian American jazz movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s, when "leftist political activism, pan-Asian American identity formation and a growing sense of a specific Asian American aesthetic and musicking intersected" to create a blossoming Asian American jazz scene, particularly strong in the San Francisco Bay Area (Fellezs 2007, 78). These Asian American artists were significantly influenced by artists of the Black Arts Movement of the previous generation, especially Black free jazz musicians who connected the "restless energy and radical politics of Black nationalism" to avant-garde music (Kajikawa 2012, 194). Also influenced by African American musicians who created their own record labels to produce and distribute their art despite the lack of acceptance of white-

owned popular record labels, Wong and Jang founded Asian Improv Records (AIR) in 1987 to further create a space for Asian American jazz musicking, a space that allowed for revolutionary political activity (Paget-Clarke 1997).

Many of the works created by Asian American jazz musicians of the era were deeply political in nature; in fact, Wong, Jang, and Ho were all members of the Marxist-Leninist League of Revolutionary Struggle (LRS), an organization that counted Amiri Baraka as one of its members (Kajikawa 2012, 206). Many of the works produced during this time directly protested injustices against Asian Americans, such as Jang's "Are You Chinese or Charlie Chan?", a 1984 piece protesting the racial killing of Vincent Chin in 1982 by white auto workers (Kajikawa 2012, 205). The piece, often performed by Jang and Wong at political demonstrations and benefits concerts, was especially influential to idealistic Asian American college students at the time (Fellezs 2007, 79). Ho is also known for his deeply political works: following his belief that revolutionary art must "portray the struggle, resistance, and life of the working class", Ho's compositions include pieces such as "Blues for the Freedom Fighters" (1985), "Tomorrow is Now!, History Crying for a Change" (1985), "We Refuse to be Used and Abused" (1988), and "Turn Pain Into Power" (1990), many of which were performed by his Afro-Asian Music Ensemble (Zhang 1993, 93). These artists also turned to traditional music for inspiration and often incorporated traditional instruments, melodies/harmonies, and rhythms to their compositions, creating a distinct sound that established Asian heritage and identity. For example, Japanese American bassist Mark Izu is known to utilize features of gagaku, or Japanese court music, and plays the sho and sheng, Japanese and Chinese mouth organs, respectively. Another example is Fred Ho's operatic works such as "A Chinaman's Chance", which features elements of Chinese poetry, drama, singing, and dancing (Zhang 1993, 89, 95).

These unapologetically Asian compositions are part of a desire to create a distinct space for self-expression that would “speak directly to [the] concerns and experiences” of Asian Americans (Kajikawa 2021, 202). However, despite being perfect examples of self-expression as a method of dissent, an important function of jazz as a metaphor for democracy according to Crouch and Murray, neither Jang, Wong, nor Ho enjoy the popularity of politically expressive Black male musicians (Fellezs 20017, 72). The continued erasure of Asian American experience, the influences of avant-garde—a sub-genre considered “not jazz” by Marsalis—on Asian American jazz, and revolutionary political ideologies shared by many Asian American artists of the day are all factors that cause the invalidation of Asian American voices in jazz. Marsalis’ metaphor for jazz democracy fails to include certain voices that do not fit within normative expectations; the art form that supposedly champions individuality and self-expression within a musical conversation celebrates a too-narrow view of jazz and excludes many from being heard.

To reiterate, I do not advocate silencing dominant voices in jazz. Those already celebrated in jazz, including giants such as Miles Davis and John Coltrane, deserve to be studied and heard. Nor am I arguing that jazz is a color-blind genre that “belongs to everyone” (Fellezs 2007, 74). Jazz remains an African American art form with distinctly West African musical features and acts as a source of freedom for Black musicians, who have faced and continue to face oppression in the U.S. That being said, jazz has been “discursively shaped into a ‘multicultural’ musicking that expressively renders American assimilation and integration” (Fellezs 2007, 76) and current jazz discourse must reflect as such. To allow some the spotlight while keeping others perpetually in the shadows, especially if the distinction is based on race and gender alone, is extremely undemocratic and must be counteracted. As stated by Fellezs, “if normalizing Asian American involvement in jazz musicking is to have any value beyond an insipid color-blind democracy in action, not only

do ideas about real jazz musicians need to change but ideas about Asian Americans need to undergo a radical rethinking” (2007, 84). Though improvements have certainly been made within the last few decades, the presence of Asian Americans is still far from normalized within both jazz discourse and American politics in general. Again, if jazz is truly a metaphor for democracy that protects the rights of every individual, it must truly be *every* individual, not just a certain few.

