

**FROM PITTSBURGH TO THE PERSHING: ORCHESTRATION, INTERACTION,
AND INFLUENCE IN THE EARLY WORK OF AHMAD JAMAL**

by

Michael Paul Mackey

Bachelor of Science, Duquesne University, 2003

Master of Music, Duquesne University, 2009

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This dissertation was presented

by

Michael Paul Mackey

It was defended on

March 31, 2017

and approved by

Amy Williams, Associate Professor, Music

Deane L. Root, Professor, Music

Geri Allen, Associate Professor, Music

Laurence Glasco, Associate Professor, History

Dissertation Advisor: Michael Heller, Assistant Professor, Music

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Michael Paul Mackey, PhD

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Despite over sixty years of international recognition and the enduring respect of his fellow musicians, pianist Ahmad Jamal's omission from jazz discourse is most curious. Stanley Crouch hailed Jamal as second only to Charlie Parker as the most influential individual on the development of jazz after 1945. While Jamal was still a teenager in Pittsburgh, the eminent Art Tatum deemed him a "coming great." After establishing himself as one of Chicago's leading pianists during the 1950s, his album *But Not for Me: Live at the Pershing* (1958) remained on *Billboard's* album chart for 107 weeks and has become one of the best-selling jazz albums of all-time. However, detractors of Jamal continually questioned his commercial success and claimed that his use of space, light touch, and emphasis on ensemble balance point to a lack of virtuosity. Yet these were the very qualities that first attracted the attention of Miles Davis, who once claimed "all my inspiration today comes from the Chicago pianist Ahmad Jamal."

This dissertation engages Jamal's life and musical output from several perspectives. Jamal's biographic narrative is constructed by tracing his youth and musical development in Pittsburgh through the reception of his highly-influential album, *At the Pershing*, with particular attention to socio-cultural movements accompanying the historical context. Transcribed recordings and interviews are used to examine the extent of Jamal's conceptual influence on Davis and his sidemen, particularly in how Jamal's trios of the early 1950s affected the repertoire, phrasing, groove, and overall aesthetic of Davis's own output. Drawing from Ingrid Monson's theory of intermusicality, analysis of Jamal's trio recordings reveals practices of orchestration and

interaction that challenge conventional notions of collaborative improvisation. Ultimately, this dissertation initiates dialogue on Pittsburgh's distinguished legacy of jazz pianists and on the applicability of Jamal's orchestrational concepts in jazz performance pedagogy.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ahmad Jamal's presence within jazz literature is scant at best. The exclusion of the pianist is particularly curious, especially when one considers the extraordinary successes he earned throughout his career. After all, this is a figure who received such honors as National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Jazz Master, Kennedy Center Legend, Yale University Duke Ellington Fellow, *Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* by the French Culture Minister, and most recently Doctor of Music, Honoris Causa, from the New England Conservatory of Music.¹ While Jamal was still a teenager, the eminent Art Tatum deemed him a "coming great."² Throughout the 1950s, Miles Davis repeatedly expressed his admiration for Jamal, at one point asserting, "all my inspiration today comes from the Chicago pianist Ahmad Jamal."³

Jamal's breakout album *At the Pershing: But Not for Me* (1958) remained on *Billboard's* album chart for 107 weeks, a significant achievement for an instrumental jazz album at a time when vocal LPs dominated record sales. *At the Pershing* has since become one of the best-selling jazz albums of all-time.⁴ Notwithstanding, detractors of Jamal continually criticized his

¹ Ahmad Jamal, "Biography," Official Website, (Accessed February 12, 2017). <http://ahmadjamal.com>.

² Stanley Crouch, *Considering Genius*, (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2006), 95.

³ Jack Chambers, *Milestones: The Music and Times of Miles Davis*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 201. Originally quoted in Leonard Feather, Liner notes, Cannonball Adderley, *Somethin' Else*, (Hackensack, NJ: Blue Note Records, 1958).

⁴ Nadine Cohodas, *Spinning Blues into Gold: The Chess Brothers and the Legendary Chess Records*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 154.

commercial successes, labeling him a “cocktail pianist” in contrast to more serious proponents of the music. With bassist Israel Crosby and drummer Vernel Fournier, the personnel on the *Pershing* album was certainly deceptive; the three effectively masked rigorous musicianship within an infectious rhythmic groove that appealed to audiences. Though his trio produced an aesthetically-pleasing product, Jamal’s ability to maintain musical inventiveness helped him earn the respect of fellow musicians, including Tatum and Davis. Davis’s regard for Jamal in particular became so well-known that the few jazz historical texts that actually cite Jamal do so simply because of his association with Davis. If not for Davis’s reiterated admirations, Jamal’s placement within the historical jazz narrative would likely be further obscured.

The attention awarded Jamal as a potential influence on a legend such as Davis also bred a considerable amount of disdain among his critics, who mostly cast off Jamal as an unlikely source from which Davis chose to borrow. In *Jazz Masters of the Fifties*, for instance, author Joe Goldberg attributes any attention awarded the pianist as a direct result of Davis’s overt veneration. Goldberg argues that Jamal should not be considered Davis’s “musical equal” simply because Davis happened to derive “valuable ideas” from his music, contesting that higher-level musicians “invariably enrich what they borrow.”⁵ Similarly, during his time as an album reviewer for *Down Beat*, Martin Williams made no effort to hide his disdain for Jamal. He dismissed the notion that Jamal had some profound influence on an “important jazzman” such as Davis, attributing the latter as proof that “good art can be influenced by bad.”⁶ Williams believed that Davis merely responded favorably to Jamal’s “interesting and very contemporary harmonic voicings” and the “impeccably accurate rhythmic pulse” provided by Jamal’s bassist Israel Crosby and drummer Vernel Fournier.

⁵ Joe Goldberg, *Jazz Masters of the Fifties*, First edition, 1965, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1980), 74.

⁶ Martin Williams, *Jazz Changes*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 281.

Although Davis and Jamal shared interests in “openness of melody, space, and fleeting silence,” Williams contested that while Davis’s use of these qualities result in “haunting lyric economy,” Jamal’s “seem a kind of crowd-titillating stunt work.”⁷

While critics such as Goldberg, Williams, and (for a time) Hentoff refused to acknowledge Jamal as a significant figure simply on Davis’s commendation, most Miles Davis scholars seem to echo biographer Jack Chambers’s belief that “Jamal would become Davis’s final formative influence in the line from Elwood Buchanan through Freddie Webster and Dizzy Gillespie to Gil Evans and the other members of his 55th Street Salon.”⁸ According to Chambers, “No other individual had exercised so decisive an effect on what Davis played since his early explorations of the Gillespie-Parker bebop repertoire.”⁹ Chambers attributes his conclusions to the fact that Davis not only borrowed many tunes from Jamal’s repertoire, but also appropriated his treatment of them particularly in terms of melodic understatement and rhythmic lightness.

In fact, apart from record reviews and magazine interviews, the vast majority of references to Jamal reside within publications on Davis. Over the fifty-plus decades of Jamal’s career, scores of other jazz musicians have also cited Jamal as a formative influence, including Keith Jarrett, Jack DeJohnette, Randy Weston, and Cannonball Adderley. In other instances, musicians may not have overtly voiced their admiration or emulation of Jamal, but comparative analysis of recorded material proves otherwise, as is the case with pianist Red Garland.

At the writing of this study, Jamal is 87 years of age and only semi-retired. He continues to release new recordings and maintain a relatively active schedule of performances around the world. Apart from two comparative essays on jazz piano improvisatory techniques, current

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Chambers, *Milestones*, 190.

⁹ Ibid., 201.

published material on Jamal remains mostly in the hands of newspaper and magazine journalists, many of whom print their stories to announce a forthcoming performance or album release.¹⁰ Because of Jamal's accomplishments and enduring respect among musicians, there is no need to validate his illustrious career or his lasting impact, despite the scarcity of his name in the jazz narrative. It would be of greater benefit to detail his life, musical development, career, and influence within a historical, cultural, and musical framework. In an effort to contextualize Jamal's placement within jazz discourse, I begin with a review of his intriguing relationship to the canon and jazz literature.

1.1 AHMAD JAMAL AND THE CANON

In a 1989 essay on Jamal, writer and critic Stanley Crouch asserts, "Though no musician since 1945 has dominated the jazz scene with quite the overwhelming impact of Charlie Parker, it is also true that no single artist after the great alto saxophonist has been more important to the development of fresh form in jazz than Ahmad Jamal."¹¹ Crouch's essay stands apart from all other critical assessments of Jamal in that he not only questions Jamal's omission from the canon, but

¹⁰ Vijay Iyer, "Embodied Mind, Situated Cognition, and Expressive Microtiming" in *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 19, no. 3 (Spring 2002): 387-414, University of California Press, (Accessed April 3, 2013),

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/mp.2002.19.3.387>; Garth Alper, "'What is This Thing Called Love?' as Conceptualized by Nine Jazz Pianists" in *Jazz Perspectives* 5, no. 2 (August 2011): 155-134, (Accessed February 12, 2017), DOI: 10.1080/17494060.2011.637679.

¹¹ The essay is referenced here as part of a 2006 compilation of Crouch's writings. See Crouch, *Considering Genius*, 95-99.

elevates him to position topped only by Charlie Parker. The overwhelming surprise of his assertion comes in light of the relative absence of Jamal in jazz discourse.

In preparation of this project, I scoured through dozens of jazz history textbooks in search of any detail pertaining to Jamal's life, music, and career. Twenty of those with published editions covering the past three decades are considered here as a means to approximate Jamal's current place in the canonical narrative. Of twenty, ten texts omit Jamal altogether, while five others mention Jamal solely as a footnote in sections devoted to Davis. Two popular college textbooks – Scott DeVeaux's and Gary Giddins's *Jazz* (2015) and Mark C. Gridley's *Jazz Styles* (2009) – use Jamal's name in contextualizing other musicians, but not Davis. DeVeaux and Giddins indicate that bassist Israel Crosby was part of the Ahmad Jamal Trio, but only include Jamal as an influence on current jazz pianist Vijay Iyer. While the authors briefly recognize Frank Sinatra's influence on Davis, they fail to note Jamal's.¹² In Gridley's text, Jamal functions solely as a stylistic link between Garner and Garland.¹³

Ultimately, only three of the reviewed texts include Jamal as a significant contributor of jazz. Nathan Davis offers a brief tribute to Jamal in a chapter on Pittsburgh Jazz in his sixth edition of *Writings in Jazz* (2006).¹⁴ However, in Davis's preceding edition, the Pittsburgh chapter does not exist, nor does any mention of Jamal. In contrast to all other textbooks reviewed here, Alyn Shipton (2007) and Ted Gioia (2011) offer multi-page biographies of Jamal, which include details of his recordings and stylistic conceptions. Though Shipton and Gioia cite Jamal as a primary

¹² Scott DeVeaux and Gary Giddins, *Jazz*, Second Edition, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015).

¹³ Mark C. Gridley, *Jazz Styles: History and Analysis*, Eleventh Edition, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009).

¹⁴ Nathan Davis, *Writings in Jazz*, Sixth Edition, (Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing, 2003).

influence on Davis, the connection between the two musicians does not dominate their narratives, thereby presenting the individuality of Jamal's contributions and successes.¹⁵

Of course, attempting to cover the entire history of jazz is unto itself problematic. In "Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography," Scott DeVeaux observes that the promulgation of these texts directly correlated to an increase in college survey courses in jazz history during the latter half of the Twentieth Century.¹⁶ Despite the complexities of style, expression, and social origins of the music, "jazz is presented as a coherent whole, and its history as a skillfully contrived and easily comprehended narrative... But from textbook to textbook, there is substantive agreement on the defining features of each style, the pantheon of great innovators, and the canon of recorded masterpieces."¹⁷ DeVeaux argues that this conventional narrative of jazz history, developed for the sake of pedagogical unity, thus becomes "a simplification that begs as many questions as it answers."¹⁸

It is certainly conceivable that authors simply avoided Jamal (even in the context of Davis or Garland) because of the longstanding debates regarding the pianist's significance. Even at what could be considered the peak of Jamal's career in the late 1950s, critics questioned his contributions to the development of jazz. Commenting on the matter in 1956, Nat Hentoff wrote, "There remains sharp critical controversy about Jamal, and even though more musicians than critics are beguiled by him, there is extensive debate about his place and value in jazz."¹⁹ By this

¹⁵ Alyn Shipton, *A New History of Jazz*, Second Edition, (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007); Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz*, Second Edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁶ Scott DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography" in *Black American Literature Forum* 25, no. 3 (Autumn 1991): 525-560, (Accessed March 3, 2012), DOI: 10.2307/3041812.

¹⁷ DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition," 525.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 526.

¹⁹ Nat Hentoff, Liner Notes, *The Piano Scene of Ahmad Jamal* (Epic LN 3631, 1956).

point, Jamal had already earned the respect of Davis and his associates, producer John Hammond, and countless other Pittsburgh, Chicago, and New York musicians, but early denunciations of “cocktail pianist” (even by Hentoff) plagued the better part of his career. Undoubtedly, Pittsburgh’s rich history of virtuosic pianists, which boasts such luminaries as Earl Hines, Billy Strayhorn, Mary Lou Williams, Erroll Garner, and Dodo Marmarosa, among others, cast a shadow over any considerations of Jamal’s greatness.

Crouch believes that most critics were preoccupied with determining Jamal’s distinctiveness at the piano in the line of his predecessors and contemporaries, rather than his significance as a conceptualist. He denounces the inability of critics to perceive more than literal emulation alone in Jamal’s offerings to jazz, thereby neglecting the artist’s most substantial contributions of conceptual nature. Crouch puts Jamal within the lineage of virtuosic Pittsburgh pianists, but comparatively-speaking considers Jamal as a conceptualist to be “in another line altogether.”²⁰ He therefore offers an alternative to the historical narrative by citing Jamal’s stylistic distinctiveness as indicative of conceptualizations that extend beyond pianistic ability alone and therefore the neatly-constructed lineage of pianists:

Jamal must be listened to as one of the pianists whose work had significance far beyond his vision of the keyboard. Jamal has to be considered along with Jelly Roll Morton, Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington, Art Tatum, Count Basie, Thelonious Monk, Horace Silver, and John Lewis, all thinkers whose wrestling with form and content influenced the shape and the texture of the music and whose ensembles were models of their musical visions.²¹

Crouch argues that Jamal’s influence in jazz was over-looked by those seeking patterns of direct emulation, whereas Jamal’s contributions have been more conceptual in nature. Morton and Tatum

²⁰ Crouch, *Considering Genius*, 95.

²¹ *Ibid.*

excluded, Crouch considers Jamal among a list of pianists who were often know more for their compositional and bandleading skills than pianistic technique – Henderson, Ellington, Basie, etc. By paralleling Jamal with Monk, whose recognition as an architect of bebop endures despite longstanding questions of his pianistic abilities, Crouch denotes conceptual and performative abilities as mutually exclusive:

Jamal, like Monk, had ideas that could function free of the specific ways in which he applied them, meaning that once one understood the concept it wasn't necessary to ape his manner of execution.²²

In separating Jamal's conceptions from his application of them, Crouch effectively opens a line of analysis for considering Davis's appropriation of Jamal. As examined in Chapter 4 of this study, while Davis's pianist Red Garland literally emulates Jamal's pianistic techniques, Davis loosely appropriates Jamal's concepts of space, note economy, and light-touch in his trumpet-playing and utilizes Jamal's approach to repertoire selection and ensemble dynamic as a bandleader.

As a whole, Crouch's essay cites dozens of specific musical qualities that he deems to be not only characteristic of Jamal's leadership and performance practices, but indicative of his genius. He attributes Jamal's ability to fully realize his musical ideals to the pianist's roots in the jazz tradition, just as "all true innovators." In describing Jamal as a genius within the jazz tradition, Crouch implies parallels to others in the pantheon of jazz figures, pianist or otherwise – Armstrong, Ellington, Basie, Tatum, Garner, Parker, Gillespie, Davis, et al.

According to DeVeaux, writers such as Crouch invoke the "jazz tradition" to reify the music across varying styles and eras, into an organic relationship:

The essence of jazz, in other words, lies not in any one style, or any one cultural or historical context, but in that which links all these things together into a seamless continuum. Jazz is what it is because

²² Crouch, *Considering Genius*, 95. As discussed in Chapter 5, Jamal's technique similarly came into question, as some critics viewed his use of space as representative of pianistic incompetence.

it is a culmination of all that has come before. Without the sense of depth that only a narrative can provide, jazz would be literally rootless...²³

DeVeaux asserts that in the continuity of this type of narrative construction, jazz is depicted with distinction and elevated as America's indigenous art form, thereby separating itself from other popular genres. But as DeVeaux warns, invoking "jazz tradition" in jazz historiography risks imposing an overarching narrative that forces out other possible interpretations of any music classified as jazz.²⁴

Crouch attempts to fight the dismissals that have kept Jamal out of the narrative by proving his worth as a conceptualist, though his alternative still favors a linear approach. To support his central thesis of Jamal as heir to Parker's throne, Crouch concludes his essay by inserting Jamal directly into linear narratives, drawing lines of influence through pianists (Garland, Bill Evans, Herbie Hancock, McCoy Tyner, and Keith Jarrett), pianist/singer Betty Carter, late-career Miles Davis, and even trumpeter Wynton Marsalis. Finally, he posits that because Jamal "produced all of these ideas between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-five proves that this bandleader is one of the most gifted in the history of this music."²⁵

Crouch's assessment is certainly not unjustified; as will be examined in Chapter 3, Jamal accomplished tremendous feats in his inaugural trios as leader, pianist, and innovator. Despite Crouch's inherent critique of the canon and call for canonical revision, he cogently details the aspects of Jamal's conceptions that first garnered the attention and lasting-respect of other jazz musicians. For the sake of this study, Crouch's designation of Jamal as a conceptualist is used as

²³ DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition," 530.

²⁴ Ibid, 531.

²⁵ Crouch, *Considering Genius*, 99.

a point of departure for highlighting the latter's application of arranging, orchestration, and improvisation practices as both bandleader and pianist.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

When I originally decided to make Ahmad Jamal the focal point of my dissertation research, I admittedly did so first and foremost as a life-long Pittsburgher and pianist. As children of Irish and Southern Italian immigrants that settled in Pittsburgh's city center, my parents and their families hailed from the same type of urban, racially-integrated neighborhoods as the East Liberty of Jamal's youth. I was particularly close to my late Italian-American grandfather, Dominic Scacchitti, whose early music training began with cornet lessons from an uncle and was developed in his church's brass band that played for parades, holy day festivities, and social events. Like Jamal, he was working professional jobs as an adolescent and often shared with me his stories of playing throughout the city with fellow Italian-American musicians, such as Johnny Costa and Sammy Nestico, and taking the railcar to the Hill District to see Duke Ellington and his orchestra.

Even as a student of jazz piano, I had very little knowledge of Jamal, other than the fact that he was born in Pittsburgh and became a legendary jazz pianist. As is common among collegiate jazz programs, my formal jazz piano studies favored jazz players within the canon, specifically Bill Evans and Chick Corea, whose performance practices have long been the focus of transcription and analysis in academic settings. Therefore, I began rifling through jazz history textbooks, jazz encyclopedias and companions, and current scholarship in the emerging field of jazz studies, hoping to find material akin to what would expect for a contemporary of Red Garland,

Bill Evans, and Oscar Peterson. Instead, I found a few comments noting any one of the following points: the *Pershing* recording, “space,” or his suspected influence on Miles Davis. With further digging, the research process turned up a sporadic array of materials in various print and interview sources provided by historians, biographers, critics, journalists, and musicians.

Davis publications offered by far the most material on Jamal’s career and musical offerings. Each one – Jack Chambers, Ian Carr, Richard Cook, Paul Maher, Jr. and Michael Dorr, Davis’s autobiography with Quincy Troup, and Steve Lajoie’s analysis of the Gil Evans collaborations – integrated Jamal into Davis’s narrative.²⁶ Together, these sources became a springboard for locating historical newspapers and archived magazines. From there, I sought out additional print sources in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Defender*, *Jet Magazine*, *Variety*, *Billboard*, and *Down Beat* for locating key events, public announcements, and performance critiques in Jamal’s career, spanning his youth in Pittsburgh through the reception of his 1958 album *At the Pershing*.

Whenever possible, I located and utilized original sources for quotes and analysis, whether often cited Miles Davis and Cannonball Adderley quotes from the *Jazz Review* or Martin Williams’s *Pershing* album review in *Down Beat*.²⁷ Archived interviews of Jamal and his sidemen

²⁶ Jack Chambers, *Milestones: The Music and Times of Miles Davis*, (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1998); Ian Carr, *Miles Davis: The Definitive Biography*, (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1998); Richard Cook, *It’s About That Time: Miles Davis On and Off Record*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Paul Maher, Jr. and Michael K. Dorr, *Miles on Miles: Interviews and Encounters with Miles Davis*, (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2009); Miles Davis and Quincy Troupe, *Miles: The Autobiography*, (New York: Touchstone, 1989); Steve Lajoie, *An Analysis of Selected Gil Evans Works: Gil Evans and Miles Davis, 1957-1962*, (Advance Music, 2003).

²⁷ Nat Hentoff, “An Afternoon with Miles Davis,” *The Jazz Review* 1, no. 2 (December 1958); Jullian “Cannonball” Adderley, “Reviews: Recordings” of Ahmad Jamal Argo LP-636 in *The Jazz Review* 2, no. 2 (February 1959); Martin Williams, “Jazz Album Reviews: Ahmad Jamal” in

were found in multiple sources: printed publications, online transcripts of radio broadcasts, album liner notes, and oral history projects from National Public Radio (NPR), National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), and African-American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh (AAJPSP). My personal interviews with Dr. Nelson Harrison, a Basie Orchestra alumnus and life-long Pittsburgh jazz musician, were indispensable for acquiring information on Sam Johnson. Johnson, the virtually-unknown pianist of the Four Strings prior to Jamal, was also Jamal's childhood mentor and friend. With access to the Carnegie Library's archives of *Pittsburgh Courier* photographer Charles "Teenie" Harris, period photographs offer visual representations of Jamal's childhood and the Pittsburgh of his youth.

