

## Book Review

### ***Jazz Consciousness: Music, Race and Humanity***

Paul Austerlitz  
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260 pages

#### **Review by David Stacey, Department of English, Humboldt State University, Arcata, California.**

The good news about jazz is that it lives! It is vigorously fit and developing in the ways it has always grown: musicians are still creatively synthesizing different kinds of music from various musical and cultural sources. The good news about *Jazz Consciousness: Music, Race and Humanity* is that it does not merely remind us that jazz is intensely alive; it furthers our understanding of its dynamic force via a well-informed insistence that the music is now, and always has been, Pan-African, Pan-American, and transnational. It thereby complicates, corrects, and adds to the traditional New Orleans-to-Chicago-to-New York narrative of origin and development. And it does this not only by pointing out the manifold musical and cultural connections among the Americas, Europe, and Africa, but also by concretizing and detailing these constitutive linkages with remarkable original research powered by a well-conceived and compelling set of arguments.

Austerlitz suggests a pervasive sense of doubleness accounts for a broad spirit of inclusiveness in jazz. The notion of double consciousness can be traced to the oft-cited work of W.E.B. Du Bois who, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, refers to “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings” at the heart of African American identity (16-17). This sense of doubleness is reflected in American society by the fact that African Americans have made, and continue to make, major contributions to American (and, indeed, world) culture, yet remain largely marginalized socio-economically. Austerlitz suggests this duality has informed jazz consciousness in crucial ways, articulating “simultaneous links to the African American in-group and the mainstream United States” (186). Austerlitz is uniquely situated to examine the double (or, perhaps more correctly, *multiple*) forms of consciousness in jazz around the world. Born in Finland and raised in New York, Austerlitz is a musician and scholar with interests in Latin American music (especially Dominican *meringue*); bebop, mainstream and free forms of American jazz; and European (especially Finnish) jazz.

The first chapter, “Jazz Consciousness in the United States,” lays the theoretical framework for the book, developing the implications of double consciousness for jazz and examining the often uneasy relationship(s) between jazz music and musicians and the United States. Each of the five remaining chapters addresses issues related to the book’s subtitle, *Music, Race, and Humanity*, focusing in particular on trans- and inter-cultural exchanges involving jazz. Throughout, Austerlitz reminds us that “discourse about music cannot be separated from unequal power relations that form the web of social life” (5). He takes care to differentiate his vision of jazz from the Ellison-Murray-Crouch-Marsalis-Burns “neo-classical” axis of thought. “While some critics, however, might laud jazz’s aesthetic ‘integration’ as an epitome of ‘American democracy,’” he explains, “I argue that the inclusiveness of jazz is *atypical* of dominant trends in the United States, that it developed as a *counterforce* to racial polarization” (20).

Each subsequent chapter draws on Austerlitz’s energetic and extensive ethnographic field research. Chapter two, “Kente Cloth to Jazz: A Matrix of Sound,” explores the ambiguities of rhythm-*and*-melody (melo-rhythm) in our collaborative experiences of music. Austerlitz notes the visual similarity between the “Time Unit Box Notation System” (developed by Koetting and Harland in order to visually represent African music) and kente cloth, the narrow strip textiles sewn in square patterns that are found in several West African cultures. Austerlitz concludes that kente notation reveals “visual equivalents of Afro-diasporic musics [. . .] [because] its colors synesthetically correlate[e] with sonority to underscore the melodic color of rhythm” (27-29). The author argues convincingly that African influence upon American jazz rhythm is melodic as well as single-pitched, profoundly collaborative, somatic, tied to dance, and finally, a universally felt aspect of human experience.

Chapter two, “Machito and Mario Bauzá: Latin Jazz in the U.S. Mainstream,” draws upon an impressive body of investigative research. In this chapter, Austerlitz inverts the conventional narrative concerning the ways in which Cuban music affected American jazz. Pulling together a mass of newly discovered details

about the life of Mario Bauzá and Machito, the musical director and leader, respectively, of the seminal band Machito and his Afro-Cubans, he shows both men to be powerful agents of a crucial mixture of elements including *Santería*, European classical musical training, *son* and other Cuban dance traditions. This syncretic mix of styles was then channeled into a complex set of back-and-forth counter-influences between Cuban and African American musicians and cultures including the “divergent development of race relations in both countries” (45); European-ized white Cubans emulating black *morés* and artifacts as national symbols (51); and the seemingly bottomless profundities of *clavé* rhythms. Interestingly, relatively little of this cross-cultural influence came *directly* from Cuba to the USA. Machito and especially Bauzá, brought mambo and other styles of Latin dance music to New York city, and *from there* pushed the “Latin tinge,” so to speak.

Chapter four examines intersections between jazz and musics of the Dominican Republic, convincingly outlining the ways in which *meringue*-jazz hybrids are used to negotiate cultural status among conflicting European and North American identifications. Similarly in chapter five, Austerlitz chronicles the ways in which Finnish jazz fans remake their anxiety about American influence into a “homegrown aesthetic of ‘rhythm music’” (155).

This is all good stuff, but perhaps the best of all is the final chapter, “My Teacher Is the Human Heart: The Human Music of Milford Graves” (by Graves, “as told to Paul Austerlitz”). Holistic, mystic, Walt Whitman-esque in his huge tastes and interests as well as in the magnificent breadth of his experiences and sensibilities, Graves has taught himself a dizzying array of skills, concepts, vocations, and traditions, parlaying those efforts into various careers as a veterinarian, college professor, acupuncturist, musician and more. He speaks of learning about music from animals. He discusses his scientific and musical research into the human heart, which involves recording and analyzing the cardiac rhythms of everyone he knows, including Austerlitz. In many ways, Graves is the living embodiment of the principles of creative synthesis and jazz multi-consciousness so prized by Austerlitz, and fans of the music in general.

*Jazz Consciousness: Music, Race and Humanity* is a groundbreaking study that deserves an important place alongside other recent works in the emergent fields of the new jazz studies and critical improvisation studies. After reading the book, I was left with the question: how can we truly know that jazz matters? How can we know that it instills a mind-set, as Austerlitz claims, that persists after the music has stopped, a mind-set that predisposes listeners to specifically-inclined social actions that advance the ideals of freedom, justice, and equality? My intent here is not to advocate cynical detachment or to otherwise dispute Austerlitz’s idealism which I think is genuinely laudable. Rather, it is to remind ourselves of the importance of examining the specific ways in which “jazz consciousness” brings about positive social change. Austerlitz’s work highlights the need for scholars of improvisation to investigate more strenuously how and when music is affective in a positive way. If we are to move beyond formalist analysis into a consideration of the social functions of the music, then rhetorical and sociological studies of “attitude”—particularly those that develop out of Kenneth Burke’s “dramatistic” notions of how “attitude” is more a social affect than an interiorized cognitive aspect of mind—might further Austerlitz’s admittedly utopian hypotheses about the mind-set that remains after the music is over.

#### **Work Cited**

Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. 1903. Greenwich: Fawcett P, 1961.