Jen Shyu, Storytelling, and Jazz Democracy

To study how one composer uses a democratic approach to jazz, especially in the context of the intersection of the identities of “woman” and “Asian American”, I will now analyze the work of Jen Shyu, an Asian American storyteller, composer, vocalist, and multi-instrumentalist who uses her experience in jazz and traditional musical elements from a vast variety of cultures as a foundation for her creative work. Over the course of three remote interviews, I was able to gain insights into Shyu’s life and experiences. I will describe the process, interview questions, and timeline further in the appendix at the end of this paper.

Born in 1978 in Peoria, Illinois, Shyu was raised by her Taiwanese father and East Timorese mother in a predominantly white community. Shyu was a talented musician from an early age; she was classically trained in piano, violin, and ballet, and performed a portion of Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 1 with the Peoria Symphony Orchestra at age thirteen. By the time she was college-age, Shyu developed an interest in singing and attended Stanford University as a major in vocal performance and eventually opera, also developing her skills in musical theater. Her career in the jazz idiom began at Stanford when she started singing for friends’ jazz combos outside of school. Shyu’s interest in jazz grew and she continued working as a jazz vocalist after graduation instead of pursuing further classical study, citing a lack of space for storytelling:

When I was first beginning to explore my own artistic voice, there was a transition from classical to jazz. In classical music, I was just taught to be ‘good’ and that was kind of it. . . [my teachers] talked about musicality, but it was all through technical terms. There was never anything about telling my own personal stories or expressing my feelings; that was just not part of the conversation. . . musical theater was all about story and acting and lyricism, so when I was in theater and singing these songs in a context of a story with a character I can portray, I came to learn a lot more about emotional expression. Then I started getting interested in learning jazz language through my voice. When I started singing in Steve Coleman’s band, I saw what could be done through music. He was an example for me as someone who constructed his own universe, his own musical language, his rhythmic and melodic concepts. . . It’s not just about singing a song with lyrics; there could be all this other stuff involved, whether it’s about bringing in spiritual or big concepts or even scientific concepts that can be expressed through music (Personal interview, March 2, 2023).

Work with saxophonist Steve Coleman; a 2001 trip to Cuba to learn salsa, traditional Cuban, and Afro-Cuban musical styles; and a move to the San Francisco Bay Area to work with AIR artists Francis Wong and Jon Jang all contributed to Shyu’s mastery of jazz language. Her interest in her own heritage led to travels to Taiwan, Indonesia, China, East Timor, and South Korea; each trip was spent learning a traditional instrument and musical style, traditional vocal techniques, and the spoken language. Shyu now plays piano, violin, Taiwanese moon lute, Chinese stringed erhu, Japanese lute biwa, Korean zither gayageum, Korean drum soribuk, and Korean gong ggwaenggwari; she also speaks eleven languages and can sing in five more. These traditional instruments are all used in various capacities in her genre-bending compositions, supplemented by a jazz background, multilingual lyrics, a variety of vocal styles, and choreography in performance, all part of a desire to share under-represented stories, including her own.

However, Shyu was not always so connected to her own heritage. Growing up in a white-dominated community in the American Midwest meant she faced constant discrimination from her peers. Though music “was a source of freedom. . . a source of solace and refuge [and] one of the

places where [she] felt really safe and respected”, the bullying ultimately led to a disconnect from her heritage from an early age:

I didn’t think about my heritage as something to be valued. In fact, there was so much shame and resentment toward my being Asian because of the racism I faced from the kids at school. It was a kind of self-hatred I was grappling with... I didn’t even think of myself as Asian. I actually called [Asian] people ‘them’, not ‘us’ or ‘we’. There was such a desperation to escape my ‘Asianness’... I didn’t want anything to do with [my heritage] for a quite a long time. (Personal interview, February 7, 2023; April 3, 2023).