Critics Stanley Crouch, Martin Williams, and Whitney Balliett offer their opinions of Jamal and his music in reprinted essays, while texts by Leonard Feather, Len Lyons, and Joe Goldberg focus on comparing Jamal to his contemporaries.²⁸ Several publications consider Jamal's recordings as part of a larger music analysis discourse, including Vijay Iyer's article on micro-timing in jazz, Garth Alper's comparison of pianists' interpretations of "What Is This Thing Called Love?," Jonathan Campbell's analysis of improvisations for pedagogical applications, and Ben Dockery's book on the jazz piano trio format.²⁹ In recent years, two European scholars focused

Down Beat 25, no. 19 (September 18, 1958), 38-39.

²⁸ Stanley Crouch, *Considering Genius*, (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2006); Martin Williams, *Jazz Changes*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Whitney Balliett, *The Sound of Surprise*, (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1978); Leonard Feather, *The Book of Jazz: From Then 'till Now: A Guide to the Entire Field*, (New York: Horizon Press, 1965); Len Lyons, *The Great Pianists: Speaking of Their Lives and Music*, (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1983); Joe Goldberg, *Jazz Masters of the Fifties*, First edition, 1965, (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1980).

²⁹ Vijay Iyer, "Embodied Mind, Situated Cognition, and Expressive Microtiming" in *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 19, no. 3 (Spring 2002): 387-414, University of California Press, (Accessed April 3, 2013), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/mp.2002.19.3.387>; Garth Alper, "'What is This Thing Called Love?' as Conceptualized by Nine Jazz Pianists" in *Jazz Perspectives*, vol. 5, no. 2

their attention on Jamal: Birgit Zach's dissertation analyzes the harmonic structures of Jamal's compositions and Marta Chludilová's Bachelor's thesis considers the influence of Jamal on Hip-Hop in the U.S.³⁰

Based on the state of extant research on Jamal, I ultimately decided to produce a document that was both historical and analytical. With the aforementioned source material, I pieced together Jamal's biographical narrative within the sociocultural context of the people and places around him, from birth through the reception of his trio's highly-praised album *At the Pershing: But Not for Me* in 1958. Within that scope, I focused on aspects of community (family, teachers, fellow musicians, spirituality), music (pedagogy, ensembles, conceptual development, characteristic features), and career (union business, contracts, recording sessions, album reception). In this regard, I aim to fill a sorely-missed void in historical jazz research.

Two specific points of the biographical narrative necessitated scholarly inquiry with musical analysis: Jamal's influence on Davis and performance practice in the Ahmad Jamal Trio. With the former, I qualify Davis's admiration of Jamal by considering archived interview transcripts of Davis and his sidemen. I then quantify the extent to which Davis appropriated and emulated Jamal with comparative musical analysis influenced by Henry Louis Gates's theory of signifyin(g).³¹ While Signifyin(g) addresses key aspects of extant historical narratives of Jamal in

(August 2011): 155-134, (Accessed February 12, 2017), DOI: 10.1080/17494060.2011.637679; Jonathan M. Campbell, *Beyond Harmony: Incorporating Rhythmic Elements of Jazz Improvisation through Pedagogy and Curriculum*, (Diss., University of Northern Colorado, 2015); Ben Dockery, *Conceptualizing the Jazz Piano Trio*, (CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2013).

³⁰ Birgit Zach, *Harmonic Structures in the Compositions of Ahmad Jamal*, (PhD Diss., Institute for Jazz Research, 2012); Marta Chludilová, *Ahmad Jamal and His Influence on Hip-Hop Music in the USA*, (Bachelor's Thesis, Palacký University, Olomouc, 2015).

³¹ Henry Louis Gates, *Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 1988).

the Davis canon, the musical analysis of Jamal's leadership and piano performance practices offers the opportunity to produce new scholarship on the jazz piano trio format with the Ahmad Jamal Trio as the subject of analysis. I draw from Ingrid Monson's concept of intermusicality to examine the musical and personal relationships between Jamal and his sidemen as realized in performance, corroborating conceptual frameworks discussed in interviews with evidence from personal and published recording transcriptions.³² By integrating analysis into Jamal's biography, I aim to enliven and enrich his narrative with accuracy of historical details, meaningful consideration of sociocultural constructs, and detailed analysis of musical conceptualizations that can be extended to studies in music theory, pedagogy, and performance practice. Just before the completion of this manuscript, I was awarded the opportunity to interview Mr. Jamal, who shared with me some of his fond memories of Pittsburgh and the formative experiences that led to his orchestrational approach to small ensemble direction and piano playing. Excerpts from our conversation are integrated at various points within the text.³³

1.3 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The chapters are ordered according to the chronological narrative of Jamal's youth in the 1930s in Pittsburgh through the critical reception of his 1958 album *At the Pershing: But Not for Me*. Due to the influence of Jamal's Chicago-based drummerless trios on Miles Davis, Chapter 1 begins by retracing the origins of jazz in Pittsburgh as analogous to the city's developing African-

³² Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

³³ Ahmad Jamal, interview with author (March 22, 2017).

American community and emerging industrial economy from the mid-1800s through World War II. Particular attention is paid to patterns of migration, labor, and social activity. At the meeting point of three major rivers, Pittsburgh became an important port city for both industry and entertainment. The riverboat steamers frequented Pittsburgh from points in the American South such as New Orleans and St. Louis en-route to destinations in the Midwest, carrying aboard its ships jazz orchestras, musicians, and a bandleader named Fate Marable. Marable's role in the vibrant jazz scene of the lower Hill District is of particular note, as his influence can be traced through the lineage of Pittsburgh jazz pianists from Earl Hines through Erroll Garner. The emergence of arts and culture in Pittsburgh's African-American community provides the backdrop for Jamal's youth in the East Liberty neighborhood, where he first encountered the piano, started his musical training, and had his earliest performance experiences. The narrative continues through the schooling and professional engagements of his adolescent years, including his interactions with the city's experienced jazz musicians and the segregated American Federation of Musicians Local 471. Chapter 1 concludes with Jamal leaving Pittsburgh to tour with the George Hudson Orchestra and the events that mark the beginning of his professional career.

In Chapter 2, Jamal briefly returns to his hometown to replace pianist Sam Johnson in a group called the Four Strings, just as it was departing for Chicago. Leader Joe Kennedy's repertoire and orchestrational techniques provided the foundation for Jamal, who took over the group's leadership after Kennedy left the band. Now running his own trio, Jamal struggled to acquire work, taking odd jobs around Chicago while attempting to secure his union card transfer. Around this time, Jamal converted to Islam along with his wife, and legally changed his name. Because of the growing significance of Islam in the African-American jazz community, the religious movement is profiled here to contextualize Jamal's conversion within the larger scope of

Islamic activities during the 1940s and 1950s. The remainder of the chapter details the professional activities of Jamal's drummerless trio, which recorded a number of singles on the OKeh label after garnering the attention of Columbia executive John Hammond. As the group grew in popularity, so did the profile of its engagements, including a performance at Carnegie Music Hall and numerous recording contracts. The performance practices and ensemble dynamics of several recordings are examined in detail here, as they came to influence many prominent jazz musicians.

Chapter 3 considers the effect of Jamal's Chicago-based drummerless trio on Miles Davis, beginning with the qualities of Jamal's work that appealed most to the legendary trumpeter. The connection between the two is then contextualized based on Davis's first account of hearing Jamal and the mutual respect between the two that ensued. In an effort to measure the latter's influence on the former, Henry Louis Gates's signifying supplies the theoretical framework. A comparison of recorded material from both Jamal and Davis frames the musical analysis of three pieces – "A Gal in Calico," "Billy Boy," and "New Rhumba" – for consideration of stylistic appropriation, literal emulation, and transcription and re-orchestration respectively. A reevaluation of the musical relationship between Jamal and Davis ensues, followed by the reception of it by critics and musicians alike.

Chapter 4 resumes the chronological narrative of Jamal's career trajectory, including the events surrounding Jamal's decision to replace outgoing guitarist Ray Crawford with a drummer. Eventually, the combination of bassist Israel Crosby and drummer Vernel Fournier proved to be the realization of what Jamal had been working toward since he first became leader of his own ensemble. Their 1958 LP *At the Pershing: But Not for Me* was a monumental success and it propelled the trio into national prominence. Despite record-breaking sales and widespread popularity, Jamal's critics despised his public acclaim, attributing his commercial success to

“cocktail” piano-playing and audience theatrics. Their reviews are examined at the conclusion of this chapter, followed by the rebuttals by prominent jazz musicians, including Randy Weston, Keith Jarrett, and Jack DeJohnette.

Because the Jamal-Crosby-Fournier combination produced such invigoratingly new conceptions of piano trio performance, the fifth and final chapter seeks to understand the remarkable relationship between its personnel. Focusing on the communicative properties of Jamal’s trio, I first engage existing scholarship on interaction in jazz performance with works by Paul Rinzler, Paul Berliner, and Ingrid Monson. Although all three consider the roles of groove and improvisation as conversation in jazz, Monson’s intermusicality is a particularly useful point-of-departure for constructing analytical frameworks examining the sociocultural aspects of jazz musicians in performance. In any improvised performance, the interactions between musicians is certainly vital to the ensemble’s success. But with Jamal at the helm, these interactions must be extended to include ever-shifting and overlapping concepts of groove, arrangement, orchestration, and improvisation. Using the *Pershing* recordings of Jamal, Crosby, and Fournier as a case study, I conduct intermusical analysis on “But Not for Me” and “Poinciana” to ascertain the trio’s negotiations of space, texture, and ensemble balance as Jamal communicates orchestrationally-motivated transitions between arranged and improvised material. I then conclude with some parting thoughts on Jamal’s life, musical development, and career through the *Pershing* and consider how this research study factors into future Jamal research, trio conceptions, and pedagogical frameworks.

2.0 PITTSBURGH

More than just rivers and steel, Pittsburgh is steeped in musical heritage. During the 1930s-40s, Pittsburgh offered a rich environment filled with arts and culture for an aspiring pianist like Jamal. In nearly every interview throughout his career, he fondly refers to his hometown as a musical “phenomenon,” with a historical stature comparable to that of New Orleans, St. Louis, and Kansas City.³⁴ Jamal considers Pittsburgh to be a city with few parallels, citing that in Pittsburgh, “there were no limitations (musically).”³⁵ His pride is certainly not without reason. Pittsburgh, as he likes to remind interviewers, has produced such musical luminaries as trumpeter Roy Eldridge, bassist Ray Brown, drummers Kenny Clarke and Art Blakey, saxophonist Stanley Turrentine, guitarist George Benson, bandleader Billy Eckstine, and singer Dakota Staton, not to mention what is perhaps the most impressive list of pianists of any American city: Earl “Fatha” Hines, Erroll Garner, Mary Lou Williams, Billy Strayhorn, and Dodo Marmarosa.³⁶

In several interviews, including the one with this author, Jamal was quick to point out that there are “as many greats that stayed (in Pittsburgh) that were just as good as those who left,”

³⁴ Kenny Washington, Ahmad Jamal Interview Transcript (February 9, 2003) in *The Complete Ahmad Jamal Trio Argo Sessions 1956-62* Boxset Booklet, (Stamford, CT: Mosaic Records, L.L.C., 2010); Ashley Kahn, “Ahmad Jamal: Walking History” in *JazzTimes* (July 1, 2003), (Accessed July 1, 2013), <https://jazztimes.com/features/ahmad-jamal-walking-history/>; Josephine Reed, “Ahmad Jamal,” *Art Works* Podcast (January 2012), National Endowment for the Arts, (Accessed July 1, 2016), <https://www.arts.gov/audio/ahmad-jamal>.

³⁵ Ahmad Jamal, interview with author (March 22, 2017).

³⁶ Washington, “Ahmad Jamal Interview,” 1.

including pianist Johnny Costa.³⁷ Costa was known primarily as the pianist for the *Mr. Roger's Neighborhood* children's show, but his Art Tatum-like skills earned him the nickname "Flying Fingers."³⁸ Similarly, Jamal also recognized other significant artists from Pittsburgh, such as singer/actor/dancer Gene Kelly and visual artist Andy Warhol. Of course, many cities boast a slew of notable figures, but Jamal points out that Pittsburgh musicians all had their own distinctive approaches for which they eventually came to be recognized, whether Strayhorn's methods of composition and orchestration, Garner's piano conceptions, or Clarke's drumming style.³⁹ These are the figures other musicians have spent years trying to emulate. Yet for Jamal, they were simply part of the neighborhood. At seven-years-old, he delivered newspapers to Strayhorn's family and attended the same schools as Strayhorn, Williams, Garner, and Marmarosa.⁴⁰ According to Jamal, his hometown gave him "a rich legacy."⁴¹ When asked how he handled following in the footsteps of the great Pittsburgh pianists that came before him, he answered, "There is no 'greatest' – *all* are great. You come into your own epitome of inspiration. (*Jokingly*) I'm still trying to determine what the black and white keys do!"⁴²

By the time of Jamal's birth in 1930, Pittsburgh's African-American community reached a cultural pinnacle, in spite of the economic and social inequalities of segregation. The community enriched the young pianist's most formative years of musical development. A brief glimpse into the history of jazz in Pittsburgh reveals the musical richness of which he speaks and provides the basis for Jamal's placement within the Pittsburgh jazz piano legacy.

³⁷ Jamal, interview with author.

³⁸ *Ibid.*; Washington, "Ahmad Jamal Interview, 2; Kahn, "Walking History."

³⁹ Washington, "Ahmad Jamal Interview," 2; Reed, "Ahmad Jamal."

⁴⁰ Washington, "Ahmad Jamal Interview," 2, 4.

⁴¹ Kahn, "Walking History."

⁴² Jamal, interview with author.

2.1 PITTSBURGH'S JAZZ HISTORY

As an industrial city nestled at the confluence of three rivers – the Allegheny, the Monongahela, and the Ohio – Pittsburgh boasts a storied jazz history. Migration patterns, community development, and riverboat jazz heavily influenced the origins of jazz in Pittsburgh and the daily lives of the city's small but growing African-American population at the turn of the Nineteenth Century. *The WPA History of the Negro in Pittsburgh* provides key insight into the development of the African-American community in Pittsburgh, which would serve as incubator for this new American music.⁴³

As a branch of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the Federal Writers' Project (FWP) sponsored a predominantly African-American group of writers in 1939 to document the history of the black experience in Pittsburgh from the mid-Eighteenth Century on. Despite the termination of the FWP in 1943, due to Congress-imposed funding cuts, these individuals utilized a variety of sources to produce a several-hundred-page manuscript titled "The Negro in Pittsburgh." After it was rediscovered and microfilmed in 1970, historian Laurence A. Glasco edited the published version used here.⁴⁴ The names of the original authors appear in the text of this chapter to preserve their contributions.

Fugitive slaves, plantation workers, and free African-Americans from the South first migrated north to Pittsburgh during the antebellum years (1820-1861), seeking labor jobs in coal mining, glass manufacturing, steel milling, textiles, and steamboat building.⁴⁵ The earliest black

⁴³ Laurence A. Glasco, ed., *The WPA History of the Negro in Pittsburgh*, (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

communities began to form by the 1830s, establishing their own churches, schools, newspapers, and theaters in spite of widespread poverty, crime, and racial oppression.⁴⁶ By the end of the Civil War, Pittsburgh's industries were booming. News of jobs spread to black laborers seeking asylum from the dangerous conditions of the postbellum South. This second wave of African-American migrants from southern states increased the region's overall black population from under 3,000 at the end of the Civil War to nearly 26,000 by the twentieth century.⁴⁷

The diminishing power of the cotton industry over black laborers and the increased demand for labor at the onset of World War I spawned the first Great Migration, in which millions of black southerners relocated to northern states for industrial work. The influx of African-Americans seeking laborer jobs in the mills and factories during the Great Migration spawned additional growth in Pittsburgh's black communities. In Joe W. Trotter's and Jaren N. Day's *Race and Renaissance: African-Americans in Pittsburgh since World War II*, the authors notes that the city's African-American population was under 27,000 prior to World War I, but that number more than tripled to 82,000 by the conclusion of World War II.⁴⁸ Although many black laborers were initially hired to replace striking white workers as a means to end labor disputes, recruitment of black industrial workers intensified during the First World War. By 1930, over 65 percent of African-American men were working in manufacturing, transportation, or trade. In the region's steel industry, the percentage of black male laborers increased from less than three percent before World War I to a peak of fourteen percent during World War II. Trotter and Day also noted that black women found jobs in manufacturing and mechanical industries around this time, with over 300

⁴⁶ Ibid., 170-171.

⁴⁷ Joe W. Trotter and Jared N. Day, *Race and Renaissance: African Americans in Pittsburgh since World War II*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 5.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 9.

working in either the garment industry as dressmakers and seamstresses or in the iron and steel industries in various capacities.⁴⁹

The ways in which immigrants and migrating African-Americans settled and acquired jobs in Pittsburgh during the nineteenth century produced black communities that contrasted with those of Harlem, South Chicago, or South Philadelphia. Writing for the *WPA History of the Negro in Pittsburgh*, Fred Holmes and Abram T. Hall described these predominantly-black communities as “cities in themselves,” in which industry, business, and social organizations unified their citizens. Pittsburgh African-American community, on the other hand, lacked the same sense of centrality: “[In Pittsburgh] the Negro people are concentrated not in one community only, but in half a dozen island-like groups into which and around which was other nationalities – Poles, Italians, Jews (foreign-born and native), Germans, Irish, Russians, Mexicans, and Hungarians.”⁵⁰ Because members of the immigrant groups typically occupied the neighborhood jobs, as small business owners – grocery, drug, and convenience stores, gas stations, and movie theaters – black workers had to travel outside of their communities to the mills, factories, or downtown business district.

The economic and cultural imbalance between groups heightened tensions that were often exploited by politicians and other powerful figures.⁵¹ With financial prosperity in the mid-1800s, some of the immigrant groups began moving outward from the city center, thus leaving neighborhoods like the Hill District, East Liberty, and Homewood to become increasingly African-American. The Pittsburgh black community filled the spaces vacated by those who left, including the alley-houses located behind the remaining Jewish and Italian businesses.⁵²

⁴⁹ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁰ Glasco, *WPA History*, 24.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 25.

These integrated neighborhoods of Pittsburgh resulted in a unique blend of cultural expressions, ethnic traditions, and musical practices that were at once distinctive to each group yet growing increasingly collective. As described by Abram T. Hall in the *WPA History*:

There exists in Pittsburgh a Negro way of life as individual as the Italian, the Jewish, the Polish, or native-white way of living. It has become traditional, integrated, and it colors the larger community. It shapes the religion and politics, the press, the sociabilities, the arts, the method of livelihood. It is a unique body of folkways and racial lore.⁵³

Those that headed North during the Great Migration brought with them a rich culture of musical expression that was further developed in Pittsburgh churches, choirs, and theater. With the advent of ragtime, jazz, and swing in the twentieth century, African-American musicians honed their skills in nightclubs, cabarets, dance halls, and radio broadcasting.⁵⁴ European classical and folk music traditions had long melded with local African-American musical culture well before jazz came to Pittsburgh. This fusion of European-American, African-American, and American musical practices heavily influenced scores of Pittsburgh musicians, including the Kentucky-born pianist, calliopist, and bandleader Fate Marable.

Marable regularly docked in Pittsburgh on Streckfus steamboats for extended periods of time and is often credited for bringing jazz from New Orleans via the riverboats to the Pittsburgh nightclubs. He is equally referenced as a sort of father of Pittsburgh jazz piano because his conceptions, ideologies, and overall influence had a lasting effect (directly or otherwise) on those that succeeded him, most notably: Earl Hines, Mary Lou Williams, Billy Strayhorn, Erroll Garner, Doda Marmarosa. and Ahmad Jamal.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid., 259.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 307.

⁵⁵ William Howland Kenney, *Jazz on the River*, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 153, 157.

As Frances Weller wrote in 1941 for her entry on arts and culture in the *WPA History*, “Pittsburgh was the northern pole, New Orleans the southern, of the river axis around which jazz evolved, and along which were scattered the star towns of Natchez, Memphis, Paducah, St. Louis, Cincinnati.”⁵⁶ Aboard the vessels that traversed these waters was Marable. At only seventeen years of age, he began playing piano and calliope for Streckfus Steamers, predating Louis Armstrong’s start on the riverboats by at least eleven years. With a career that spanned over thirty years, Marable’s activities recruiting African-American musicians and leading dance bands for the riverboats since 1907 factored significantly into the musical movements of the Great Migration:

Fate Marable carried jazz up the Mississippi and Ohio to every town along the banks. He himself played it. He picked up one man after another, trained him soundly in musical technique, and watched him leave the river to carry the gospel into cities inland, on lake shore, prairie, mountainside from coast to coast.⁵⁷

Under his leadership, Marable’s musicians were well-trained in both performance and business practices within the scope of Jim Crow-era riverboat etiquette. In many ways, Marable’s ten- and twelve-piece orchestras functioned as training grounds for professional musicians, building their skills for long-term success in the music business of the time. Using commercial arrangements, he rehearsed his ensembles to perfection and required his musicians to learn to read music at sight. Moreover, he enrolled them in the racially-segregated union locals of the American Federation of Musicians, represented them if problems arose with the riverboat captains, and arranged contacts for them with the nation’s leading bandleaders. Marable held his musicians to high standards and did not hesitate to fire them if his demands were not met.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Glasco, *WPA History*, 324.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Kenney, *Jazz on the River*, 38-39.