This phenomenon is not uncommon for Asian American youth, many of whom experience identity crises as they try to balance assimilation and their connections to their heritage (Ruiz et al., 2023). For Shyu, this even limited her childhood dreams—as an Asian American girl in the Midwest, she believed the only way to be on Broadway was to be in *Miss Saigon*, one of the few Broadway musicals to feature an Asian woman as the main character, a dream imposed by her white mentors.

A shift in Shyu’s perspective occurred after connecting with AIR, specifically with Francis Wong and Jon Jang. Jam sessions with Wong showed her “true freedom” and a “joy in pushing boundaries;” hanging out with Wong and Jang provided a safe space to discuss identity and the positioning of Asian Americans in jazz history, something that she was never able to explore beforehand (Personal interview, February 7, 2023). This underscores the power of spending time with and learning from people of similar backgrounds: while school and other spaces didn’t provide a safe space for experimentation and true self-expression, other Asian American musicians with similar experiences allowed Shyu to explore her identity.

Encouraged by Wong and Jang, Shyu began to develop an interest in her Taiwanese/East Timorese heritage and the cultures of other Southeast/East Asian traditions. Her trips to Indonesia from 2011 to 2014 were monumental for her musical journey:

I was struck by the music people were creating [in Indonesia] ... of course, I was mostly focusing on traditional music, but there were a lot of brilliant, creative composers and

choreographers who had training in their tradition and were creating this out-of-this-world theater/dance mixed with gamelan and shadow puppetry. It was just so fertile and creative. The thing that struck me the most, that made me reflect on how I was approaching jazz, was that it was so personal to them. It was about their families and their communities and their personal lives, and there was no shame or embarrassment in it. Nothing was too personal or too revealing, it was just simply a reflection of themselves. It was liberating in a way. That's when I turned and began to really look at my own life and focus on living, not just doing or studying. I realized, if I'm going to create art about my life, I need to live! I became a different version of myself. I wanted to tell my stories, and jazz and improvisation just felt like the best space to do it, especially combined with the storytelling elements of musical theater. I asked myself: how can I be of service to myself and others? (Personal interview, March 2, 2023)

Since then, Shyu has traveled all over Southeast/East Asia to study traditional methods of musical storytelling, all of which are used in her compositions as part of her goal to tell the under-recognized, non-Euro-American stories of the global community.

This commitment to raising under-heard, marginalized voices despite the many outside pressures and challenges is a very democratic approach to storytelling in jazz. Though Shyu is likely not whom Stanley Crouch had in mind in his writings of jazz democracy, her work checks all the boxes: she improvises, sometimes alone and sometimes with others; she has pulled herself up by the bootstraps in the face of oppression; and she is committed to the self-expression of not just her own stories but the stories of many others. One such democratic work is *Zero Grasses: Ritual for the Losses*, a 2021 album devoted to the marginalized voices of women around the world and the experience of personal loss, referencing jazz improvisational techniques, traditional Javanese music, Japanese musical storytelling (katari) with Japanese lute (biwa), East Timorese chants, and singing in five different languages. Elements of democratic self-expression in *Zero Grasses* include “Lament for Breonna Taylor”, a piece dedicated to Breonna Taylor, a young Black woman killed by police in her home in 2020, and the injustice in the destruction of Black lives in

the U.S.; “Father Slipped Into Eternal Dream”, a piece regarding the sudden death of her father in 2019 and the subsequent grief Shyu faced in the aftermath; “The Human Color”, a piece about the history of Chinese indentured servants who labored under Portuguese and Spanish colonialism; and “When I Have Power”, the lyrics of which are based on Shyu’s middle school diary entries detailing a racist encounter with one of her classmates. The political activism found in Shyu’s music is not only similar to the activism found in the music of Fred Ho, but her dedication to free self-expression despite the expectations of others is also like the boundary-challenging sub-genres of bebop and free jazz.

Shyu’s endeavor to promote less-told stories does not stop at compositions and performances, however. Outside of composing and performing, Shyu is also a teacher. Though she has given lectures and hosted workshops all over the world, she focuses on under-served areas, where she gives talks, hosts concerts and events, and even organizes community potlucks. With every performance, she also tries to do a free school performance, often in rural towns close to the city in which she performed. She is a staunch believer in providing a creative music platform for underrepresented people. One such platform is Mutual Mentorship for Musicians (M3), an organization she co-founded to “empower, elevate, normalize and give visibility to women, non-binary musicians and those of other historically underrepresented gender identities in intersection with race, sexuality, or ability” (Mutual Mentorship for Musicians, n.d.). Her work with M3 is another way to connect with the musical community while raising unheard voices and setting up a positive cycle of mentorship for those marginalized in music.

Unlike Marsalis’ work at JALC, Shyu does not try to fit the subjects of her compositions into the confines of what jazz “should” be; she promotes her subjects’ experiences truthfully. Also unlike Marsalis, Shyu has a more open-minded view of the definition of the jazz genre; in fact,

though she does consider herself a jazz musician and she works within a jazz context, she prefers not to use labels like “jazz” for her compositions entirely. She explains:

It’s really tricky to try to define things as one thing, especially when that one thing, like jazz, is so huge. There are so many things that many people are bringing into jazz and mixing with jazz to have a clear boundary in the genre... the only way I can define my music is simply ‘the music that I create’. The industry really wants us to define ourselves and to give ourselves labels, but I want to be more inclusive. If I say I’m just a jazz musician, that means I’m excluding all the other elements of my practice. I’ll talk about what I’m influenced by—music, theater, dance, jazz, classical, traditional musics—but if someone forced me to put labels on myself, sure, I’ll say that I’m a jazz musician, but I’m also a student of traditional music, an actor and theater maker, a researcher, a touring and recording artist, a dancer, a teacher. It’s a long list! I just define myself as a multi-disciplinary artist, because then it’s wide open. Beyond that point, it’s just semantics. (Personal interview, April 3, 2023)

Shyu’s approach to defining jazz is far more progressive than the approach Marsalis takes in his work, one that allows for more space for self-expression while also recognizing the inequities of jazz history. While I cannot fault Marsalis’s dedication to preserving the jazz tradition and the classic jazz greats, the pursuit of raising under-recognized voices exactly as they are—as Shyu is doing—is to me a more democratic endeavor than trying to fit every individual perspective into an extremely specific ideal.

Conclusion

Marsalis’s idea of jazz democracy is theoretically “color-blind”—in other words, free for all to participate in equally, no matter race, gender, or other identity—but a deeper look into the realities of jazz practices reveals the cracks in this argument. While the genre promotes ideals of resistance, individual self-expression, and cooperation, jazz is still missing one crucial element of democracy: equity. Jazz welcomes all voices in theory, but an analysis of which voices are

elevated—and which are ignored entirely—shows that not every participant stands on equal ground. This is also true for the United States as a whole, as discussed by Givan (2021, 65):

America as an exemplary democracy... is an idealized misconception belied by the demonstrably inegalitarian system of government that the nation's staunchly antidemocratic founders intentionally designed. With its Constitution enabling the legal subjugation of certain social groups (e.g., nonwhites and women) and expressly mandating the overrepresentation of select minority interests (e.g., residents of relatively underpopulated states), the United States has for its entire history been characterized by gross political inequities and injustices.

While in theory, all modern-day Americans have equal rights, women and people of color continue to face injustices that prevent them from success, much less recognition. The racist and sexist legacies of the nation and its people remain. If jazz is truly a metaphor for American democracy, then it includes all its flaws, not just its strengths. The only difference between jazz and the U.S. is that in jazz, both Black and white men have power. Despite the contributions that women and non-Black people of color have made to jazz all throughout its history, most remain forgotten, cast aside.

I do not claim to have “solved” sexism and racism in jazz by pointing out the flaws in the democratic jazz model, nor do I necessarily think democracy is the only path forward. Though I do not offer a deep exploration of other political models that may suit jazz and jazz improvisation better, such as anarchy (Ralph 2002, 130), in this paper, the pursuit of a less flawed system may be worthwhile and should be explored further, especially given the systemically ingrained issues found in American democracy (Givan 2021, 65). At the same time, I do not believe that jazz as a metaphor for democracy is so flawed that the whole idea must be scrapped entirely, though this statement is subjective. The pursuit of an equitable democracy that simultaneously acknowledges its flaws and makes amends to those the system has wronged is a noble one, still worth pursuing.

That being said, jazz has a long way to go before it can be considered a democracy both in its ideals and in practice.