In November 1919, Louis Armstrong was playing with the Kid Ory Band in his hometown of New Orleans, when another band challenged Ory's to a battle on the corner of Rampart and Perdido Streets. After Ory's band out-played their challenger, Armstrong was approached by Marable to join his band on the excursion steamer *Dixie Belle*.⁵⁹ In his second autobiography in 1954, Armstrong revealed that he decided to leave Ory to join Marable, because the latter required his musicians to read music at sight, whereas the former did not. Since Marable's players could read and improvise, they could play a wider-range of music, and Armstrong considered them to be better players for it.⁶⁰ Armstrong later indicated his gratitude for Marable, who was willing to hire him based on his tone and ability alone, putting faith in the young trumpeter that he would learn how to read music. Marable bandmember David "Br'er" Jones, who played the mellophone, taught Armstrong "how to divide the notes" so he could manage Marable's difficult arrangements without having to hear it first. With Jones's help and Marable's "strictness as a leader," Armstrong earned a spot in the band.⁶¹

From 1919-1920, Armstrong played aboard the *Dixie Bell* with Marable's band, which would start playing at eight o'clock at the wharf on Canal Street to attract people for the late evening river cruise. According to Armstrong, Marable's band was quite different from the other

⁵⁹ In his first autobiography, Armstrong cites the *Dixie Belle* as the steamer, but in his second, he calls it the *Sydney*. Louis Armstrong, *Swing that Music*, Gerlach, Horace, ed., (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1936), 36, (Accessed February 27, 2017), <http://solomon.bltc.alexanderstreet.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/cgi-bin/asp/philo/bltc/getvolume.pl?S7616>; Louis Armstrong, *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans*, (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1954), 140, (Accessed February 27, 2017), <http://solomon.bltc.alexanderstreet.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/cgi-bin/asp/philo/bltc/getvolume.pl?S7618>.

⁶⁰ Armstrong, *Satchmo*, 140.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

jazz orchestras of the time. Whereas the famous bands from New Orleans had five to seven pieces, Marable's had twelve:

The orchestra on the *Dixie Bell* was...a twelve-piece orchestra and every man was a crackshot musician. Fate Marable had recruited them from the best bands in town, taking this man here and that one there and each one because he was a "hot" player on his own particular instrument. Fate was a fine swing pianist, himself, and he knew that in time they would learn to play together.⁶²

In addition to Armstrong, Marable employed the likes of Jimmie Blanton, Ernie Nappolo, Fletcher Henderson, and Chuck Webb. Weller noted that "Fate Marable's bands were always good, solid. Nothing showy, nothing fancy, but good jazz bands. He has changed with the times, and consequently had played each phase of popular music as it passed from the earliest barrel-house blues, into jazz, 'sweet music,' and swing."⁶³

William Howland Kenney parallels Marable's philosophy of ensemble leadership to other movements within the black community in the years surrounding World War I. Kenney posits that Marable's "persistent efforts to assimilate improvising urban folk musicians into the world of arranged popular dance music" with emphasis on musical literacy "found resonance in national dialogues about the proper meaning of race music."⁶⁴ As early as 1917, Marable's leadership paralleled the later beliefs of Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Sterling Brown in the 1930s, as attitudes shifted towards the African-American intellectualism and the underlying sophistication of instrumental improvisation.⁶⁵ Even after the 1917 East St. Louis race riot led to the segregation of the Streckfus steamboat orchestras, Marable's leadership of all-black bands

⁶² Armstrong, *Swing that Music*, 39.

⁶³ Glasco, *WPA History*, 327.

⁶⁴ Kenney, *Jazz on the River*, 39.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

from that point on aided in shifting primitivist perceptions of early jazz towards the cosmopolitan sophistication of instrumental improvisation that followed in the 1930s.⁶⁶

In an autobiographical letter penned by Marable, he told of his travels south to New Orleans, “where [he] got his idea of the New Orleans swing.”⁶⁷ Though he spent the first decade of his career leading a ragtime band, Marable quickly gained recognition in the black nightlife of the cities he visited while working the riverboats, including New Orleans and St. Louis. Louis Armstrong recalled:

Every musician in New Orleans respected him. He had seen the good old days in Storyville, and had played cotch with the pimps and hustlers at the Twenty-Five gambling house. He had had fine jam sessions with the piano greats of those days...He always won the greatest honors with them.⁶⁸

The Streckfus steamers carried Marable’s brand of riverboat jazz up the Mississippi to Cairo, Illinois, at the intersection of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers. From Cairo, the riverboats continued down the 981-mile long Ohio until their final stop in Pittsburgh. Marable first docked in Pittsburgh with his orchestra while aboard the steamer named the *J.S.*, before it was destroyed by fire in 1910. Splitting his winters between Paducah, St. Louis, and Pittsburgh, Marable’s yearly return to Pittsburgh led to him eventually settle his family there while he worked the inland waterways.⁶⁹ While in Pittsburgh, he frequented the clubs of the Hill District, though he was said to have spent weeks at a time at his favorite spot, the Crawford Grill on Wylie Avenue, drinking and talking with musicians.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Ibid., 43-44.

⁶⁷ Glasco, *WPA History*, 327.

⁶⁸ Kenney, *Jazz on the River*, 45. Originally quoted in Louis Armstrong, *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1946), 5.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 149.

⁷⁰ Glasco, *WPA History*, 324-325.

Marable and the Streckfus steam line were not the only riverboats to dock in Pittsburgh during the 1920s and 1930s. Hailing from Alton, Illinois, Eddie Johnson's St. Louis Crackerjacks played aboard Henry Meyer's steamer *Idlewild* that also frequented Pittsburgh at the time and was met with enthusiasm.⁷¹ Although Pittsburgh's local jazz scene found inspiration (and, for some, employment) in riverboat jazz, as Kenney points out, it never became entirely reliant on it like other riverboat port cities, like Cincinnati. With the Hill District at the epicenter of activity, Pittsburgh boasted a culturally-rich and vibrant African-American community, whose postwar influence on drama, journalism, music, and sports rivaled that of Harlem.⁷²

During the 1920s, the steamer *East St. Louis* carried aboard a ten-piece dance band led by singer and saxophonist Lois P. Deppe. In Pittsburgh, Deppe led a band at the Leader House (the predecessor of the Crawford Grille). While he was organizing his act, he discovered a young Pittsburgh pianist named Earl Hines. At fifteen, Hines began travelling from his home in the Duquesne suburb of Pittsburgh to join in the nightly jazz scene of the clubs along Wylie Avenue. The pianist's versatility as both soloist and accompanist garnered Deppe's attention, who soon hired Hines to join his band at the Leader House.⁷³ Hines became an early influence on pianist Mary Lou Williams, who visited the Saturday afternoon dances at the Arcadia Ballroom, where Deppe was playing. Williams, whose family migrated to Pittsburgh in 1915 when she was five, grew up in East Liberty. Like Jamal, she attended Westinghouse High School, just a few years ahead of pianists Billy Strayhorn (whose family also migrated from the south) and Pittsburgh-born Erroll Garner. According to Kenney, Garner was the only Pittsburgh jazz musician to have worked on the Streckfus excursion boats. In 1935, Marable had fallen ill and his musicians sent word to

⁷¹ Kenney, *Jazz on the River*, 151-152.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 156-159.

the union that they were in need of a substitute to play aboard the steamer *President*. They were skeptical when the twenty-four-year-old Garner showed up and refused to rehearse before the cruise. After he played, Marable's musicians marveled at how he sounded as if he had previously played with the band, even though many of the arrangements included modulations into different key signatures.⁷⁴ In many ways, the musical sophistication and technical virtuosity of these pianists represented an ideological shift among Pittsburgh black youth, many of whom utilized their education to build careers in music and the arts in opposition to laboring in the factories and mines as their parents.

In response to racial discrimination and segregation at the onset of the twentieth century, Pittsburgh's African-American community turned inward, building vibrant neighborhoods in which religious, social, business, and professional organizations thrived. The height of this metropolitan and ideological development occurred in the lower area of the Pittsburgh Hill District, where black-owned and run businesses produced a sense of cosmopolitan blackness unlike any other part of the city or the nation. Referred to as "Hayti" in the 1800s because of its predominantly-poor African population, the Lower Hill had earned the nickname "Little Harlem" by the 1930s, due to a vibrancy of black life that rivaled its New York counterpart.

The flurry of activity that surrounded the intersection of Fullerton Street and Wylie Avenue garnered the nickname "crossroads of the world," a designation popularized in the 1950s by WHOD disc jockey Mary Dee (Figure 1).⁷⁵ In addition to Goode's Pharmacy and Bobby Hinton's Grocery Store, the adjoining street corners boasted several nightclubs (Stanley's, the Blue Note, and the Bambola) and elite social clubs (the Washington Club and the Loendi Club). According to

⁷⁴ Ibid., 162-164.

⁷⁵ Colter Harper, *"The Crossroads of the World": A Social and Cultural History of Jazz in Pittsburgh's Hill District, 1920-1970*, (Ph.D. Diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2011), 2.

Pittsburgh-area musician and ethnomusicologist Colter Harper, the Lower Hill’s designation as “crossroads of the world” was particularly fitting, noting that an “ever-shifting demographic makeup kept the Hill in constant flux.”⁷⁶ Although the neighborhood housed migrant black laborers and Italian, Polish, and Jewish immigrants, it also welcomed the jazz elite that travelled to play its clubs and dance halls.



Figure 1. Intersection of Wylie Avenue and Fullerton Street with Blue Note Cafe and Goode Pharmacy, on foggy night, Hill District, c. 1945-1965 (© Carnegie Museum of Art, Charles “Teenie” Harris Archive, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.3181)

WPA History contributor Weller documented what could be seen on an evening in the Hill District during the height of the Jazz Age:

In the ten years following the world war, Pittsburgh shared the nationwide interest in jazz, and in the Hill a number of small night clubs sprang up where good jazz could be heard. The three most

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

popular “hot spots” were Collins Inn, the Humming Bird, and the Leader House, located upstairs over the C. & G. Coffee Shop. But there were also Derby Dad’s, Fullerton Inn, and Paradise Inn. Besides there were Marie’s and Lola’s, here in small, stuffy rooms reached by many steps and along narrow hallways, and where the air was thick with cheap incense and dim with red or green lights, juke boxes played until during the latest hours of the night or the earliest of dawn, musicians came up from the river boats, or in from dances they had played. Here they would sit out the night, drink, play, and improvise in jam sessions. At these spots might be heard Earl Hines, Casey Harris, Fletcher Henderson, Honey Boy Jones, Louise Mann, and from time to time other musicians who have enlivened the night life and jazz history in Pittsburgh.⁷⁷

In an interview for *Melody Maker*, pianist Mary Lou Williams (whose family moved from Atlanta to Pittsburgh’s East Liberty neighborhood while she was a child) offered a musician's perspective of the Hill District jazz scene:

Some nights we jammed all the way from East Liberty down to Wylie Avenue, then a notorious section of town which was held in dread by so-called decent people. We always wound up in the Subway on Wylie, a hole in the ground to which the cream of the crop came to enjoy the finest in the way of entertainment. For me it was a paradise. Visiting musicians made straight for the place to listen to artists like beautiful Louis Mann, and Baby Hines, Earl’s first wife...At the same spot I heard a lot of Prince Robinson, and have never forgotten his excellent tenor. He was one of the outstanding jazz players of the generation. Prince would refuse to jam with inadequate musicians, waiting until he could round up some other out-of-the-ordinary players to make the session inspirational or at least worthwhile. One way and another I was having a ball – playing gigs, jamming and listening to fine musicians.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Glasco, *WPA History*, 324.

⁷⁸ Arthur P. Monella and Anna Karvellas, eds., *Places of Invention: A Companion to the Exhibition at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History*, (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2015), 210-211. Originally quoted in Mary Lou Williams, “In Her Own Words: Mary Lou Williams Interview,” *Melody Maker*, printed in eleven installments between April 13 and June 12, 1954.

Like Williams, Ahmad Jamal was raised in East Liberty, but as soon as he showed musical promise, he spent most of his adolescent years traversing several miles down to the Hill District to be in the center of black musical life. Especially in his youth, the disparity between the neighborhoods must have been shocking for Jamal. Despite the droves of visitors that travelled to Fullerton and Wylie to take in the top jazz acts, the Hill's tenants were not nearly as prosperous. According to Holmes and Hall, who penned their contribution for the *WPA History* in 1939, "The history of the Hill is the usual sorry tale of deterioration from a once attractive living place."⁷⁹ As "the symbol of the worst that a fiercely industrial city like Pittsburgh can do to human beings," the authors paint an image of the Hill as one of desolation, prostitution, struggling businesses, stench of garbage and urine, and people fighting for life amongst poverty, squalor, disease, crime, and vice.⁸⁰

The East Liberty of Jamal's youth, along with neighboring Schenley Heights and Homewood, stood in stark contrast to the "social disorganization and disintegration of the Hill."⁸¹ Here, the WPA authors write of middle-class professionals who own their homes, with manicured lawns and flowering gardens, and enjoy the pleasures of "radios, automobiles, vacations with pay, pianos and bathrooms, high school and university study, theater and concert attendance..."⁸² Though it is not known what, if any, of these niceties were enjoyed by Jamal's family, it is clear that the family, friends, educators, and professional musicians in Jamal's life helped him discover and develop his natural-born talents.

⁷⁹ Glasco, *WPA History*, 24.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

2.2 AHMAD JAMAL'S YOUTH AND MUSIC EDUCATION

As explained in Chapter 3, when Jamal converted to Islam and legally changed his name in 1952, he explained that he had not adopted a new name, but rather “re-established [his] original name.”⁸³ He requested that the author of this dissertation not refer to him by any other name, because “Ahmad Jamal” is his only name.⁸⁴ Apart from a brief mention of his Christian birth name below for reference, his request has been honored throughout this manuscript.

Ahmad Jamal was born Frederick Russell Jones on July 2, 1930 in Pittsburgh's East Liberty. His father, Robert Smith Jones, worked in the steel mills, and his mother, Lottie, was a maid. Jamal was one of four children, along with brother Robert W. and sisters Geraldine and Ophelia.⁸⁵ Nicknamed “Freddie” and “Fritz” by family and friends, Jamal was only three years old when his talents at the piano were inadvertently revealed by his mother's brother-in-law Lawrence. The uncle sat down to play the family's old upright piano and teasingly turned to the toddler and said, “I bet you can't play this.” To every adults' surprise, the three-year-old played it back note-for-note.⁸⁶

By the time Jamal reached kindergarten, his baffled teachers encouraged his mother to get him a formal piano teacher. His mother, Lottie, whom he described as being “rich in spirit,” saved her streetcar fare by walking home to pay for his lessons, which cost one dollar apiece at the

⁸³ “Words of the Week,” *Jet Magazine* 16, no. 17 (August 20, 1959), 30.

⁸⁴ Ahmad Jamal, interview with author (March 22, 2017).

⁸⁵ “Death Notices,” *Pittsburgh Courier (1955-1966)*, (December 1, 1956), A20, (Accessed July 3, 2013), ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Pittsburgh Courier (1911-2002).

⁸⁶ Kenny Washington, Ahmad Jamal Interview Transcript (February 9, 2003) in *The Complete Ahmad Jamal Trio Argo Sessions 1956-62* Boxset Booklet, (Stamford, CT: Mosaic Records, L.L.C., 2010), 2.

Cardwell Dawson School of Music on Apple Avenue.⁸⁷ His mother's eagerness to help her child learn could be attributed in part to the fact that she previously studied piano, though the extent of which is unknown as even Jamal did not learn of it himself until later.⁸⁸ At age seven, Jamal began his piano studies with Mary Cardwell Dawson, a noteworthy African-American concert singer who inaugurated the first African-American opera company, the National Negro Opera Company (NNOC). From 1925 until she left Pittsburgh in 1942, Dawson enriched the lives of the students and community she served as a passionate and gifted educator, school leader, choir director, opera coach, and civil rights activist.

Dawson's family migrated to the ethnically-diverse Pittsburgh neighborhood of Homestead from her birthplace of Madison, North Carolina while she was still a child. At twenty-four years old, after years of training and active musical involvement in her Pittsburgh church, she continued her voice, piano, and organ studies at the New England Conservatory in Boston. While in Boston, she frequented the Boston Opera and the Boston Symphony Orchestra and noticed the absence of African-Americans in all aspects of performance. After graduating from the conservatory with a Teacher's Diploma in 1925, she opened the Cardwell School of Music, a private music school in Homestead offering lessons in voice, piano, organ, and violin. A review of Dawson's student recital programs by Karen M. Bryan revealed that she incorporated a blend

⁸⁷ Eugene Holley, Jr., "Gold Standard: Pianist Ahmad Jamal Chartered a New Popularity for Jazz," *Wax Poetics*, (December/January 2008-2009), 98; Molly Murphy, "NEA Jazz Masters: Ahmad Jamal," Interview (January 11, 2007), National Endowment for the Arts, (Accessed July 1, 2016), <https://www.arts.gov/honors/jazz/ahmad-jamal>.

⁸⁸ Ted Panken, "It's Ahmad Jamal's 81st Birthday: Ahmad Jamal Profile" (July 2, 2011), WKCR Interview Transcript (February 5, 1995), *Today Is the Question: Ted Panken on Music, Politics and the Arts*, (Accessed December 12, 2016), <https://tedpanken.wordpress.com/2011/07/02/its-ahmad-jamals-81st-birthday/>.

of traditional Western European repertoire, American and African-American composers, church hymns, and spirituals.⁸⁹

By the time Jamal was a student, the Cardwell Dawson School of Music was an accredited institution with dozens of course offerings and a faculty.⁹⁰ In addition to traditional band and orchestra instruments, the school offered private and class instruction in such areas as dance, public speaking, stage direction, diction, choral conducting, and foreign languages. Around the same time, she established Pittsburgh's first local chapter of the National Association of Negro Musicians (NANM), through which she sponsored lectures, recitals, fundraising and social events, and promoted black opera.⁹¹ In 1941, Dawson founded the National Negro Opera Company (NNOC) in Pittsburgh and directed its productions using local and national talent, some of whom went on to be among the first African-American performers in the Metropolitan Opera. By 1955, she staged a production of African-American composer Clarence Cameron White's *Ouanga* at the Metropolitan Opera House with the NNOC. The event marked two firsts for the famed opera house; the first outside company to take to their stage and the first African-American troupe to be awarded the honor.⁹²

From his own experiences at the Cardwell Dawson School of Music, Jamal recalled that Mrs. Dawson was a "unique person, always dressed to the max. You could hear her heels coming down the stairway. If you didn't have your lessons ready, you were in trouble (laughs). She was

⁸⁹ Karen M. Bryan, "Radiating a Hope: Mary Cardwell Dawson as Educator and Activist" in *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 25, no. 1 (October 2003): 20-35, (Accessed February 22, 2017), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40215275>.

⁹⁰ One of the instructors was Dawson's former student and Jamal's future teacher James Miller. See Bryan, "Radiating a Hope," 26.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 35.

wonderful.”⁹³ As a child, Jamal thought about playing baseball and other activities like the other kids of the neighborhood, but he grew more and more involved with his music studies. Rather than heading to the ball field, the young boy went to his piano teacher’s house on 7101 Apple Avenue in Homewood for his weekly piano lessons (Figure 2).⁹⁴



Figure 2. Exterior of William "Woogie" Harris's house, and Mary Cardwell Dawson's National Negro Opera Company, 7101 Apple Street, Homewood (© Carnegie Museum of Art, Charles "Teenie" Harris Archive, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.4864)

⁹³ Holley, "Gold Standard," 98.

⁹⁴ Jim Macnie, "Intricacy and Groove: At Home with Ahmad Jamal," *Down Beat* 77, no. 3 (March 2010), 28. The house was owned by William "Woogie" Harris, father of noted *Pittsburgh Courier* photographer Charles "Teenie" Harris. Until the 1960s, the house also served as a residence for black athletes and entertainers who were barred from white hotels. See "Biography: Chronology of the Life of Teenie Harris," Carnegie Museum of Art, (Accessed February 24, 2017), <http://teenie.cmoa.org/About.aspx>.

In 1942, Dawson moved the NNOC headquarters from Pittsburgh to Washington, D.C., after her husband Walter Dawson, a master electrician, accepted a position with the General Services Administration.⁹⁵ When Dawson left Pittsburgh, Jamal continued his studies with her former student and Cardwell Dawson School teacher, James Moore Miller. An accomplished pianist and composer, Miller graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Carnegie Tech in 1930 and became a music teacher at the A. Leo Weil Elementary School in 1940. He became president of the Negro History Society of Pittsburgh in 1941 and music director and organist of Bethesda Presbyterian Church. In addition to teaching private piano students, Miller composed and arranged choir music. His arrangements of two Negro spirituals, “I Wanna Be Ready” and “Daniel,” were recorded by the Robert Shaw Chorale for their RCA Victor album *Deep River and Other Spirituals*.⁹⁶

While studying European classical piano repertoire with Dawson and Miller, Jamal began to build his knowledge of popular music courtesy of his aunt Louise, a teacher in Wilson, North Carolina.⁹⁷ Every month, Louise mailed the young Jamal boxes of sheet music, containing the popular hits of the time. By the time he was ten or eleven years old, he had compiled such an extensive repertoire that musicians four and five times his senior began hiring him to play in their bands:

I grew up with all sorts of orchestras playing in venues all around the surrounding area. I worked with [pianist/saxophonist] Carl Arter, one of the prominent musicians around Pittsburgh, and Joe Westray hired me. He was one of the more successful bandleaders.

⁹⁵ Bryan, “Radiating a Hope,” 32.

⁹⁶ “James M. Miller of A. Leo Weil: Jamal’s Teacher Wins Recognition” in *Pittsburgh Courier (1955-1966)* (January 16, 1960), 5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Pittsburgh Courier (1911-2002).

⁹⁷ Holley, “Gold Standard,” 98; Andrew Velez, “Ahmad Jamal: It’s Magic” (May 14, 2008), *AllAboutJazz.com*, (Accessed July 1, 2013), <https://www.allaboutjazz.com/ahmad-jamal-its-magic-ahmad-jamal-by-andrew-velez.php>.

I was playing at ten years old with people like Honeyboy Minor, a legendary drummer who had all the best jobs...I was making more money in eleventh grade than my father was making in the steel mill!⁹⁸



Figure 3. Young Ahmad Jamal (Fritz Jones) playing piano, c. 1942 (© Carnegie Museum of Art, Charles “Teenie” Harris Archive, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.3174)

While preparing Liszt etudes for competitions, he also played everything that appealed to him, whether popular swing tunes like “Christopher Columbus” or his own etudes. Engaged in both formal studies and professional employment at such a young age, Jamal experienced a varied music education:

I also studied with fledging and aspiring musicians around Pittsburgh, and we never had that separation of classical and so-called jazz music. It was music, either good or bad. If we wanted to play Duke Ellington, we did. We considered Art Tatum a study, just

⁹⁸ Holley, “Gold Standard,” 98.

like Bach or Beethoven...I began to study everything I could get my hands on until I was seventeen.⁹⁹

By ten-years-of-age, Jamal was writing his own arrangements. He was inspired to orchestrate one for his school orchestra, but the attempt did not go so well:

It sounded so bad because I forgot to transpose the parts (laughs). So, when my school teacher raised his baton to hit, I was just devastated. I hadn't transposed the parts for the trumpets and for the saxophones, but I tried.¹⁰⁰

Instead of giving up, Jamal joined the high school jazz orchestra, the K-dets. At that time, Westinghouse High School band director Carl McVickers, Jr. ran three ensembles: Beginners Orchestra, Junior Orchestra, and Senior Orchestra. A gifted trumpeter and music graduate of Carnegie Technical, McVickers garnered the school's approval to sponsor the student-run K-dets.¹⁰¹ Jamal is pictured in the front row, far right, in the following photograph of the Westinghouse High School K-dets taken by Charles "Teenie" Harris (Figure 4):

⁹⁹ Len Lyons, *The Great Pianists: Speaking of Their Lives and Music*, (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1983), 115.

¹⁰⁰ Jamal, interview with author. See also, Washington, "Ahmad Jamal Interview," 4.

¹⁰¹ McVickers is often credited with teaching jazz, but as revealed by Westinghouse alumnus and professional musician Dr. Nelson Harrison, the students ran the ensemble. McVickers only sponsored the group. Nelson Harrison, interview with author (March 1, 2017).



Figure 4. Westinghouse High School swing band "The K-dets," c. 1943-1944. (© Carnegie Museum of Art, Charles "Teenie" Harris Archive, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.3174)

In an interview with Ted Panken, Jamal credited McVickers for his willingness to start the jazz orchestra:

It was unique because this was the all-American Classical/Jazz band, and it was quite unusual for it to be in a high school at that time on such an organized basis. He started the K-dets maybe around 1946, which is quite early on. Now, of course, we have Berklee and all these institutions of higher learning that incorporate this music in their curriculum to say the least. But I think it was very innovative, very unique on his part to start a Jazz clinical society in 1946.¹⁰²

In a 2015 Smithsonian project, researchers Kate Lukaszewicz and Mariruth Leftwich discovered in the Pittsburgh Public School archives at the Senator John Heinz History Center that the Pittsburgh Public School System (of which Westinghouse belonged) was one of the first school

¹⁰² Panken, "Ahmad Jamal's 81st Birthday."

systems in the nation to integrate African-American music into the standard music curriculum. As early as 1937, Pittsburgh Public Schools promoted the teaching of “racial and national music” and permitted any school with twelve interested students to form an orchestra. The school system even provided citywide lesson plans to be aided by recordings of jazz, blues, work and folk songs, and other genres by Smithsonian Folkways.¹⁰³

In his teenage years, Jamal became an avid collector of records. Whatever he could not find in Pittsburgh, he ordered by mail. His collection was diverse: Georgie Auld, Boyd Raeburn, Don Byas, Martial Solal, and Lucky Thompson.¹⁰⁴ He sent away for Charlie Parker’s and Dizzy Gillespie’s “Salt Peanuts” and “Groovin’ High” and recalled “waiting for the delivery with all kinds of anxiety and enthusiasm to open the package with these wonderful breakables, records that were sent by mail.”¹⁰⁵ His favorites were those by Erroll Garner, Art Tatum, and Nat Cole, specifically Garner’s *Laura*, Cole’s *Body and Soul* with Lester Young, Tatum’s *Flying Home* with Tiny Grimes and Slam Stewart.¹⁰⁶

Jamal was only eleven when he began taking regular jobs for money. In doing so, he always managed to keep up with the high-standards set by the older musicians. However, he later admitted that it was difficult being a child and a working musician:

Too young. I was eleven years old. That’s too young. I’d do algebra during intermission, between sets. That’s too young. I don’t recommend that.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Molella and Karvellas, ed., *Places of Invention*, 207-208.

¹⁰⁴ Kahn, “Walking History.”

¹⁰⁵ Murphy, “NEA Jazz Masters.”

¹⁰⁶ Washington, “Ahmad Jamal Interview,” 3. In my interview with Jamal, he said that Tatum’s *Flying Home* should be required listening for all students.

¹⁰⁷ Panken, “Ahmad Jamal’s 81st Birthday.”

Nevertheless, by the time he reached fourteen, he was getting so much work around town that he had to join the musicians' union. Because the minimum age was sixteen, he had to lie on his application, but the president was from the nearby neighborhood of Homewood and let it slide.¹⁰⁸ As a member of the African-American Local 471 of the American Federation of Musicians, Jamal gained access to the Musicians' Club in the union's building located at 1213 Wylie Avenue in the Hill District of Pittsburgh. For Jamal, the Musicians' Club was the center of his musical training, "the dome of the capital as far as music was concerned."¹⁰⁹



Figure 5. Furnished Rooms, 1213 Wylie Avenue, looking east, April 29, 1930. (Pittsburgh City Photographer, Pittsburgh City Photographer Collection, 1901-2002, 715.3011481.CP)

¹⁰⁸ Rory, D. Webb, "Ahmad Jamal Recalls the Pittsburgh of His Youth" in *Pittsburgh City Paper* (September 18, 2013), (Accessed February 12, 2017), <http://www.pghcitypaper.com/pittsburgh/ahmad-jamal-recalls-the-pittsburgh-of-his-youth-and-addresses-how-the-city-treats-jazz-today/Content?oid=1692939>.

¹⁰⁹ Panken, "Ahmad Jamal's 81st Birthday."

The union club hosted nightly jam sessions, which were frequented by local and nationally-known musicians alike. In some cases, notable Pittsburgh-born musicians who were working on the national scene would visit when they returned from the road, such as bassist Ray Brown. These “historical sessions” proved to be invaluable learning experiences for young musicians like Jamal:

So you take these things off a record, and you apply them in the jam sessions, and eventually, if you’re lucky, if you’re blessed, you’ll find your own approach to these things – which is not easily (sic) come by.¹¹⁰

Jamal’s memories of the jam session scene are equally indicative of the mutual respect given between musicians. Recalling that trumpeter Tommy Turrentine (Stanley’s brother) taught him his first flatted fifth chord, Jamal proudly noted that he in turn got Turrentine a job with George Hudson, soon after joining the band himself. Jamal’s childhood friend and future bandleader violinist Joe Kennedy, Jr. also played the Musicians Club and worked as leader of its house band for a time, along with fellow Four Strings guitarist Ray Crawford and pianist Sam Johnson (whom Jamal later replaced in the group). Other regulars named by Jamal included drummer Joe Harris, bandleader Leroy Brown, saxophonist Osie Taylor, and drummer Cecil Brooks II.¹¹¹

No doubt Jamal’s membership in the union and participation in these jam sessions helped him secure his earliest gigs as a professional musician. One such engagement appeared in a column in the November 9, 1946 *Pittsburgh Courier* listed Jamal as a member of an “all-star combo,” which had been sponsored by Melvin Goode¹¹² of the Pittsburgh Housing Authority to play a Thanksgiving Day dance at the Elks Lodge in Pittsburgh’s North Side. The combo included

¹¹⁰ Panken, “Ahmad Jamal’s 81st Birthday.”

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Goode’s first name was printed here as “Melvin,” but his nickname of “Mal” has led other sources to indicate his name as “Malvin.”

trumpeter Horace Turner, trombonist Sam Hurt, tenor saxophonist Billy Webster, and vocalists Joe Frazier and Verna White.¹¹³



Figure 6. Band performing with Ahmad Jamal (Fritz Jones) on piano, Jon Morris on trombone on left, Harold "Brushes" Lee on drums, Horace Turner on trumpet, John Foster on saxophone, and Sam Hurt on trombone on right, c. 1940-1950. (© Carnegie Museum of Art, Charles "Teenie" Harris Archive, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.10346)

At the beginning of his career, Jamal was not too selective when taking gigs. He just wanted to play as much as possible:

I was working in just about every setting possible. I was working sometimes with Eddie Jefferson, who was a tap dancer then. He wasn't singing at the time. I used to play for Eddie Jefferson on rare occasions. In fact, Eddie used to come down to the club and participate in jam sessions, too. And I was with all the big bands. I did a lot of big band work in Pittsburgh... (Saxophonist) Carl Otter,

¹¹³ "Top Hatters to Hold Holiday Dance, Nov. 28," (November 9, 1946), 20, *The Pittsburgh Courier (1911-1950)*, (Accessed January 24, 2017), ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Pittsburgh Courier.

who was a great musician around Pittsburgh... We used to play jobs in Uniontown: just piano and tenor, no drums, no bass. Can you imagine that, just piano and tenor? Then we had the Bamboolah Club, and we had Crawford's Grill...Crawford's Grill was the definitive place for players. I, interesting enough, never worked Crawford's Grill.¹¹⁴

As a common stop for most musicians traveling from Chicago through Philadelphia and on to New York, Pittsburgh hosted all of the top acts and Jamal deemed himself fortunate to be able to see them. In several instances, he came in direct contact with the biggest names in jazz. One night, he met tenor saxophonist Ben Webster, who gave him his cufflinks as a memento. When he was fourteen years old, working underage at the Washington Club, legendary pianist Art Tatum came into the club after performing in the city. An after-hours jam session broke out and Jamal got the opportunity to play for him. Though Tatum was the last to play that evening, as was customary, the night proved to be a pivotal experience as the legendary pianist deemed Jamal to be a "coming great."¹¹⁵

In another instance, several years later one of these "big names" attempted to test Jamal. When Woody Herman's "Second Herd" band was in town, Pittsburgh-area guitarist Joe Negri, who had some friends in the group, offered to be their guide around the city. Ralph Berns, Serge Chaloff, and a few others asked Negri to take them to the Local 471 Musicians' Club. Jamal was playing in the house band, when tenor saxophonist Stan Getz arrived and wanted to sit in:

So Ahmad Jamal was playing – we were enjoying ourselves very much listening to him – and Stan Getz appears at the door bigger than life, comes in a little drunk with his tenor. It didn't take him long before he said, "I'm going to go up and play with that kid. He sounds pretty good..." He was rather cocky. So he went up and he obviously hit Ahmad the wrong way because he said he wanted to play "The Song is You" and he wanted to take it up and Ahmad put it in a cockeyed key. If you know the tune, the bridge is strange. It's

¹¹⁴ Panken, "Ahmad Jamal's 81st Birthday."

¹¹⁵ Crouch, *Considering Genius*, 95.

in C and it goes to E major, so Ahmad put it in A which meant the bridge went to Db. So the song is going, and lo and behold, the great Getz gets to the bridge and kind of trips himself up a little. He wasn't very happy and put his horn away and left. He called Ahmad "kid" a couple of times and just rubbed him the wrong way.¹¹⁶

Nevertheless, the one recurring theme in all of Jamal's recollections of his early musical experiences in Pittsburgh was that his hometown trained him to work in variety of musical configurations. It was a tough, yet supportive town that demanded musical excellence on all fronts, whether "Bach and Tatum, Beethoven and Basie; there was no separation."¹¹⁷ With all the training his birth city could offer, Jamal left home at seventeen years of age to take his first job on the road with the George Hudson Orchestra.

2.3 ON THE ROAD WITH THE GEORGE HUDSON ORCHESTRA

St. Louis-based trumpeter and bandleader George Hudson first heard Jamal play at one of the historic jam sessions at the Local 471. He was so taken by the 17-year old's abilities, that he hired him for a summer-long engagement with his band at Club Harlem in Atlantic City. As this booking was his first outside of Pittsburgh, Jamal jokingly referred to Hudson as the man who "made me leave my happy home."¹¹⁸ It was the moment he said he went "straight from infancy to

¹¹⁶ Harper, "*The Crossroads of the World*," 136. Negri also shared the same story with the author in 2013 at the University of Pittsburgh.

¹¹⁷ Ted Panken, "For Ahmad Jamal's 85th Birthday, a *Down Beat* feature from 2002" (July 2, 2015), Interview Transcript (2002), *Today Is the Question: Ted Panken on Music, Politics and the Arts*, Accessed December 12, 2016, <https://tedpanken.wordpress.com/2015/07/02/for-ahmad-jamals-85th-birthday-a-downbeat-feature-from-2002/>.

¹¹⁸ Washington, "Ahmad Jamal Interview," 2.

adulthood.”¹¹⁹ He describes Hudson as a “consummate leader” and “protective of his men,” who “would go to the nth degree to see that you were secure and no one was harassing you unduly.”¹²⁰

Born in Stonewall, Mississippi and raised in Birmingham, Alabama, Hudson and his family moved to Pittsburgh in his adolescent years. In Pittsburgh, he attended Westinghouse High School (at the same time as Mary Lou Williams) and the Pittsburgh Musical Institute. He began his career in Pittsburgh as a freelance trumpeter before travelling to St. Louis, via stints in several other territory bands, to play lead trumpet with the Jeter-Pillars Orchestra in 1934 and Dewey Jackson on the riverboats in 1938. Hudson formed his own orchestra in 1942, which replaced his former employer, the Jeter-Pillars Orchestra, as house band at the Plantation in 1944.¹²¹ With success at the Plantation and the Riviera, two prominent clubs in St. Louis, Hudson garnered enough notoriety to recruit the city’s best young musicians, many of whom had just served in the Great Lakes Naval Band in Chicago during World War II. This included legendary trumpeter Clark Terry. Like Jamal, Terry’s first job with a major band was with the Hudson Orchestra.¹²² Trumpeter Cy Stoner recalled that “Daddy” Buggs Roberts, a well-known arranger from Chicago who worked for Earl Hines, wrote most of the band’s repertoire. Hudson also acquired additional scores from both Count Basie and Stan Kenton.¹²³

In 1948, just before Jamal joined the band, Hudson acquired another St. Louis-born Navy veteran in tenor saxophonist Ernie Wilkins, who proved his gifts as an arranger for the Jeter-Pillars Orchestra. Wilkins produced a number of orchestrations for Hudson and after his tour with the

¹¹⁹ Macnie, “Intricacy and Groove,” 28.

¹²⁰ Washington, “Ahmad Jamal Interview,” 2.

¹²¹ Dennis Owsley, *City of Gabriels: The History of Jazz in St. Louis, 1895-1973*, (St. Louis, MO: Reedy Press, 2006), 94.

¹²² *Ibid.* 93.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 94.

band, went on to work with Dinah Washington, Count Basie, Dizzy Gillespie, and Tommy Dorsey, among others.¹²⁴ Recounting his time with the band, Wilkins speaks of Hudson's group as one of such precision that it fell out of favor with New York promoters:

He had a very, very good band. In fact, the band was too good, according to certain promoters in New York. We played in tune; we played with precision; and we had great arrangements, things that a colored band was not supposed to do unless it was Duke Ellington. I learned very much being in the band. And, by that time, I was really writing well. I'd learned a whole lot [during] the time I was in the Navy. I learned from Gerald Wilson and a few of the heavy guys that were in the navy then. So, playing with George Hudson was a great experience and it was a very good band. Everybody that ever heard the band, even Dizzy Gillespie's band, when they heard the band, they flipped...And Dizzy liked the band too...But, unfortunately, things never happened for George Hudson and his excellent band.¹²⁵

Jamal celebrated his eighteenth birthday in Atlantic City, where the George Hudson Orchestra began each night at eight and left with the sun rising. The band did not record while he was a member, but at Club Harlem the band worked for the likes of singers Johnny Hartman and Billy Daniels, Butterbeans and Susie from the Theatre Owners Booking Association (TOBA) circuit, and director/choreographer Ziggy Johnson's chorus line. It was with Hudson in Atlantic City that Jamal had "one of the thrills of [his] life," playing with drummer Sid Catlett, who was passing through as a member of Louis Armstrong's All-Stars.¹²⁶ Jamal had hoped to study at Juilliard that fall, but after the summer engagement concluded in Atlantic City, Hudson moved the band up to the Apollo Theater in New York City. Though he played the historic Apollo and backed

¹²⁴ Stan Britt and Barry Kernfeld, "Wilkins, Ernie" in *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed., *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, (Accessed December 20, 2016),

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/subscriber/article/grove/music/J483600>.

¹²⁵ Owsley, *City of Gabriels*, 95.

¹²⁶ Panken, "Ahmad Jamal's 81st Birthday." Like Hudson, Catlett was an alumnus of the Jeter-Pillars band. See Owsley, *City of Angels*, 63.

the city's top acts, he never made it to Juilliard, which was just a few blocks from the theater at the time:

I was too busy playing from 9AM to midnight. We were on the bill with The Ravens, who had the hottest act in the country with "Old Man River." Dinah Washington. Jimmy Smith, a xylophone player who tap-danced on the instrument. Billy Eckstein was checking me out from the wings.¹²⁷

After a year with Hudson, Jamal returned to Pittsburgh in 1948, replacing pianist Sam Johnson in The Four Strings, a drummerless quartet consisting of all Pittsburgh musicians: violinist Joe Kennedy, Jr., guitarist Ray Crawford, and bassist Edgar Willis. Jamal's experience in the quartet not only contributed to his small ensemble concept, but eventually provided the personnel and musical foundation of his first trio as leader.

¹²⁷ Panken, "Ahmad Jamal's 85th Birthday."

3.0 THE FOUR STRINGS

Jamal was still in his teens when he joined The Four Strings, but its impact on him was lasting, as was the guidance of its leader and musical director Joe Kennedy. Jamal referred to Kennedy as “one of the most influential people” in his life.¹²⁸ Kenney, who Jamal described as having a “wonderful orchestral mind,” produced all of the arrangements and contributed a number of original songs to their repertoire, in addition to his improvisational artistry on the violin.¹²⁹ According to Jamal, “Joe Kennedy stands out like Stuff Smith and Eddie South, and he was certainly a forerunner in the technical aspects of the violin and the approach in American classical music, sometimes called jazz, as far as the violin is concerned.”¹³⁰

Kennedy was first inspired to study violin with his grandfather, Saunders C. Bennett, Sr., after attending a recital by Jewish-American master violinist Yehudi Menuhin. He participated in his school’s orchestra program and his mother enrolled him in the music classes at Mary Caldwell Dawson’s School of Music, where he met and became friends with Ahmad Jamal. The two played together for class recitals and church programs.¹³¹ Though he studied “the typical classical

¹²⁸ Ahmad Jamal, interview with author (March 22, 2017).

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ “Profile: Remembering the Musical Career of Joe Kennedy Jr., Who Died Last Week,” *Weekend All Things Considered* (April 25, 2004), *Academic OneFile*, (Accessed December 12, 2016), http://go.galegroup.com/pitt.idm.oclc.org/ps/i.do?p=AONE&sw=w&u=upitt_main&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CA162001564&asid=e15370b0591e12b4d49f06b3e7afa440.

¹³¹ “Joe Kennedy, Jr.,” self-interview, African-American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh (AAJPSP) Oral History Project, 1997-, (University of Pittsburgh: September 1998).

repertoire” with Dawson, Kennedy “always had [his] ears open to jazz.” His uncle, Theodore “Cuban” Bennett, played trumpet alongside Fletcher Henderson and Louis Armstrong during the 1920s, and his cousin, Benny Carter, enjoyed an illustrious career as a saxophonist, trumpeter, composer, and arranger.¹³²

As a young black man, however, he was denied any opportunity to audition for the local white symphony, so he spent his summers in Europe playing with Carter. At the Hot Club of France, he was introduced to the work of violinist Stephane Grappelli, who founded the Quintette du Hot Club de France along with guitarist Django Reinhardt in 1934. Though Grappelli and other jazz violinists such as Eddie South, Joe Venuti, and Stuff Smith influenced his early development, Kennedy was equally drawn to pianists and horn players. “In my case, I wanted to play bebop and I just loved listening to Charlie Parker, to Diz Gillespie. Thelonious Monk and people of that time, and I just leaned toward horns, leaned towards pianists – Art Tatum, Benny Carter – and this has been my focal point, even now.”¹³³ With World War II still raging on, Kennedy enlisted in the United States Army after graduating from high school. He was sent to the Army Band training unit at Camp Lee, near Petersburg, Virginia (now Fort Lee), where he performed in the Camp Lee Symphony Orchestra.¹³⁴

When he returned to Pittsburgh following his army discharge in 1946, Kennedy joined the Black Federation of Musicians Union Local 471, headquartered at 1213 Wylie Avenue in the historic Hill District. He worked his first contracted job in George “Duke” Spalding’s band, where

¹³² Ibid.; Joe Kennedy, Jr., interview by Billy Taylor, *Jazz at the Kennedy Center*, National Public Radio (2000), Accessed December 12, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/programs/btaylor/archive/kennedy.html>.

¹³³ Julie Lyonn Lieberman, *Improvising Violin*, (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard Publishing Corporation, 1997).