The power imbalances in jazz have certainly improved over the last few decades, as they have in the U.S. itself. Though the jazz field remains male-dominated, the number of women present in jazz scenes across the country has increased significantly and Asian Americans, especially through AIR, continue creating music spaces for themselves. However, jazz remains far from achieving its democratic ideals. If jazz is to be truly democratic, where, as Stanley Crouch stated so elegantly, those who “cut the mustard” are recognized “no matter what class or sex or religion or shape or height,” the historic discrimination of certain demographics in jazz must be recognized and abolished. The voices of those less heard must be elevated to a point where their self-expression is recognized as legitimate artistic work; those with the privilege of already being recognized must not only allow for a space for those less heard, but also must be willing to actively listen. If all stories are worth telling and all stories deserve to be heard, then it truly must be *all voices*. Only then will jazz reach its true potential as a metaphor for democracy.

Appendix: Interview Methods and Timeline

I first reached out to Jen Shyu on March 26, 2022, through the contact form on her website jenshyu.com to tell her about my thesis (then proposal) and ask for an interview. Shyu responded to me April 16, 2022, to tell me she was not able to do any interviews for the time being, but she normally charges \$200 per hour of interview if I wanted to reach out again in the future. After finishing my proposal, I reached out to Shyu again on September 12, 2022, to ask again for an interview. This time, Shyu accepted my request. Unable to pay the hourly rate out of pocket, I applied for a grant through the UVM office of Fellowships, Opportunities, & Undergraduate Research (FOUR) in January 2023. I was awarded \$600 for a series of three research interviews with Shyu. To prepare for the interviews, I read a variety of articles on Shyu's work, including interviews and reviews, and listened to several other interviews on radio shows and podcasts. On February 7, 2023, I conducted my first interview with Shyu. Though Shyu is based in New York, and I am based in Vermont, we were able to meet over Zoom. I asked the following questions:

- 1) Your compositions contain elements of traditional music cultures from all over Asia, drawing from your Taiwanese and East Timorese heritage but also from Korean, Indonesian, Javanese, and other cultures. Why go so far? What is your motivation for studying such a wide variety of cultures?
- 2) As someone who draws a lot from a variety of cultural materials, where is the line between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation?
- 3) Other Asian American jazz composers, such as Fred Ho, have used their art as a vehicle for protest and political activism. Still other Asian American jazz composers, such as Francis Wong, prefer to use their art more as a vehicle for self-expression through spirituality, not so much outright political dissent. Where do you lie on this spectrum?

After a month of additional research and writing, I conducted my second interview on March 2, 2023, again over Zoom. I asked the following questions:

- 1) Why use jazz as the primary vehicle for self-expression? What is it about jazz that goes so well with your musical endeavors?
- 2) One common theme of discourse all through jazz history has been the balance between music that is easily digestible and commercialized for audiences and/or jazz critics; versus “pure” self-expression that may not be as popular with mainstream audiences and thus makes less money. In the modern world of heavily commercialized music where streaming services like Spotify are more popular than CDs, how do you find that balance?
- 3) My research has shown me that many people, like Wynton Marsalis, care a lot about what jazz is and isn’t. Do you consider your work jazz? If yes, what do you think of people who might say, “that’s not jazz!” to your work? What do you think of people who might call your music “world music” or “fusion”?

The third and final interview was held April 3, 2023, again over Zoom. I asked the following questions:

- 1) If you do not consider your music “jazz”, then how do you think of it? Do you think such labels are necessary?
- 2) In your excerpt from Cicily Janus’s *The New Face of Jazz*, you wrote that you are doing the work you do now because your mentors Steve Coleman and Francis Wong encouraged you to go into your roots. This was obviously very meaningful for you, but for Korean composers like Isang Yun, their European mentors’ encouragement to express their Korean identities seemed like a prerequisite for their music to be recognized in the Western music world as non-Euro-American works. There was an expectation for “Koreanness” even if

the composer was more familiar with western classical music than Korean traditional music. What is the difference there? As a mentor, how do you encourage students without that pressure and expectation?

- 3) What is the importance of recognizing intersectionality and how does that appear in your music?
- 4) While racism and sexism are still big issues in jazz and otherwise, progress has been made. What progress has been made and what progress has yet to be made?

All three interviews were recorded for the sake of accuracy in my writing.

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