¹³⁴ “Joe Kennedy, Jr.,” AAJPSP.

he met bassist Edgar “Peeper” Willis. As an active musician in Pittsburgh, Kennedy also came to know pianist Sam Johnson and guitarist Ray Crawford. With Willis on bass, he assembled them into a group called The Four Strings around 1947. One afternoon, while they were practicing the Local 471 rehearsal space, union president Henry “Prez” Jackson appeared and was impressed by what he heard, exclaiming, “I like the music you all are rehearsing. You play in all different kinds of keys; I noticed, too...How would you like to play here on Saturdays and Sundays?”¹³⁵ Kennedy said he and his bandmates were rendered “speechless with excitement” for the opportunity to work as the Local’s house band and develop their repertoire.¹³⁶

Though young, these four were already among the most accomplished musicians in the city. According to Jamal, his predecessor Sam Johnson was “unbelievable,” “a phenomenal player” with “an amazing harmonic mind” and was “much better suited” for the band than himself.¹³⁷ In fact, Jamal said he was initially “reluctant to take Sam Johnson’s place in the Four Strings,” recalling how Johnson “used to play the most beautiful, contrary-motion lines.”¹³⁸ When I mentioned that fellow Pittsburgh musician Nelson Harrison brought up Johnson’s work, Jamal exclaimed, “I introduced Nelson to Sam – and he never forgot!”¹³⁹ Harrison, a life-long Pittsburgh musician and alumnus of Westinghouse High School and the Count Basie Orchestra, was a friend to the late Sam Johnson and Ahmad Jamal. In my interview with Harrison, he shared with me that Jamal nicknamed Johnson, the “poet,” because of the way he made the piano speak each time he sat down to play it. Harrison describes Johnson as a contemporary of and musical equal to Erroll

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Kenny Washington, Ahmad Jamal Interview (February 9, 2003) in *The Complete Ahmad Jamal Trio Argo Sessions 1956-62* Boxset Booklet, (Stamford, CT: Mosaic Records, L.L.C., 2010), 3.

¹³⁸ Jamal, interview with author.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

Garner, but whose quiet personality left him mostly in the shadows of his fellow pianist.¹⁴⁰ In the early 1980s, Harrison was able to get Jamal, Johnson, and Jamaican-born pianist Monty Alexander together for an impromptu session. Johnson started playing and with every twist and turn, Jamal shouted out “you rascal!” Alexander sat down alongside Johnson to play a bass-line to his improvisations, but gave up midway through the chorus, throwing his hands up in the air in disbelief.¹⁴¹

Guitarist H. (Holland) Ray Crawford started his professional career as a clarinetist and tenor saxophonist with Fletcher Henderson from 1942-1943, but was hospitalized for two years after contracting tuberculosis. Due to the effect of the disease on his lungs, Crawford could no longer play a wind instrument, so he taught himself how to play the guitar while in the hospital. On his release, he played well enough to get work, but he could only play solos at first, no chords.¹⁴² As noted above, bassist Edgar “Peepers” Willis was a member of Spalding’s band and was regarded by the esteemed pianist Mary Lou Williams as one of her favorite bassists.¹⁴³ In fact, Williams grew so fond of the group that in 1947, she arranged and supervised their first recording session with Moses Asch, director of the Asch Recording Company in New York.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Harrison explained that when Garner first went to New York, he urged Johnson to go along. Johnson did not, but Garner went and gained instant recognition. On a return trip to Pittsburgh, Garner insisted that Johnson follow him to New York where the two could take the scene together. Again, the shy Johnson refused. Nelson Harrison, interview with author (March 1, 2017).

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Mark Weber, “Interview with Ray Crawford,” *Coda* 184 (1982), 6.

¹⁴³ Ted Panken, “It’s Ahmad Jamal’s 81st Birthday: Ahmad Jamal Profile” (July 2, 2011), WKCR Interview Transcript (February 5, 1995), *Today Is the Question: Ted Panken on Music, Politics and the Arts*, (Accessed December 12, 2016), <https://tedpanken.wordpress.com/2011/07/02/its-ahmad-jamals-81st-birthday/>

¹⁴⁴ David A. Jasen, *Jazz Violins of the Forties: Stuff Smith, Paul Nero, Joe Kennedy*, Liner notes, (New York, NY: Folkways Records and Service Corp., 1981), 3.

The recording was never mass distributed, nor has it since been reissued. Two of Kennedy's original compositions from this session – "Patches" and "Desert Sands" – were included on a 1981 compilation album as representative of Joe Kennedy, Jr.'s contribution to jazz violin styles on the 1940s.¹⁴⁵ "Patches" is a harmonically-rich ballad, with several surprising chord movements. Although Kennedy only plays the head melody for the first and final choruses, his violin-playing is smooth and resonant and carries well over the accompanying piano and guitar. Johnson's arpeggiated flourishes, sweeping harmonized melodies, and use of the entire keyboard range call to mind characteristics of his friend and contemporary Erroll Garner. During his solo, he plays inventive melodic lines, which complement the intricacy of the chord progressions. On the guitar, Crawford mostly remains in the background with light arpeggiations and block chords, giving Johnson full control over the harmonic responsibilities. Crawford interjects improvised solo material during Johnson's solo and at the final measures of the arrangement. His tone contains as much richness as Kennedy's, balancing well with the violin.

"Desert Sands," however, is particularly representative of Kennedy's orchestrational influence on Jamal. The piece begins with a vamping introduction, in which the rhythmic phrases are played in unison between the piano, guitar, and bass with very specific articulations. The vamp diminishes but continues as accompaniment under Kennedy's legato melodies. The last four measures of each A-section include accented phrases played in unison. In the bridge that follows, Willis's shifts from the vamp into a strong walking bass-line under bop-influenced solos by Kennedy, Crawford, and Johnson. There is a shout-like chorus after the solos, which gives space to hear a few punctuations by Willis's bass. Overall, this is a very balanced quartet, with each musician seamlessly transitioning between arranged ensemble parts and solo choruses without

¹⁴⁵ *Jazz Violins of the Forties: Stuff Smith, Paul Nero, Joe Kennedy*, (Folkways Records 1981).

over-powering his fellow bandmates. Both compositions possess the same features that Jamal would further develop in his own ensembles – detailed arrangements, balanced orchestrations, skillful improvisations, innovative song forms, and dramatic shifts of dynamics and textures – and are indicative of the importance this ensemble played in Jamal’s conceptual development.

Willis left the group to replace fellow Pittsburgh bassist Ray Brown in Sonny Stitt’s quartet in 1947, when Brown left to play with pianist Oscar Peterson.¹⁴⁶ Around the same time, Sam Johnson left the group to take a gig in Philadelphia that ultimately never materialized, leaving the pianist, as Jamal remembered, “to wash dishes and tune pianos.”¹⁴⁷ While maintaining a steady schedule of bookings at local clubs, the group also recorded commercials for advertising agencies and background music for syndicated radio shows. In need of a pianist, Kennedy hired Jamal for the group because he was such a strong reader, even though he was still a teenager at Westinghouse High School. According to Kennedy, the experience working for radio stations developed the group’s creativity in the studio.¹⁴⁸ Once Jamal ended his tour with Hudson and graduated from high school, The Four Strings left for Chicago, with fellow Pittsburgher Tommy Sewell replacing Willis on bass (Figure 7).

¹⁴⁶ Though Willis enjoyed success with Stitt playing alongside pianist Bobby Timmons and drummer Kenny Dennis, he is mostly known for his long career with singer/pianist Ray Charles and other Rhythm-and-Blues musicians.

¹⁴⁷ Washington, “Ahmad Jamal Interview,” 3.

¹⁴⁸ “Joe Kennedy, Jr.” AAJPSP.



Figure 7. The Four Strings, including Tommy Sewell on bass, Ahmad Jamal (Fritz Jones), Joseph Kennedy Jr. on fiddle, and Ray Crawford on guitar, c. 1942-1948. (© Carnegie Museum of Art, Charles “Teenie” Harris Archive, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.10346)

Soon after, *Down Beat* magazine printed a column on the latest edition of The Four Strings – Kennedy, Crawford, Sewell, and Jamal – in the May 20, 1949 issue, headlined “Exciting Bop Group Found in Pittsburgh.” Penned by Bettylou Purvis, a *Down Beat* correspondent and disc jockey for WPGH in Pittsburgh, she writes of being “knocked out” upon hearing the quartet in rehearsal.¹⁴⁹ Commenting on the repertoire, she highlights “Tempo for Two,” a Kennedy and Irving Ashby original recently recorded at the time by Nat Cole, with particular excitement for Kennedy’s and Jamal’s playing:

Tempo, for example, opens with an intricate melody pattern riffed lightly by guitar and violin at a breakneck tempo. Everybody comes

¹⁴⁹ Harold V. Cohen, “The Drama Desk,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* 21, no. 230 (April 26, 1948), 16. Purvis’s father, Jack Purvis, enjoyed a fairly successful career as a jazz trumpeter and composer in the 1920s and 1930s. See Scott Yanow, *Classic Jazz: The Musicians & Recordings that Shaped Jazz, 1895-1933*, (San Fransisco, CA: Backbeat Books, 2001).

in for a solo, with constant rhythm building on piano and bass. And right here we want to say Kennedy plays the cleanest violin we've ever heard, with Jones (Jamal) an amazingly facile, tremendous bopplet. The group has lovely intonation, dynamics, and a compelling beat.¹⁵⁰

In what she perceives as an indicator of the band's showmanship, Purvis states that Crawford used his guitar case as bongos to play Afro-Cuban rhythms behind Kennedy's violin solos. She ends the column by urging her readers to purchase The Four Strings album, *Trends*, to "see what we mean when we say they are original, produce depth of tone and precise phrasing, and, above all, really listenable bop."¹⁵¹

Even after their favorable *Down Beat* review and second recording session with Asch, The Four Strings were unable to acquire steady employment in Chicago. When Kennedy opted to return to his teaching career in Pittsburgh, Jamal assumed the leadership role and continued the band's operations as a trio. Jamal recalled, "We couldn't get adequate work. We got a few jobs, but not enough to stay intact, and Joe went back to Pittsburgh. I decided to become a very responsible person. Leadership is full of responsibilities. I had inherited what was left – Ray Crawford and Tommy Sewell... We became the Three Strings."¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Betty Lou Purvis, "Exciting Bop Group Found in Pittsburgh," *Down Beat* 16, no. 9 (May 20, 1949), 5.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* Regrettably, no known copy of this album exists today.

¹⁵² Washington, "Ahmad Jamal Interview," 3.

3.1 CHICAGO

In early 1949, Jamal married a woman from Chicago named Virginia Wilkins, and decided to settle there permanently. Though he was committed to Chicago as the base for his new trio, the leadership of the black Chicago Musicians Union Local 208 made it difficult for him, like other musical migrants to Chicago, to contract gigs. The famously-tough president of the Local, Harry Gray, angrily blocked the transfer of Jamal's union card from Pittsburgh, citing that he failed to file for the transfer before working a single night with guitarist Leo Blevin.¹⁵³ Without the transfer, Jamal could not accept nightly bookings. In hopes of solidifying his permanent residence, he was forced to take odd jobs, which included maintenance work, cabinet-making, and a solo piano stint at the Palm Tavern. Even though Chicago drummer Ike Day would often come to join in an impromptu duo, Jamal took the Palm Tavern job more out of economic need than artistic fulfillment:

I was there because of the bills. I was paying \$7 a week for a room, and I had to make a living. Eventually I started making \$32 per week at one of the big department stores. I was making kitchen cabinets for 80 cents an hour before I got my card transferred from Pittsburgh to Chicago – it took a while.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Ted Panken, "For Ahmad Jamal's 85th Birthday, a *Down Beat* feature from 2002," (July 2, 2015), Interview Transcript (2002), *Today Is the Question: Ted Panken on Music, Politics and the Arts*, (Accessed December 12, 2016), <https://tedpanken.wordpress.com/2015/07/02/for-ahmad-jamals-85th-birthday-a-downbeat-feature-from-2002/>.

¹⁵⁴ Jim Macnie, "Intricacy and Groove: At Home with Ahmad Jamal," *Down Beat* 77, no. 3 (March 2010), 30.

During the day, Jamal made his way up to the sixteenth floor of the Carson, Pirie, Scott, and Company department store at South State Street and East Madison Street in downtown Chicago, where cleaning the revolving doors and shoveling the snow were part of his duties.¹⁵⁵

Without his union card, Jamal's hopes of leading a trio were fading, so he accepted an intermittent job touring as an accompanist for The Caldwelles, a song-and-dance troupe from East St. Louis, Illinois. Originally named The St. Louis Four, the group was billed in 1947 as "America's Outstanding Instrumental-Vocal Quartet." They featured original compositions and held a brief recording contract with RCA Victor.¹⁵⁶ Before Jamal joined the group, the group had changed their name to The Caldwelles after signing a record deal that produced a series of singles (RCA Victor 20-2906).¹⁵⁷ By January 1948, *The Pittsburgh Courier* ran a photo of the group with the caption:

The Caldwelles are rated by the Note Book as the most sensational new act to hit Broadway in years. Voice and instrumental, the group has been working in Philadelphia since coming East from East St. Louis, Ill. Each member plays bass fiddle and guitar and has a distinctive style of singing the blues. Most of their numbers are originals and composed by Alex Caldwell...Other members are...Helen Stewart, John Dennis and Aleatha Granger.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Panken, "Ahmad Jamal's 81st Birthday."; Eugene Holley, Jr., "Gold Standard: Pianist Ahmad Jamal Chartered a New Popularity for Jazz," *Wax Poetics*, (December/January 2008-2009), 98.

¹⁵⁶ "Eddie Suez Presents America's Outstanding Instrumental-Vocal Quartet," Advertisement, *Billboard (Archive: 1894-1960)* 59, no. 4 (January 25, 1947), 33, (Accessed January 25, 2017), <http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1040107362?accountid=14709>.

¹⁵⁷ "This Week's RCA Victor Release," Advertisement, *Billboard (Archive: 1894-1960)* 60, no. 24 (June 12, 1948), 23, (Accessed January 25, 2017), <http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1039909112?accountid=14709>.

¹⁵⁸ Photo Standalone 27 – No Title, *The Pittsburgh Courier (1911-1950)*, City Edition (January 17, 1948), 15, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Pittsburgh Courier, (Accessed January 25, 2017), <http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/202220675?accountid=14709>.

This publicized description notwithstanding, Jamal recalls that the act mostly employed fake instruments. In addition to providing vocal accompaniment, he had to imitate the sounds of the instruments being “played:”

They just held the instruments. They held the guitar and the bass, but you’d have to be the bass player in actuality. You had to be the guitarist. You had to be the orchestra. If you played with them, you had to play what they couldn’t play. They just held the instruments. They would make a few strokes, but meaningless. They were singers, so they had to have someone who could simulate the bass and the guitar. You had to make the necessary support. That was a job! For 75 bucks a week, that was a job (laughs)!¹⁵⁹

The whole experience took its toll on the young pianist, and while on the road Jamal grew increasingly depressed. As a means of coping, he wrote “Ahmad’s Blues,” during a stop in Philadelphia in 1948. Jamal later recorded the composition with The Three Strings (Epic 1952), The Ahmad Jamal Trio (Argo 1958), and The Ahmad Jamal Trio with a 15-piece string orchestra (Argo 1959). Pianist Red Garland, bassist Paul Chambers, and drummer Philly Joe Jones also recorded it as a trio for Miles Davis’s *Workin’ with the Miles Davis Quartet* (Prestige 1959).¹⁶⁰ Minneapolis school teacher Bob Williams later penned lyrics for “Ahmad’s Blues,” first recorded by Marlena Shaw on *Out of Different Bags* (Cadet 1967), then by Natalie Cole on *Stardust* (Elektra 1996).¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Washington, “Ahmad Jamal Interview,” 2.

¹⁶⁰ Davis’s recording of “Ahmad’s Blues” was also used in the 1962 Broadway play *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* by Edward Albee. See Josephine Reed, “Ahmad Jamal,” *Art Works* Podcast (January 2012), National Endowment for the Arts, (Accessed July 1, 2013), <https://www.arts.gov/audio/ahmad-jamal>.

¹⁶¹ Marlena Shaw, *Out of Different Bags*, Liner notes, (Cadet 1967); *1968 Catalog of Copyright Entries*, Library of Congress, Third series, Vol. 22, Part 5, No. 1, Sec. 1.

With the help of saxophonist Eddie Johnson, the Local 208 finally accepted Jamal's union card transfer in 1948, so he immediately left the Caldwells to return to Chicago.¹⁶² Johnson, who wanted to hire Jamal, pleaded his case to union president Harry Gray, who finally relented.¹⁶³ Even after obtaining clearance, however, it took some time before he was able to acquire work as a leader. He continued to take on a variety of work as a sideman while attempting to pinpoint a contract for his own trio. Jamal described 1940s Chicago as the "Age of Saxophone," in which high-caliber players like Johnny Thompson, Gene Ammons, Tom Archia, Claude McLin, and Von Freeman dominated the scene. After Jamal established himself, bassist Israel Crosby hired him for a steady weekend job at Jack's Back Door on 59th and South State Street, to play in his trio with tenor saxophonist Johnny Thompson.¹⁶⁴ Crosby filed an indefinite contract with the Local 208 on October 19, 1950 and on December 16, 1950, *The Chicago Defender* ran an advertisement for the engagement with accompanying photograph of the three, labeled as the Israel Crosby Trio (Figure 8):¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Washington, "Ahmad Jamal Interview," 2. At Jamal's departure, pianist Ray Bryant took his place. Like Jamal, Bryant went on to enjoy a successful career in his own right, touring with guitarist Tiny Grimes and working as house pianist at the Blue Note in Philadelphia in the 1950s, where he played with the likes of Lester Young, Philly Jo Jones, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, and Sonny Stitt. See Feather, Leonard and Ira Gitler, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁶³ Panken, "Ahmad Jamal's 81st Birthday."

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ For the Local 208 contract, Armin Büttner, Robert Campbell, and Robert Pruter, *The Parrot and Blue Lake Labels*, (Accessed August 20, 2013), <http://myweb.clemson.edu/~campber/parrot.html>.



JACK'S BACK DOOR is wide open and his front door is also and one of the reasons is the music being put down there by the Isreal Crosby Trio. The group, busy packing them in nightly at the popular 59th and State st., spot, includes Fritz Jones on piano and Johnny Thompson on the tenor horn.—Defender photo by Rhoden.

Figure 8. *Chicago Defender* Advertisement for the Israel Crosby Trio.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Photo Standalone 29 – No Title, *Chicago Defender (1921-1967)*, National Edition (Dec 16, 1950): 21, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Defender, (Accessed January 25, 2017), <http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/492823981?accountid=14709>.

The job with Thompson and Crosby at Jack's Back Door lasted about a year, during which time Jamal recalled that they played "every conceivable song." He later told Kenny Washington that it was "one of the most memorable jobs I've ever had in my life."¹⁶⁷

Jamal also played with saxophonist Von Freeman at the Circle Lounge on 63rd and Cottage Grove. Freeman first met Jamal at the Club DeLisa on South State Street and asked him to work some gigs with him in a band that also include his two brothers, guitarist George Freeman and drummer Eldridge "Bruz" Freeman. In an interview with Ted Panken, Freeman recalled that Jamal was initially hesitant to take it because up until that point he was mostly a trio pianist. Freeman responded, "Man, the way you play, you'll fit in with anybody."¹⁶⁸ He likened Jamal's style at that point to Erroll Garner, but as Jamal continued to play with Freeman, the bandleader noticed a difference in his playing. During that time, Jamal had befriended another Chicago-based pianist who worked with Freeman – Chris Anderson. According to Jamal, Anderson "always had a great harmonic concept...absolutely amazing, astounding" and often joked with the pianist that he needed "to get out and steal a few chords" from him.¹⁶⁹ Anderson's influence on Jamal did not go unnoticed, as Freeman explains:

¹⁶⁷ Washington, "Ahmad Jamal Interview," 4; Ted Panken, "Vernel Fournier on Ahmad Jamal" (July 3, 2011), WKCR Interview Transcript (1990), *Today Is the Question: Ted Panken on Music, Politics and the Arts*, (Accessed December 12, 2016).

<http://tedpanken.wordpress.com/2011/07/03/vernell-fournier-on-ahmad-jamal-wkcr-1990>.

¹⁶⁸ Ted Panken, "NEA Jazz Masters 2012: Von Freeman" (June 24, 2011), National Endowment of the Arts Jazz Masters Awards Interview Transcript (January 19, 1994), *Today Is the Question: Ted Panken on Music, Politics and the Arts*, (Accessed December 12, 2016),

<https://tedpanken.wordpress.com/2011/06/24/nea-jazz-masters-2012/>.

¹⁶⁹ Panken, "Ahmad Jamal's 85th Birthday." Though Anderson enjoyed a successful career in both Chicago and New York, working with the likes of singer Dinah Washington, pianist Barry Harris, and drummer Billy Higgins, his reputation remained mostly among other musicians, including pianist Herbie Hancock, who sought out his instruction during his breaks from college. See "Spotlight: Herbie Hancock," *JazzEd Magazine* (February 5, 2015), (Accessed December 12, 2016), <http://www.jazzedmagazine.com/articles/spotlight/spotlight-herbie-hancock/>.

And then he [Jamal] started hanging with Chris, too. And I really noticed a big difference in his playing after he had been around Chris. Almost anybody who had been around him, it kind of opened them up a little bit – because he was very advanced for those times. In fact, I still think he is.¹⁷⁰

After roughly two years with Freeman, Jamal was ready to lead his own group. He gave Freeman his two-week notice and with fellow Four Strings alumni Ray Crawford and Tommy Sewell, Jamal formed his trio: The Three Strings.¹⁷¹

3.2 THE THREE STRINGS

Jamal's first documented job as a leader finally came on April 19, 1951, when the Local 208 awarded him an indefinite contract with Jimmy's Palm Garden, under his birth name Frederick Jones. A second followed on June 7 with Harry's Show Lounge, which was subsequently renewed on July 5.¹⁷² Jamal retained the piano/guitar/bass format for The Three Strings, not only because of the group's original instrumentation, but also because of the popularity of Nat "King" Cole's own drummerless trio:

Nat "King" Cole's was the classic cohesive trio that everyone patterned themselves after at that time [around 1949]. Nat was a fabulous pianist, and he worked with just bass and guitar. Listen to those things he did with Lester Young and his own trio. They were masterpieces. Subtlety was the trademark of that instrumentation. It was quite a challenge, especially to play some of those big rooms without a drummer.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Panken, "Ahmad Jamal's 85th Birthday."

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Büttner, Cambell, and Pruter, "Parrot and Blue Lake Labels."

¹⁷³ Len Lyons, *The Great Pianists: Speaking of Their Lives and Music*, (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1983), 116.

In a survey of jazz pianists, *The Great Pianists: Speaking of Their Lives and Music*, Len Lyons delineates two camps in the early fifties: those who followed blues-centric conceptions of hard bop and those who continued to champion the values of subtlety, technique, and harmonic sophistication, as inspired by Cole.¹⁷⁴ With his signature delicate touch taking lead, Cole began using the piano/guitar/bass setup in 1937 while playing in Los Angeles with guitarist Oscar Moore and bassist Wesley Prince.¹⁷⁵ According to pianist and educator Dr. Billy Taylor, Cole focused on constructing rhythmic phrases that could effectively swing without the aid of a drummer.¹⁷⁶ In fact, the overwhelming popularity of Cole's trio in particular led many other pianists to adopt the same format, including Clarence Profit, Art Tatum, Erroll Garner, Oscar Peterson, Lennie Tristano, and Hank Jones. Jamal's drummer from 1956-1962 Vernel Fournier recounted:

Most trios came from the sound of Nat "King" Cole. The unity and the way he used dynamics brought about a new phase of playing. Ahmad just had more difficult dynamics, and so many of them. That was the thing.¹⁷⁷

Unfortunately, Jamal quickly learned that one of the greatest challenges of leading an ensemble was getting all musicians to identify with a unified concept. On July 5, 1951 bassist Tommy Sewell presented a complaint to the Local 208 board that he had been wrongfully fired from Jamal's trio while working at Harry's:

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 45.

¹⁷⁵ Art Tatum followed suit in 1943, with Tiny Grimes on guitar and Slam Stewart on bass, until he abandoned the format in 1945 for return to solo piano work. See Bill Dobbins and Richard Wang, "Cole, Nat 'King'," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, (Accessed September 9, 2013),

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/subscriber/article/grove/music/06073>.

¹⁷⁶ Billy Taylor, *Jazz Piano: History and Development*, (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1982), 107.

¹⁷⁷ Ted Panken, "Vernel Fournier on Ahmad Jamal" (July 3, 2011), WKCR Interview Transcript (1990), *Today Is the Question: Ted Panken on Music, Politics and the Arts*, (Accessed December 12, 2016), <http://tedpanken.wordpress.com/2011/07/03/vernell-fournier-on-ahmad-jamal-wkcr-1990>.

Members Fritz Jones and Thomas Sewell appeared before the Board, as notified, with reference to Sewell's complaint that Jones had no reason for dismissing him from his group.¹⁷⁸

Sewell had been working with Jamal since The Four Strings arrived in Chicago several years prior, but Jamal issued him a notice of dismissal from his trio for not cooperating stylistically. Jamal complained that Sewell insisted on soloing in a bebop manner against his desires, and that upon being served his notice, Sewell retaliated with actions meant to humiliate and embarrass the leader, such as arriving late to the bandstand. Sewell believed he was dismissed because Jamal's wife did not care for him. Ultimately, the board ruled in Jamal's favor.¹⁷⁹ Jamal replaced Sewell with Chicago bassist Eddie Calhoun, who played intermittently with Jamal since 1949.¹⁸⁰

On August 2, 1951, the local approved a contract between Jamal and the *113 Lounge* and extended it on September 20 with a new five-month contract.¹⁸¹ While the trio was in-residence at the *113*, producer John Hammond offered Jamal a contract to record with Okeh, a subsidiary of Columbia. In the liner notes to *Portfolio of Ahmad Jamal* (Argo 1959), Hammond reveals that he first encountered the band at The Embers in New York City. The owner of Chicago's Blue Note, Frank Holzfeind, was instrumental in setting up the booking.¹⁸²

Columbia Records reactivated the Okeh subsidiary label after it remained dormant for several years in the late-1940s.¹⁸³ Under the direction of the newly-appointed sales manager and

¹⁷⁸ Büttner, Cambell, and Pruter, "Parrot and Blue Lake Labels."

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ James M. Doran, "Calhoun, Eddie," *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed. *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, (Accessed December 12, 2016), <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/subscriber/article/grove/music/J072200>.

¹⁸¹ Büttner, Cambell, and Pruter, "Parrot and Blue Lake Labels."

¹⁸² John Hammond, *Portfolio of Ahmad Jamal*, Liner notes, (Chicago, IL: Argo, 1959).

¹⁸³ Since the label's inception by General Phonograph in 1918, the label had produced historically-important early jazz, blues, and gospel records, including those by Mamie Smith, Clarence Williams, King Oliver, Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and Hot Seven, and Bennie Moten, among dozens of others. Columbia Records acquired the label in 1926. See Howard Rye,

director of artists and repertoire Danny Kessler, Okeh focused on jazz reissues and the R&B market.¹⁸⁴ Together, Hammond and Kessler arranged for the Three Strings to record a series of 78-RPM singles. On October 25, 1951, Jamal took to the studio with Crawford and Calhoun to record the first four, followed by a second session on May 5, 1952 to record four more. When released, the eight songs were paired as per the Okeh number in Figure 9:

Okeh Number	Title	Recorded Date
6855	Rica Pulpa	October 25, 1951
6855	Surrey with the Fringe on Top	October 25, 1951
6889	Billy Boy	May 5, 1952
6889	Perfidia	October 25, 1951
6921	A Gal in Calico	May 5, 1952
6921	Aki and Ukthay	May 5, 1952
6945	Will You Still Be Mine?	October 25, 1951
6945	Ahmad's Blues	May 5, 1952

Figure 9. Ahmad Jamal's Three Strings 78 Singles for Okeh.¹⁸⁵

The November 17, 1951 issue of *The Billboard* printed the following announcement:

Okeh Records, Columbia's R&B affiliate, this week continued to expand its rapidly-growing talent list...Okeh's recording boss, Danny Kessler, this week landed a quartet of newer artists from the Chicago area. Newly inked [was] the Fritz Jones Trio...¹⁸⁶

"Okeh," *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, (Accessed January 4, 2017),

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/subscriber/article/grove/music/48934>.

¹⁸⁴ Hal Webman, "Rhythm and Blues Notes," *Billboard*, (*Archive: 1894-1960*) 63, no. 21 (May 26, 1951): 32, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Billboard, (Accessed January 25, 2017), <http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1040198200?accountid=14709>.

¹⁸⁵ Steve Abrams and Tyrone Settlemier, "Okeh (by CBS) 78rpm numerical listing discography: 6800 – 7100," (June 26, 2012), *The Online Discographical Project*, (Accessed January 4, 2016), <http://www.78discography.com/OK6800.htm>.

¹⁸⁶ "Rhythm and Blues Notes," *Billboard* (*Archive: 1894-1960*) 63, no. 46 (November 17, 1951): 35, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Billboard, (Accessed January 25, 2017),

Hammond later blamed the Columbia's "step-child label" for minimum distribution of the trio's first recordings and the "influential jazz critics" for "ignoring both the trio and its discs," even though they "remain among [his] favorite 78s."¹⁸⁷

These recordings are proof that Jamal was forming his trio conception from the moment he inherited what was left of The Four Strings. For the new trio to function as intended, each member needed to exact Jamal's disciplined approach. Collaboration and interaction among instrumentalists was central to Jamal's concept of the trio and his bandmates adopted it wholeheartedly. So well in fact that Hammond observed, "Ahmad's trio is not just Ahmad, not all piano like Erroll Garner. It's a trio."¹⁸⁸

A closer listen to the interactions between Jamal and guitarist Crawford is particularly telling, especially as they negotiate the delicate balance of two harmonic instruments playing simultaneously. When playing in a bebop fashion, Jamal's right hand plays a single-line melody, while the left-hand comps.¹⁸⁹ The amount of comping in Jamal's left hand determines how much space Crawford has to fill in with his own comping patterns. When Jamal shifts from single-line melodies to thick, harmonized block chords, Crawford must play in response to Jamal rather than in support of him. In return, Jamal offers harmonically-lush and rhythmically-interesting accompaniment under his guitarist's solo improvisations.

<http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1040139571?accountid=14709>.

¹⁸⁷ Hammond, "Portfolio."

¹⁸⁸ Jack Chambers, *Milestones: The Music and Times of Miles Davis*, (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1998), 202.

¹⁸⁹ "Comping" is a term derived from the word "accompanying," used primarily by pianists and guitarists to denote improvised accompaniment.

On each track, the two alternate positions with ease. More importantly, rather than always competing with Jamal for comping space, Crawford pioneered an approach to guitar playing that conceded to Jamal's piano while simultaneously making up for the absence of a drummer. By tapping on his fretboard in various ways, Crawford mimicked lightly muted percussion sounds, akin to that of bongos. He adapted the technique to match the stylistic needs of each tune, whether in a swing style for "A Gal in Calico" or "Billy Boy" or a Latin clave for "Rica Pulpa." The result was so effective that in the years that followed a number of guitarists, including Herb Ellis and Barney Kessel, directly appropriated Crawford's technique for use in Oscar Peterson's drummerless trio. In fact, Ellis employs it on a recording of "A Gal in Calico" with Peterson for the 1958 album *On the Town with the Oscar Peterson Trio* on Verve.

3.3 A NEW NAME AND A NEW TRIO

3.3.1 Islamic conversion

During this period, Jamal grew increasingly interested in Islam. He was first introduced to the faith while playing the Apollo Theatre with George Hudson a few years prior. Trumpeter Idris Suleiman, himself a convert, approached Jamal at the Braddock Hotel, located at the backstage door of the Apollo, with what Jamal described as a "philosophical presentation:"¹⁹⁰

It had everything to do with being all you can be... There are people who don't want to be all they can be, and when you want to be all you can be, they want to put blocks in the path. I know no other existence except my present existence. I'm very guarded about this, because I've been abused by ignorant people. The issue at hand is music. If a person wants to interview me about philosophy, that's a

¹⁹⁰ Panken, "Ahmad Jamal's 85th Birthday."

different ballgame, because my philosophy certainly has influenced my music.¹⁹¹

In an interview with the *New York Times*, he explained that “his conversion had brought him ‘peace of mind’ as far as his race was concerned,” accounting for his “growth in the field of music that has proved very lucrative for [him].”¹⁹² He indicated that he “says Moslem (sic) prayers five times a day and arises in time to say his first prayers at 5A.M. He says them in Arabic in keeping with the Muslim tradition.”¹⁹³ He soon became involved with the International Society for the Introduction of Islamic Culture. There he met Egyptian Dr. Mahmoud Youssef Shawarbi, a professor at the University of Cairo, who later hosted the pianist and his family while visiting Egypt, the Sudan, and Ghana in 1959. In 1958, following his first performance in Pittsburgh in nearly a decade after moving to Chicago, Jamal explained his conversion to Islam to George E.

Pitts of the *Pittsburgh Courier*:

I feel that anyone needs direction and purpose to become a success and to live with himself. It doesn't matter what faith a person chooses as long as it gives him direction. I just want them to respect mine like I respect theirs. I have my music, my religion and my family, and I'm really happy.¹⁹⁴

Upon his conversion, he applied to legally change his name to Ahmad Jamal, explaining:

I haven't adopted a name. It's a part of my ancestral background and heritage. I have re-established my original name. I have gone back

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Jay Walz, “Pianist-Investor is a Hit in Cairo: Jazz Musician Ahmad Jamal Finds Moslem Faith Aids Him on African Visit,” *New York Times (1923-Current File)* (November 20, 1959): 14, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, (Accessed January 25, 2017), <http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/114835742?accountid=14709>.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ George E. Pitts, “Ahmad Jamal's a Man with Purpose,” *Pittsburgh Courier (1955-1966), City Edition*, (Nov 29, 1958): 17, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Pittsburgh Courier, (Accessed January 25, 2017), <http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/202382246?accountid=14709>.

to my own vine and fig tree.¹⁹⁵

On January 17, 1952, the Local filed its last contract (a four-week deal with the Blue Note) under Jamal's Christian birth name, Frederick Jones. The following month, he and his wife filed a name change petition with the Cook County court, witnessed by his sideman Calhoun, that read:

That the place of nativity of Frederick Russell Jones is the state of Pennsylvania and that the place of nativity of Virginia Wilkins Jones is the state of Illinois. That the age of F. R. J. is 21 years and that the age of V. W. J. is 25 years. That F. R. J. has resided in the state of Illinois for 2 years and that V. W. J. has resided in the State of Illinois for 25 years last past... Their names may be changed to Ahmad Jamal and Maryam Mezzan Jamal... Witnessed by Eddie A. Calhoun, February 18, 1952.¹⁹⁶

3.3.2 Islam in 1940s-1950s Black America

Since the 1940s, many African-American jazzmen were attracted to Islam because it provided an alternative to the racial negativism encountered in daily life. Those that were sincere converts, such as Jamal, Yusef Lateef, Max Roach, and Art Blakey, found spiritual fulfillment in its teachings. Other musicians converted or expressed an affinity for Islam to make a sociopolitical or religious statement against the roots of jazz in the Negro Protestant Church. Historically, Christianity was the religion of the white oppressor, and though it preached equality, it did not practice it. To these musicians, Islam not only provided a solution to the social problems of segregation, it was a religion that promoted and practiced equality.

However, some musicians converted for purely social reasons, noting that dark-skinned individuals from Eastern cultures were not subject to the same discrimination in restaurants and public venues or when applying for services, such as rent and housing. By converting to Islam or

¹⁹⁵ "Words of the Week," *Jet Magazine* 16, no. 17 (August 20, 1959), 30.

¹⁹⁶ Büttner, Cambell, and Pruter, "Parrot and Blue Lake Labels." The petition was discovered by Alexia Kinni, a Rutgers-Newark graduate student, under the supervision of Dr. Lewis Porter.

simply appearing to be of another culture, these African-Americans realized they could construct a new identity and escape the stigma of being a Negro in America, and in turn, the effects of racism.¹⁹⁷ In his autobiography, Dizzy Gillespie describes the impact in the jazz community:

Rudy Powell, from Edgar Hayes's band, became one of the first jazz musicians I knew to accept Islam; he became an Ahmadiyah Muslim. Other musicians followed, it seemed to me, for social rather than religious reasons, if you can separate the two. "Man, if you join the Muslim faith, you ain't colored no more, you'll be white," they'd say. "You get a new name and you don't have to be a nigger no more."¹⁹⁸

Gillespie reported that Kahilil Abdul Nasir was the Ahmadiyah missionary that facilitated many of the conversions in the jazz community, during the 1940s and 1950s, but ultimately, Gillespie believed that racial discrimination at the booking office and restaurants convinced more than a few African-American musicians to convert. He recalled an occurrence when Idrees Sulieman, a convert to Islam, "could go into these white restaurants and bring out sandwiches to the other guys because he wasn't colored – and he looked like the inside of the chimney – they started enrolling in droves."¹⁹⁹ As such, the substantial interest and conversion to Islam was met as suspect. However, most Muslims during this period were not known to proselytize, preferring rather to live and worship privately in their communities.²⁰⁰

Differing factions of the faith at the time added to the confusion of what it meant to be an African-American Muslim. According to Richard Brent Turner, "African-American Muslims were not united but had different visions of Islamic identity and significance that involved different

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 34.

¹⁹⁸ Dizzy Gillespie and Al Fraser, *To Be, or Not...To Bop*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 291.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Eddie S. Meadows, *Bebop to Cool: Context, Ideology, and Musical History*, (Westport, CN: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 33.

syntheses of religion, politics, and culture.”²⁰¹ From the early 1920s through the 1940s, the three African-American majority Islamic sects were the Moorish Science Temple (MST), the Nation of Islam (NOI), and the Ahmadiyah,²⁰² to which Jamal associated. Ahmadiyahs were primarily concentrated in the northern Midwest, with particularly large faith communities in Chicago and Detroit.²⁰³

Mizra Ghulam Ahmad, a Muslim scholar and theorist, founded Ahmadiyah in India at the end of the nineteenth century. He sent missionaries to the United States in 1920, but after attempts to convert white Americans failed, they concentrated their efforts on the black community, particularly nationalists and Garveyites.²⁰⁴ By the mid-1920s, nearly all African-American Muslims were connected to Ahmadiyah.²⁰⁵ In New York City, Indian missionary Mufti Muhammad Sadiq was an educated and articulate promoter of Ahmadiyah, who distributed large cards with his photograph on one side and an abbreviated lesson of basic Islamic principles on the reverse.²⁰⁶ The Ahmadiyah message spoke directly to the common grievances of the African-American community, offering a response to their marginalization at the hands of Christian hegemony. The missionaries emphasized the parts of their message that appealed directly to jazz musicians who were first exposed to music through the Negro Protestant Church. Christopher Chase explains that “Ahmadiyah, like most successful missionary traditions, offered an appealing prophetic counternarrative of religious identity as participants working for the will of God and a

²⁰¹ Quoted in Meadows, *Bebop to Cool*, 41.

²⁰² Other spellings: Ahmadiyah, Ahmadiyyah, and Ahmadiyya.

²⁰³ Patrick D. Bowen, *The African-American Islamic Renaissance and the Rise of the Nation of Islam*, (Ph.D. Diss., University of Denver, 2013), 102.

²⁰⁴ Meadows, *Bebop to Cool*, 34.

²⁰⁵ Bowen, *African-American Islamic Renaissance*, 102.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 103-4.

destiny of salvation for the *ummah* (nation/community).”²⁰⁷ Together with a Garveyian vision of transnational “blackness,” converts gained messianic hope as well as pragmatic gains. The fact that Islam acknowledges Jesus as both Isa, the “Prophet of Firm Resolve,” and the focus of prophetic salvation assisted the compatibility of Ahmadiyah with the Protestant Christianity of the black church.²⁰⁸

The Pittsburgh African-American Islamic community began to develop during the 1920s when the Ahmadis came to proselytize the city’s African-Americans. Due to a schism in the local MST, a faction left to join Ahmadiyah.²⁰⁹ The spread of Ahmadiyah to the Ohio-Pennsylvania Region can be attributed to Pakistani Mohammad Yusaf Khan, who came to the U.S. to assist Sadiq in promoting Islam in 1921 as a student. By 1923, Khan had become the leader of the U.S. missionary movement, and in March 1930, moved to Pittsburgh to establish several mosques in the region.²¹⁰

Though the Ahmadiyah movement proliferated in urban black communities stretching from the Midwest to the Atlantic coast, Turner indicates the severance of some for individual and collective desires:

In the Ahmadiyyah movement as many black people passed through its ranks because they did not want to seriously study Islam and became disenchanted with its multiracial agenda. Some...went to Sunni groups because they wanted to Arabize their identities to escape the stigma of their blackness. Others went to the Nation of Islam because they were attracted to its nationalist agenda.²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Christopher W. Chase, “Prophetics in the Key of Allah: Towards an Understanding of Islam in Jazz” in *Jazz Perspectives* 4, no. 2 (September 6, 2010), 165, (Accessed February 14, 2017), <http://dx.doi.org.pitt.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/17494060.2010.506031>.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ By the end of the 1930s, this group turned to Sunnism, creating one the first African-American Sunni communities in the U.S. The group has since become the largest form of Islam in black America. See Bowen, *African-American Islamic Renaissance*, 236.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Quoted in Meadows, *Bebop to Cool*, 39.

Some African-Americans left Ahmadiyah because it exhibited double-standard practices that permeated U.S. society at large. The schism proved to be advantageous for the Nation of Islam (NOI), whose emphasis on African-American social awareness dates back to DuBois and Garvey.

Unlike the other prominent Islamic faiths at the time, NOI originated in the United States, led by a mystical peddler from Detroit, known as Mr. Farrad Mohammad.²¹² It was founded in 1930, but its predominant period of growth occurred during the 1950s and 1960s, largely due to declines in other Islamic practices. Although NOI's ideology emphasized positive deeds, including self-help, business ownership, and anti-welfare dogma, the media latched onto its anti-white stances. Seeking advancement over dependence, NOI contrasted from Ahmadiyah in that it taught color consciousness, whereas the latter pursued a multiracial agenda. Like early Islamic faiths, NOI's emphasis on black identity, self-worth, and black consciousness coincided with the ideologies of Garveyism and other black intellectual movements, and became an appealing counterculture to parallel religions and sociopolitical campaigns.²¹³ Furthermore, NOI's focus on racial separation, the underclass, and education of destiny and heritage, positioned it dogmatically as the logical successor to Garvey's UNIA. Among other significant points, both emphasize the African motherland from which all Americans of African descent were forcibly taken; the land in which Islam is the true religion.

A report printed in Jet Magazine in 1962 indicates that Jamal was subject to some of this anti-African-American Muslim sentiment. In February 1962, Jamal and his wife filed for divorce, he closed his short-lived club The Alhambra, and disbanded the famous "Pershing" trio of Israel

²¹² Also known as F. Mohammad Ali, Mr. Wali Farrad, W.D. Fard or Ford, and Professor Ford. See Meadows, *Bebop to Cool*, 42.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

Crosby and Vernel Fournier. As the public pressed for answers, Jamal blamed those who “persecuted” him, especially the promoters and publishers who attempted to wrongfully link his Islamic devotion to the anti-white teachings of Elijah Muhammad.²¹⁴ Defending himself, he explained that he converted before Muhammad rose in popularity:

They don’t understand. I have believed this way all my life. People ask me why I have changed. Money and our present values never did mean anything to me...I belong to another culture which really believes in the dignity of the human being and the real brotherhood of man.²¹⁵

3.3.3 The Ahmad Jamal Trio

On April 17, Jamal filed his first contract under the new name, for two weeks at the Pershing Lounge in Chicago. The pre-release advertisements from the OKeh sessions continued to print “Fritz Jones,” but by the first release in the spring of 1952, “Ahmad Jamal’s Three Strings” was printed on the album sleeves.

In what could be considered its first major engagement, the Ahmad Jamal Trio was tapped to take part in a concert at Carnegie Hall honoring a quarter-century of Duke Ellington and his orchestra on November 14, 1952. Although his new name was misspelled on the advertisement, it introduced Jamal “for his first concert appearance anywhere,” sharing the bill with Billie Holiday, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Stan Getz (Figure 10):

²¹⁴ Larry Still, “Break-up of Jamal Marriage,” *Jet Magazine* 21, no. 22 (March 22, 1962), 53.

²¹⁵ Ibid.



Figure 10. Poster advertisement for the Carnegie Hall concert.²¹⁶

The program in the Carnegie Hall Archives does not include specific song selections, but it does indicate performances by Ahmad Jamal and His Three Strings. According to Walter Bruyninckx's discography, they performed "So Beats My Heart for You," "It Ain't Necessarily

²¹⁶ "The A to Z of Carnegie Hall: E is for Ellington," Blog, (Wednesday, July 25, 2012), Carnegie Hall, (Accessed January 25, 2017), <http://www.carnegiehall.org/BlogPost.aspx?id=4294988115>.

So,” and “This Can't Be Love.”²¹⁷ Patricia Music, Inc. produced the star-studded concert and broadcast it on WNBC.²¹⁸ When news of the event reached Pittsburgh, on November 8, 1952 the *Pittsburgh Courier* printed the headline “Ahmad Jamal, Whom You Called Fritz Jones, Plays Carnegie Hall.” The article proudly detailed how the former East Liberty pianist who changed his name after joining the “Moslem religion” would play his first concert at the famed music hall with his trio.²¹⁹ On November 15, 1952, the *New York Times* printed its review of the concert. Even though the columnist was less than impressed with Stan Getz’s “tiresome” performance, Jamal’s trio was received favorably:

Mr. Jamal’s trio was more rewarding. From the combination of piano, double-bass and rhythm section the three players achieved remarkable variety of timbre. Their playing was easy and spontaneous.²²⁰

Around this time, Calhoun left Jamal to join pianist Horace Henderson, younger brother of bandleader Fletcher Henderson.²²¹ In need of a bassist for a steady lineup of club dates in Chicago, Jamal hired Chicago-native Richard Davis, a classical bass student at Vandercook College of Music who played in symphony orchestras by day and jazz combos at night, including those led

²¹⁷ Walter Bruyninckx, *70 Years of Recorded Jazz 1917-1987*.

²¹⁸ “Jazz Concert featuring Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, Charlie Parker and Others: November 14, 1952 at 8:30PM – Main Hall,” Performance History Search, Carnegie Hall, (Accessed January 25, 2017), <https://www.carnegiehall.org/performancehistorysearch/#!performer=27235>.

²¹⁹ “Ahmad Jamal, Whom You Called Fritz Jones, Plays Carnegie Hall,” *Pittsburgh Courier* (1950-1954), *City Edition*, (November 8, 1952): 2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Pittsburgh Courier (1911-2002), (Accessed January 25, 2017), <http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/202330134?accountid=14709>.

²²⁰ J.B., “Specialists in Jazz Team for Concert,” *New York Times* (1923-Current File), (November 15, 1952):14, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, (Accessed January 25, 2017), <http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/112326768?accountid=14709>.

²²¹ James M. Doran, "Calhoun, Eddie."

by Andrew Hill and Harold Ousley.²²² According to Jamal, Davis had been working in a rhythm-and-blues band led by Cozy Eccleston. Davis was the same age as Jamal, but Jamal's trio was Davis's first long-term professional job. Davis remembered working engagements for several weeks at a time, including a six-week booking at the Pershing Lounge. While working there, he recalled seeing the headliners from the upstairs ballroom come in to see their trio, including Lester Young and Charlie Parker. In an interview with Ted Panken, Davis shares his experience playing with Jamal:

Ahmad had a tune which required me to play maracas while I was playing the bass; I had to learn to do that with him, so he'd get this effect. And then Ray Crawford would thump on the strings and make it sound like a conga drum. It was a fantastic thing. And Ahmad had a sound and a concept that was just unbelievable. And of course, he attracted all of the guys coming in traveling to the club to hear him play, and it was always jam-packed.²²³

The bassist's most memorable lesson from his bandleader perhaps best illustrates Jamal's ensemble concept as one based on trust:

The one thing I'll never forget him telling me at a rehearsal, he said... "You want to know who my favorite bass player is?" I said, "Tell me." I thought he was going to say Ray Brown or somebody. He said, "You are." I said, "Me?" He said, "Yeah, because you're here with me." I said, "God, what a lesson!" I was the number-one bass player for him because he was confronted with me being with him. That was a real booster.²²⁴

Jamal's contract with OKeh was set to expire in 1953. When the label opted to discontinue its Chicago operations, his trio was without a new record deal. Black radio disc jockey Al Benson

²²² Bill Bennett and Barry Kernfeld, "Davis, Richard," *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed., *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, (Accessed January 4, 2017),

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/subscriber/article/grove/music/J114400>.

²²³ Panken, "Ahmad Jamal's 81st Birthday."

²²⁴ Ibid.

stepped in and signed Jamal to his Parrot label in November 1952.²²⁵ Known as “the Swingmaster” at WGES, Benson is credited for increasing the distribution of black popular music to a larger audience.²²⁶ His Parrot label focused primarily on blues, gospel, and vocal groups, but Jamal’s trio was among several jazz groups he chose to record. In researching the Parrot record label, Armin Büttner, Robert Campbell, and Robert Pruter found, as per the discovery of a Chess Records tape list, that Jamal first recorded six titles for Benson in November 1953, followed by a second session in January 1954.²²⁷ The titles they recorded during the two sessions initially went unreleased, until Benson finally opted to release four tracks on 78- and 45-rpm singles; the trio’s take of Gerwhin’s “But Not for Me” on one side and Jamal’s “Seleritus” on the other²²⁸; and Van Heusen’s and Burke’s “It Could Happen to You” opposite Jamal’s “Excerpts from the Blues.”²²⁹

In 1954, Davis left Jamal’s trio to replace Johnny Pate in pianist Don Shirley’s group, which was heading to New York.²³⁰ Pate in turn replaced Davis for a short time with Jamal, but the pianist ultimately sought out a bassist from his recent Chicago past: Israel Crosby. Like Jamal, Crosby had been playing music since his childhood: first trumpet, then trombone and tuba, before finally moving to the double bass at age 15.²³¹ His recording debut came only a year later. On November 19, 1935, Gene Krupa and his Chicagoans recorded “Blues of Israel,” featuring the

²²⁵ Washington, “Ahmad Jamal Interview,” 7.

²²⁶ Nadine Cohodas, *Spinning Blues into Gold: The Chess Brothers and the Legendary Chess Records* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 36.

²²⁷ Büttner, Cambell, and Pruter, “Parrot and Blue Lake Labels.”

²²⁸ Parrot 810

²²⁹ Parrot 818. See Washington, “Ahmad Jamal Interview,” 7. Also, this recording of “But Not for Me” is referenced in Chapter 6.

²³⁰ Josephine Reed, “2014 New Jazz Master Richard Davis,” Interview Transcript, Part One, (Accessed January 4, 2017), <https://www.arts.gov/audio/richard-davis-part-1>.

²³¹ John Voigt, “Crosby, Israel,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed., *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, (Accessed January 5, 2017), <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/subscriber/article/grove/music/J106900>.

young bassist. In his article on the double bass as a solo instrument, David Chevan noted that Crosby was already named “one of the best bass players in the game” by 1936, citing his demonstrable warm sound, rich pizzicato (in contrast to the common slap style of the time), horn-player swing sensibility, and much larger range than previous bassists.²³²

After Krupa, Crosby went on to play with a veritable list of top names, including Teddy Wilson, Albert Ammons, Fletcher Henderson, Roy Eldridge, and Coleman Hawkins.²³³ Crosby’s impeccable intonation, expansive repertoire, and uniquely conceived bass lines were the perfect complement to Jamal’s trio concept. He hired Crosby while the bassist was in-between jobs with Buster Bennett and Benny Goodman.²³⁴ Jamal explained to Ted Panken why he was so drawn to the bassist:

First of all, the incredible thing about Israel is that he used a K-bass. He didn’t have a Tyrolean bass...or a German bass or some of these fabulous instruments that you see various bassists with. He just had a K-bass. It was phenomenal how Israel could get this kind of action, this kind of sound, this kind of penetration out of a K-bass. But he did. And of course, the remarkable thing about Israel is that he was a master of intonation. His intonation was flawless, just absolutely flawless. And a tremendous ear. Again, here’s a man that knew many, many, many compositions. He knew all the tunes. You couldn’t play a tune he didn’t know. He was just a phenomenal bassist in the fullest sense of the word.²³⁵

With Crosby now on bass, the Ahmad Jamal Trio returned to Benson’s studio on May 23, 1955, producing nine tracks for *Ahmad Jamal Plays*, the only LP Parrot issued of the trio. The original Parrot LP has since become very rare, but the album gained lasting popularity and distribution after it was re-released in 1956 as *Chamber Music of the New Jazz* (Argo 602), on the Chess

²³² David Chevan, “The Double Bass as a Solo Instrument in Early Jazz,” *The Black Perspective in Music* 17, no. 1/2 (1989), 82, DOI:10.2307/1214744.

²³³ Voigt, “Crosby, Israel.”

²³⁴ Washington, “Ahmad Jamal Interview,” 4.

²³⁵ Panken, “Vernel Fournier.”

subsidiary label Argo.²³⁶ Seven of the titles are arrangements of popular standards, with one by Jamal and another provided by Crawford:

1. New Rhumba, Jamal
2. A Foggy Day, Gershwin
3. All of You, Porter
4. It Ain't Necessarily So, Gershwin
5. Medley (I Don't Wanna Be Kissed (By Anyone but You), Elliot/Spina)
6. I Get a Kick Out of You, Porter
7. Jeff, Crawford
8. Darn that Dream, DeLange/Van Heusen
9. Spring is Here, Rodgers/Hart

Aptly-titled, *Chamber Music* is quite possibly the most controlled of Jamal's recordings to date. Many of the characteristic traits of the original Three Strings still exist – Crawford's fretboard percussion, bass lines shifting seamlessly between two and four patterns, arranged passages, and ensemble balance – but with heightened mastery. Crosby's bass-playing is more melodic, fluid, and rich in tone than his predecessor, and there is an even stronger sense of give-and-take between Crawford and his bandleader. Jamal awards Crawford with multiple solo opportunities, and features the guitarist on his tune "Jeff," one of only two original tracks on the album.

Above all other considerations, Jamal is truly in top form. His playing is crisp and deliberate, whether light and staccato, thick and accented, or a combination of both in one phrase. On Cole Porter's "All of You" in particular, Jamal demonstrates his mastery of touch. He shades his rhythmically-displaced paraphrases of the melody with varying degrees of attack, regardless of single-note or locked-hands style of playing, and the technique is maintained over the entire range of the piano. One begins to hear more significant moments of self-imposed restraint and space. Not limited to resting alone, Jamal creates space in the orchestration with dramatic shifts to upper registers, dropping dynamics, editing out melodic material, and reducing the number of

²³⁶ Argo 602. See Cohodas, *Spinning Blues*, 152-153.

comping figures in his left hand. Within the context of the trio, his sidemen react to each one of these textural shifts with matched control, collectively executing Jamal's arrangements with precision and cohesiveness. The orchestrational elements of this album attracted the attention of Miles Davis and Gil Evans. Of the three tracks from this album that Davis later appropriated for himself, Evans utilized two of Jamal's arrangements to produce large ensemble orchestrations for Davis.²³⁷

On October 25, 1955, Jamal, Crawford, and Crosby recorded fourteen titles at Columbia's 30th Street Studio, in New York, for its Epic subsidiary.²³⁸ A column in the September 19, 1953 *Billboard* announced the subsidiary's launch with several EPs to be re-released on the new label, including Jamal's "string group."²³⁹ Ultimately, Epic only included two titles from the Three Strings OKeh sessions for the 1956 release of *The Ahmad Jamal Trio*. The other eight came from the more recent October 1955 session (Figure 11):

²³⁷ See Chapter 4.

²³⁸ Columbia Records created Epic in 1953 to handle classical, pop, jazz, and show tunes, as well as re-releases of previously-released OKeh material to focus OKeh's new output to R&B.

²³⁹ "Music: Columbia's Epic to Bow with Classic, Pop Line," *Billboard (Archive: 1894-1960)* 65, no. 38 (September 19, 1953): 14, (Accessed January 25, 2017), <http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1040207684?accountid=14709>.

Label Number	Song Title	Personnel (p, g, b)	Recording Date
OKeh 6889	Perfidia	Jamal, Crawford, Calhoun	October 25, 1951
Epic 627	Love for Sale	Jamal, Crawford, Crosby	October 25, 1955
OKeh 6855	Rico Pulpa	Jamal, Crawford, Calhoun	October 25, 1951
Epic 627	Autumn Leaves	Jamal, Crawford, Crosby	October 25, 1955
Epic 627	Squeeze Me ²⁴⁰	Jamal, Crawford, Crosby	October 25, 1955
Epic 627	Something to Remember You By	Jamal, Crawford, Crosby	October 25, 1955
Epic 627	Black Beauty	Jamal, Crawford, Crosby	October 25, 1955
Epic 627	The Donkey Serenade	Jamal, Crawford, Crosby	October 25, 1955
Epic 627	Don't Blame Me	Jamal, Crawford, Crosby	October 25, 1955
Epic 627	They Can't Take That Away from Me	Jamal, Crawford, Crosby	October 25, 1955

Figure 11. *The Ahmad Jamal Trio* (Epic 1956) – LN 3212

In 1959, after the astonishing success of Jamal's *At the Pershing: But Not for Me*²⁴¹ for Argo the previous year, Epic released the other six titles from the October 1955 session along with another six from The Three Strings OKeh catalogue on *The Piano Scene of Ahmad Jamal* (Figure 12):

²⁴⁰ Titled on the album as "Squeeze Me," but the full title is "Just Squeeze Me" by Duke Ellington.

²⁴¹ See Chapter 5.

Label Number	Song Title	Personnel (p, g, b)	Recording Date
Epic 634	Old Devil Moon	Jamal, Crawford, Crosby	October 25, 1955
OKeh 6945	Ahmad's Blues	Jamal, Crawford, Calhoun	May 5, 1952
Epic 634	Poinciana	Jamal, Crawford, Crosby	October 25, 1955
OKeh 6889	Billy Boy	Jamal, Crawford, Calhoun	May 5, 1952
OKeh 6945	Will You Still Be Mine	Jamal, Crawford, Calhoun	October 25, 1951
Epic 634	Pavanne	Jamal, Crawford, Crosby	October 25, 1955
Epic 634	Crazy He Calls Me	Jamal, Crawford, Crosby	October 25, 1955
OKeh 6855	The Surrey with the Fringe on Top	Jamal, Crawford, Calhoun	October 25, 1951
OKeh 6921	Aki and Ukthay	Jamal, Crawford, Calhoun	May 5, 1952
Epic 634	Slaughter on the 20 th Avenue	Jamal, Crawford, Crosby	October 25, 1955
OKeh 6921	A Gal in Calico	Jamal, Crawford, Calhoun	May 5, 1952
Epic 634	It's Easy to Remember	Jamal, Crawford, Crosby	October 25, 1955

Figure 12. *The Piano Scene of Ahmad Jamal* (Epic 1959) – LN 3631

In March 1956, the Chess brothers, Leonard and Phil, formed a new Chicago-based subsidiary, named Argo. In addition to pop and R&B artists, they signed jazz saxophonist James Moody and bought Benson's masters of the Ahmad Jamal Trio from the Parrot sessions.²⁴² Jamal knew Leonard and Phil from his early days in Chicago, when they owned and operated the Macomba Lounge. While playing solo piano just around the corner at Jimmy's Palm Garden, he frequented the Macomba to hear tenor saxophonist Tom Archia. It was also at the Macomba where Jamal first made acquaintance with his future drummer, Vernel Fournier, who was a member of the house band led by Archia.

By this point in the mid-1950s, Jamal commanded the attention of the public, critics, and musicians alike, most notably trumpeter Miles Davis. Davis indicated in his autobiography that he was first introduced to Jamal's playing via his sister Dorothy, who after hearing the pianist circa 1953 in a Chicago club, called Davis on a payphone to share her find. Finally getting to hear the

²⁴² Cohodas, *Spinning Blues*, 131.

pianist himself, Davis recalled being “knocked out” by Jamal’s “concept of space, his lightness of touch, his understatement, and the way he phrased notes and passages,” asserting that he “loved his lyricism on the piano, the way he played and the spacing he used in the ensemble voicing of his groups.”²⁴³ From that point onward, Davis always made it a point to see Jamal’s trio whenever visiting Chicago. As examined in next chapter, Davis’s mounting fondness for Jamal is particularly evident in his choice of repertoire, with over a dozen selections from Jamal’s drummerless trio recordings alone. Though it is difficult to determine what kind of impact Davis’s stylistic emulation and outspoken admiration may have had on the success of the pianist, the connection between the two has remained an oft-cited yet highly-contested footnote in Jamal’s career trajectory.

²⁴³ Ibid., 178.

4.0 MILES DAVIS: AN UNLIKELY CHAMPION

As the Ahmad Jamal Trio gained both local and national recognition as a preeminent piano trio during the mid-1950s, Jamal amassed an equal share of critics and admirers. To many, Oscar Peterson was considered to be the leading virtuoso of the piano, following in the direct lineage of his idol and mentor Art Tatum.²⁴⁴ Peterson was the perfect pianist – he played hard-swinging lines over rich harmonies with infallible dexterity, accuracy, and rhythmic sensibility. Peterson exhibited the technically-charged characteristics of Tatum and Bud Powell, whereas Jamal took a more delicate approach with a light touch, sparse improvisations, and lucid rhythmic grooves. His use of poignant silences and dramatic shifts in dynamics contrasted so greatly with the sounds of his contemporaries that the critics dismissed his pianistics as trival and cliché.

Miles Davis heard something else. In an interview for the December 1958 issue of *The Jazz Review*, Nat Hentoff played him four measures of Jamal’s “But Not for Me,” to which Davis replied:

That’s the way to play the piano...Listen to how he slips into the other key. You can hardly tell it’s happening. He doesn’t throw his technique around like Oscar Peterson. Things flow into and out of each other.”²⁴⁵

²⁴⁴ Len Lyons, *The Great Pianists: Speaking of Their Lives and Music*, (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1983).

²⁴⁵ Nat Hentoff, “An Afternoon with Miles Davis,” *The Jazz Review* 1, no. 2 (December 1958), 12.

Davis's critique of Peterson was anything but subtle, asserting:

Oscar makes me sick because he copies everybody. He had to *learn* how to play the blues. Everybody knows that if you flat a third, you're going to get a blues sound. He learned that and runs it into the ground worse than Billy Taylor. You don't have to do that...He passes right over what can be done with the chords...It's much prettier if you get into it and hear the chord weaving in and out like Bill Evans and Red Garland could do – instead of being so heavy. Oscar is jazzy; he jazzes up the tune. And he sure has devices, like certain scale patterns, that he plays all the time.²⁴⁶

In regards to Jamal, however, Davis was still showing his contempt for Hentoff's off-hand remark about Jamal being no more than a "cocktail pianist" a few years earlier. Taking full advantage of his audience with the critic, he instructed the him to:

Listen to the way Jamal uses space. He lets it go so that you can feel the rhythm section and the rhythm section can feel you. It's not crowded...Ahmad is one of my favorites. I live until he makes another record. I gave Gil Evans a couple of his records, and he didn't give them back."²⁴⁷

Throughout the interview, Davis voices his preference for space and simplicity in music and displeasure with those that do not exhibit such qualities to him, like Peterson. Even Hentoff picked up on his "strong preference for writing that isn't overcrowded" and described Davis as "talking with gathering intensity about the need for more space and less chord-cluttering in jazz."²⁴⁸ Using his forthcoming recording of *Porgy and Bess* as an example, Davis points out that for certain passages, he and Gil Evans used simplified chord progressions, long spaces, and scales without chords to avoid it from being too "cluttered," finding "more freedom and space to hear things."²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ Hentoff, "Miles Davis," 10.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 10, 12.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 12.

4.1 YOU CALL IT SPACE, I CALL IT DISCIPLINE

Due to his own less-is-more approach in early recordings and Davis's ardent praise, Jamal is often credited for influencing Davis's use of space. However, the "space" so commonly acknowledged in Jamal's playing is actually a product of his philosophical conceptualization of music.²⁵⁰ Rather than showing off, he preferred a disciplined approach to playing, a delicate balance between following the rules and not, insisting that "You can't get freedom unless you observe the rules...there's a joy in discipline that's much overlooked."²⁵¹ Jamal attributes this philosophy of playing and writing to having played "with every configuration known and unknown to man," whether duos, trios, small ensembles, big band orchestras, or accompanying singers.

Jamal's foundational conceptions of discipline, space, and orchestration were also born out of necessity. The departure of Joe Kennedy meant that Jamal had to assume arranging duties for the group. The presence of two harmonic instruments – piano and guitar – and the absence of a drummer necessitated structure. As a result, he was forced to think in terms of orchestration even while improvising in an effort to minimize discord between parts. Jamal eventually developed a balanced implementation of both compositional and improvisational elements in his trio's well-rehearsed repertoire. He extended the techniques of Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and other big band pianist-leaders, with use of interludes, vamps, and visual hand cues from the piano. Not unlike big band orchestrations, much of Jamal's arrangements consisted of precomposed material

²⁵⁰ Kenny Washington, Ahmad Jamal Interview (February 9, 2003) in *The Complete Ahmad Jamal Trio Argo Sessions 1956-62* Boxset Booklet, (Stamford, CT: Mosaic Records, L.L.C., 2010), 6.

²⁵¹ Josephine Reed, "Ahmad Jamal," *Art Works* Podcast (January 2012), National Endowment for the Arts, (Accessed July 1, 2013), <https://www.arts.gov/audio/ahmad-jamal>.

with ample space for improvisation. In this practice, Jamal learned to respect the importance of resting, or knowing when to play and when to abstain from doing so. Though many have come to refer to this aspect of his playing as “space,” he emphasizes that it can be more accurately described as an acquired discipline of restraint to prevent the ensemble’s combined musical product from becoming too congested:²⁵²

People call it space, but I call it discipline. That’s my answer to the people who try to analyze what I’m doing. I’m a very disciplined person musically, and I think it’s important in music to be aware of the fact that in music you can’t overdo, you can’t be excessive in anything in life. You have to sometimes be a minimalist.²⁵³

Davis later indicated that he began using Jamal’s concept of space and breathing during the mid-1950s and specifically sought out Jamal’s arrangements and compositions to add to his own repertoire. Careful not to give Jamal all the credit, Davis insists that he was playing in that style long before he even heard of the pianist and Jamal’s influence helped him refocus his own concept of playing. In Davis’s words, “He just brought me back to myself.”²⁵⁴ However, Davis biographer Jack Chambers contests that the “spirit of Ahmad Jamal” was first present in Davis’s 1955 *Miles Davis Quartet* (Prestige LP-7007) and the pianist’s influence persisted until it became “an inseparable element of Davis’s style.”²⁵⁵ Though the most apparent correlation between the two musicians is Davis’s appropriation of Jamal’s repertoire, Chambers argues that “No other

²⁵² Molly Murphy, “NEA Jazz Masters: Ahmad Jamal,” Interview (January 11, 2007), National Endowment for the Arts, (Accessed July 1, 2016), <https://www.arts.gov/honors/jazz/ahmad-jamal>.

²⁵³ Benjamin Cawthra, “‘Sensational Pulse’: An Interview with Ahmad Jamal,” *Miles Davis and American Culture*, ed. Gerald Early, (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2001), 80.

²⁵⁴ Miles Davis and Quincy Troupe, *Miles: The Autobiography*, (New York: Touchstone, 1989), 190.

²⁵⁵ Jack Chambers, *Milestones: The Music and Times of Miles Davis*, (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1998), 200.

individual had exercised so decisive an effect on what Davis played since his early explorations of the Gillespie-Parker bebop repertoire.”²⁵⁶

4.2 CONTEXTUALIZING THE JAMAL-DAVIS CONNECTION

Davis’s extensive emulation and voiced admiration of Jamal is particularly profound because the two never performed together, even while both were working in New York and living a block and a half from each other: Jamal on 75th Street and Davis on 77th. Jamal later recalled talk at the time of getting the two together for a record with saxophonist Cannonball Adderley, but it never occurred, mostly due to the fact that they were simply too busy leading their own bands. The two never spoke directly on the matter, and although Davis was rumored to have wanted Jamal for his band, at no point did he ever approach Jamal on the possibility. In fact, Jamal did not even know that his name and image were so prominently displayed throughout Davis’s autobiography until someone else brought it to his attention. He often describes his relationship to Davis as “one of quality, not quantity” – a “mutual admiration society.”²⁵⁷ Jamal and Davis never had a particularly close friendship, and according to Jamal, they never spent time together or had any extensive conversations.²⁵⁸ Nevertheless, Jamal indicated his appreciation of Davis’s “great support.”²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 201.

²⁵⁷ Washington, “Ahmad Jamal Interview,” 6.

²⁵⁸ Ashley Kahn, “Ahmad Jamal: Walking History” in *JazzTimes* (July 1, 2003), (Accessed July 1, 2013), <https://jazztimes.com/features/ahmad-jamal-walking-history/>.

²⁵⁹ Washington, “Ahmad Jamal Interview,” 6.

After Davis's stylistic shift to avant-garde and fusion in the 1970s, he continued to seek out Jamal's trio at the Village Gate in Greenwich Village. Even during his five-year hiatus from playing, Davis took Paul Buckmaster to hear Jamal. The outing was a singular occurrence during a time when Davis remained in relative isolation.²⁶⁰

4.3 APPROPRIATION, EMULATION, AND SIGNIFYIN(G)

Why should Miles Davis's admiration, emulation, and appropriation of Ahmad Jamal warrant attention? For one, Davis was often accused of claiming others' musical material as his own, yet he openly voiced his admiration for this one individual and gave him credit accordingly. Moreover, the oral tradition of jazz and other African-American cultural art forms is rife with practices of borrowing. Henry Louis Gates developed the theory of signifyin(g) to theorize tropes of repetition, revision, and ironic reversal as inspiration for new creation.²⁶¹ Ingrid Monson posited the notion of intermusicality as a means to consider how these tropes literally "play out" in musicians' improvised interactions during performance, revealing the social, cultural, and racial constructs of the music and its participants.²⁶² Monson's theory will be discussed further in Chapter 6 for conducting intermusical analysis of the Ahmad Jamal Trio.

²⁶⁰ Buckmaster is a classically-trained cellist, arranger, and composer who collaborated with numerous rock artists, including David Bowie, Elton John, and The Rolling Stones. He also worked on Davis's 1972 album *On the Corner* (Columbia 1972). See Ian Carr, *Miles Davis: The Definitive Biography*, (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1998), 321.

²⁶¹ Henry Louis Gates, *Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 1988).

²⁶² Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Since 1988, Henry Louis Gates's *Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* has been foundational for theorizing the inherent tropes in African-American oral traditions. In this highly-influential text, Gates employs the signifying monkey – which itself is based on the mythological trickster Esu-Elegbara from the Fon and Yoruba cultures of Benin and Nigeria – as the archetypal signifier in African-American oral tradition.²⁶³ This signifier does not provide information; it manipulates and mediates others' information. Signifyin(g), then, is a literary trope of repetition and revision that represents an engagement with preceding texts as a means to inspire and create one's own. Because all African-American artistic forms to a certain extent share the Signifyin(g) tradition, scholars of jazz and other relevant fields of study have since extended Gates's theory beyond black literature alone. Even Gates recognized his theory's usefulness in jazz, "There are so many examples of signifyin(g) in jazz that one could write a formal history of its development on this basis alone."²⁶⁴

According to Gates, when a musician alters a previously composed work by modifying its form, instrumentation, orchestration, and other stylistic devices, the new version does not "surpass" or "destroy" the original, but rather "complexly *extends* and tropes figures present in the original."²⁶⁵ At its core, signifyin(g) involves the manipulation of intertextual content, whether dealing with varied interpretations of the original composition at the macro level or cultural identities and/or ironies passed through idiomatic phrasing, articulation, or aesthetics at the micro. Therefore, when a jazz musician performs his/her interpretation of a tune, whether improvised or precomposed, he/she is Signifyin(g) on material from the original composition and other

²⁶³ Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 4.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

interpretations, preconceived notions of style and idiomatic expression, as well as his/her own experiences.

In “Cultural Dialogics and Jazz: A White Historian Signifies,” Gary Tomlinson employs Gates’s theory to examine the oral dissemination of idiomatic techniques and aesthetics inherent in jazz performance and to analyze “an indigenous black metaphor for intertextuality” in jazz.²⁶⁶ Though the notion of signifyin(g) can be useful for constructing lines of influence among musicians, it is not limited to canonical formation alone. In fact, Tomlinson contests that because jazz musicians have long drawn from musical works and styles outside of what is deemed mainstream by critics, signifyin(g) in jazz is largely extracanon.²⁶⁷ Jamal enjoyed a successful career as a jazz pianist from the onset, but his immediate exclusion from any sort of canonical narrative or lineage led critics such as Leonard Feather, Joe Goldberg, and Martin Williams to deem him an unlikely source of influence for Miles Davis. Notwithstanding, Davis’s signifyin(g) of Jamal extends beyond the pianist’s playing style alone, appropriating concepts exhibited by the entire trio, as revealed in his repertoire, groove, phrasing, orchestration, and overall sound concept during the 1950s.

²⁶⁶ Gary Tomlinson, “Cultural Dialogics and Jazz: A White Historian Signifies,” *Black Music Research Journal* 11, no. 2 (Autumn 1991): 229-264, Center for Black Music Research – Columbia College Chicago and University of Illinois Press, (Accessed February 10, 2013), DOI: 10.2307/779268.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 246.

4.4 MAPPING JAMAL'S INFLUENCE

In his autobiography, Davis directly speaks of his affinity for Jamal's repertoire, particularly his interpretation of standards and his original compositions.²⁶⁸ When Ian Carr constructed his biography of Davis, he noticed that Davis's repertoire in the 1950s indicates his preference for the recorded repertoire of two individuals: Frank Sinatra and Ahmad Jamal. In an appendix to the biography, Carr compiles a list of recordings by Davis that correlate to those previously recorded by Sinatra and Jamal.²⁶⁹ Figure 13 expands upon the material printed in Carr's publication, with the addition of missing recordings, a few date corrections, and album information.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ Davis, *Autobiography*, 178.

²⁶⁹ Carr, *Miles Davis*, 593. "Billy Boy" is curiously absent from Carr's list, but is likely an oversight, as it is included in his text on pages 101 and 126.

²⁷⁰ Jamal recorded many of these songs multiple times over the course of his career, but only the recordings that predate those by Davis are included.

Song	Davis Recording Date	Davis Album (Label/Release)	Jamal Recording Date	Jamal Album (Label/Release)
But Not for Me	June 29, 1954	<i>Bag's Groove</i> (Prestige 1957)	November, 1953 January, 1954	(Parrot <i>unissued</i>) <i>But Not for Me</i> (Parrot 1954)
A Gal in Calico	June 7, 1955	<i>Musings of Miles Davis</i> (Prestige 1955)	May 5, 1952	<i>Ahmad Jamal's Three Strings</i> (OKeh 1951-2)
Will You Still Be Mine	June 7, 1955	<i>Musings of Miles Davis</i> (Prestige 1955)	October 25, 1951	<i>Ahmad Jamal's Three Strings</i> (OKeh 1951-2)
Just Squeeze Me	November 16, 1955	<i>Miles: The New Miles Davis Quintet</i> (Prestige 1956)	October 25, 1955	<i>The Ahmad Jamal Trio</i> (Epic 1956)
Ahmad's Blues	May 11, 1956	<i>Workin' with the Miles Davis Quintet</i> (Prestige 1956)	May 5, 1952	<i>Ahmad Jamal's Three Strings</i> (OKeh 1951-2)
Surrey with the Fringe on Top	May 11, 1956	<i>Steamin' with the Miles Davis Quintet</i> (Prestige 1961)	October 25, 1951	<i>Ahmad Jamal's Three Strings</i> (OKeh 1951-2)
All of You	September 10, 1956	<i>'Round About Midnight</i> (Columbia 1957)	May 25, 1955	<i>Ahmad Jamal Plays</i> (Parrot 1955), <i>Chamber Music of the New Jazz</i> (Argo 1956)
I Don't Wanna Be Kissed (By Anyone But You) ²⁷¹	May 1957	<i>Miles +19</i> also released as <i>Miles Ahead</i> (Columbia 1957)	May 25, 1955	<i>Ahmad Jamal Plays</i> (Parrot 1955), <i>Chamber Music of the New Jazz</i> (Argo 1956)
New Rhumba	August 22, 1957	<i>Miles +19</i> also released as <i>Miles Ahead</i> (Columbia 1957)	May 25, 1955	<i>Ahmad Jamal Plays</i> (Parrot 1955), <i>Chamber Music of the New Jazz</i> (Argo 1956)
Billy Boy	February - March 1958	<i>Milestones</i> (Columbia 1958)	May 5, 1952 January 17, 1958	<i>Ahmad Jamal's Three Strings</i> (OKeh 1951-2) <i>At the Pershing, Vol. 2</i> (Argo 1961)
On Green Dolphin Street	May 26, 1958	<i>Jazz Track</i> (Columbia 1958)	September 17, 1956	<i>Count 'Em 88</i> (Argo 1956)
Love for Sale	May 26, 1958	<i>1958 Miles</i> (Columbia 1974)	October 25, 1955	<i>The Ahmad Jamal Trio</i> (Epic 1956)
Pavanne ²⁷²	March 2, 1959	<i>Kind of Blue</i> (Columbia 1959)	October 25, 1955 September 5, 1958	<i>The Ahmad Jamal Trio</i> (Epic 1956) <i>At the Spotlight</i> (Argo 1958)

Figure 13. Jamal-Davis Recorded Output

²⁷¹ Titled “Medley” on Jamal’s recordings.

²⁷² Part of the chord changes are the basis for Davis’s “So What” and John Coltrane’s “Impressions.” The latter also takes its melody from Crawford’s paraphrase of Gould’s original melody.

A comparison of the recorded material from 1954-1958 reveals that Davis recorded thirteen songs from Jamal's previously-recorded repertoire dating 1951-1956. Of those, all but two were versions initially recorded by Jamal's drummerless trios, with five from The Three Strings' 78-RPM singles for OKeh (1951-2) alone. Some of Davis's versions postdated Jamal's by nearly five years (e.g. "Surrey with the Fringe on Top" and "Ahmad's Blues"), whereas his June 1954 "But Not for Me" trailed Jamal's by a mere five months.²⁷³ Two of the compositions were penned by Jamal, "Ahmad's Blues" and "New Rhumba," but apart from a couple of jazz standards (e.g. "Just Squeeze Me" and "On Green Dolphin Street"), the list also reveals their affinity for selecting music from unlikely sources. "A Gal in Calico" first appeared in the 1946 film *The Time, the Place and the Girl*, "Billy Boy" is a traditional American folksong with British origins, and "Pavanne" is based on the second movement of Morton Gould's *American Symphonette*. As was common in jazz, there were a number of selections from Broadway musicals: "But Not for Me" from *Girl Crazy* (1930), "Love for Sale" from *The New Yorkers* (1930), "Surrey with the Fringe on Top" from *Oklahoma!* (1943), and "All of You" from *Silk Stockings* (1955).

In each of these tunes, especially the medium to up-tempo ones, Davis not only borrowed the pieces themselves for his recordings, but also many additional elements from Jamal's performances.²⁷⁴ The most literal of these stylistic borrowings came as a direct result of Davis's desire to have a pianist who could emulate Jamal's piano techniques. When Davis returned to the studio in June 1955, following the death of Charlie Parker, he sought out a pianist that played like Jamal. Davis's drummer Philly Joe Jones first introduced him to Red Garland in 1953 at a session

²⁷³ Carr's omission of "Billy Boy," recorded by Jamal in October 1951 and by Davis in 1958, in this appendix is likely an oversight, as it is included in his text on pages 101 and 126.

²⁷⁴ Carr, *Miles Davis*, 101.

with Parker. Davis ultimately hired Garland because he played with Jamal's light touch.²⁷⁵ Garland knew of Davis's affinity for Jamal, so it was likely no surprise to the pianist when his new bandleader asked him to give him "Ahmad's sound." Speaking on the matter with Nat Hentoff, Davis explained:

Red Garland knew I liked Ahmad and at times I used to ask him to play like that. Red was at his best when he did. Bill [Evans] plays a little like that but he sounds wild when he does – all those little scales.²⁷⁶

Jack Chambers considers that Garland may have been a particularly desirable pick for Davis because Garland, as a young musician with something to prove, was "malleable," unlike veterans Horace Silver and Thelonious Monk, who played with Davis before him.²⁷⁷ Since Davis knew specifically what he wanted in his pianist – to sound like Ahmad Jamal – he could shape the newcomer accordingly.

Nonetheless, Garland was not the only pianist in which Davis attempted to find Jamal's characteristic sound. When Davis hired Tommy Flanagan for a Prestige recording session on March 16, 1956, he requested that he too "Play block chords, but not like Milt Buckner. In the style of Ahmad Jamal."²⁷⁸ Flanagan ultimately put little effort into following Davis's directive, but he understood why he was drawn to Jamal:

I love Ahmad's playing, but I don't want to play like him...I know what Miles likes about it – he plays that way himself. With the spaces – it just gives you a lot of room to play inside of. Like Ahmad can repeat a phrase to death but with taste. Not the kind of monotony that really wears on your nerves – he gets a lot of good out of it.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁵ Davis, *Autobiography*, 190.

²⁷⁶ Hentoff, "Miles Davis," 10.

²⁷⁷ Jack Chambers, *Milestones: The Music and Times of Miles Davis*, (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1998), 200.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 233.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

With Garland, Jones, and bassist Oscar Pettiford, the Miles Davis Quartet went into the studio on June 7, 1955 to record six tracks for Prestige Records. Originally released as simply the *Miles Davis Quartet*, two of the six tunes were taken directly from Jamal's repertoire: "A Gal in Calico" and "Will You Still Be Mine."²⁸⁰ The obvious parallels of song selection aside, the album as a whole demonstrates yet a greater level of influence of Jamal's trio on Davis's own conceptions as a leader. According to Davis biographer Jack Chambers, "Jamal's enormous influence on Davis gets its first significant airing at this session, and it will persist until it becomes an inseparable element of Davis's style."²⁸¹ Although Davis was mostly concerned with adapting the overall aesthetic of Jamal's trio, his reason for hiring Garland indicates an equal desire for more literal emulation as well. Furthermore, in the development of this album, Davis clearly sought to establish a particular dynamic within the entirety of his rhythm section, as they retained the bright, bounciness of Jamal's trio in their recording of these two tunes.

4.5 "A GAL IN CALICO:" STYLISTIC APPROPRIATION – PHRASING, GROOVE, AND AESTHETIC

Although Miles Davis did not employ guitarists in his groups in the 1950s, he was particularly drawn to the underlying groove created by the fretboard percussion of Jamal's drummerless trio guitarist Ray Crawford. When Miles Davis heard the group, he instructed his rhythm section – Oscar Pettiford on bass and Philly Joe Jones on drums – to emulate the unique

²⁸⁰ The original album, titled *Miles Davis Quartet*, was later reissued on Prestige's new line of 12" LPs as *Musings of Miles Davis* (Prestige LP-7007).

²⁸¹ Chambers, *Milestones*, 200.

groove, which subsequently led to one of Davis's signature sounds during this period. In an interview with Stanley Crouch, drummer Philly Joe Jones explained:

Miles used to study Jamal. Once when we were in Chicago listening to Jamal when he didn't use a drummer. We kept hearing an accent on the fourth beat, but there wasn't no goddamn drums up there anywhere. Miles kept looking and noticed that Ray Crawford was hitting the guitar with his thumb on the last beat, swinging the hell out of the band. Miles said to me, 'Joe, if you took your drumstick and hit the rim of the snare on four, it would swing the band to death'.²⁸²

Crawford's fretboard percussion can be heard behind Jamal's second solo chorus in "A Gal in Calico," recorded on May 5, 1952 for the series of OKeh 78-RPM singles. During his first solo chorus, Jamal plays long, single-note bebop lines with sparse comping figures in the left hand supplemented by Crawford's own comping. By the end of the chorus, Jamal's long eighth note phrases move from the middle to the upper register, and to match the lessened resonance of the piano, the guitar and bass drop in volume. In the second chorus, Jamal offers sparse paraphrases of the original melody, while Crawford employs his fretboard percussion. The combination of Jamal's light, upper-register phrases and Crawford's bongo-like accents on beats two and four produces a lightly-bouncing "two feel" that contrasts with the "four on the floor" swing of the previous chorus. In this particular instance, Jamal reverses the common jazz solo arc, in which short phrases with a two-beat feel typically give way to the increased intensity of longer phrases over a driving four-beat walking bass line. Even though Calhoun does not return to a two-beat bass line during the change, the effect is the same, as the intensity of the overall trio still drops at a point that would be typically reserved for a peak.

²⁸² Stanley Crouch, *Considering Genius*, (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2006), 98.

When the Miles Davis Quartet recorded “A Gal in Calico” in 1955, each member of Davis’s band borrows stylistic characteristics from Jamal’s trio. Drummer Philly Jo Jones’s light cymbal work and soft snare comping echo Crawford’s guitar patterns and retain the same bright, bouncy feel. With the exception of the first head chorus, Jamal’s bassist Calhoun favors walking bass lines throughout. Reiterated by Oscar Pettiford, this trait imparts a continuous drive to the end, even when the dynamics drop, the soloists change, or the final chorus begins.

As in Jamal’s second solo chorus, Davis’s phrases are light and articulate with sudden bursts of expressivity. Though the similarities between Davis’s airy and understated trumpet sound and Jamal’s delicate touch are evident, this track is particularly noteworthy because it marks one of the first times Davis employed a harmon mute for a studio recording.²⁸³ By stripping the trumpet sound of its body, the harmon mute reduces volume while its metallic properties enhance inflections – articulations, pitch bends, vibrato (or the absence of), and lip sounds. In doing so, Davis not only emulated the subtle yet expressive nature of Jamal’s touch, he produced the muted sound for which he would become legendary.

The following year, on May 11, 1956, Davis’s rhythm section – pianist Red Garland, bassist Paul Chambers, and drummer Philly Joe Jones – recorded a trio rendition of “Ahmad’s Blues” for *Workin’ with the Miles Davis Quintet* (Prestige 1959). Both Davis and tenor saxophonist John Coltrane sit out to showcase the three in what turns out to be a particularly accurate recreation of Jamal’s trio style. In fact, even Jack Maher’s original liner notes indicate that, apart from Garland’s parody of Jamal in the opening chorus, no clear distinction between the two pianists occurs in subsequent choruses; Garland emulates Jamal’s light, blues-tinged, single-note melody

²⁸³ He also uses a harmon mute on “I See Your Face Before Me,” from Frank Sinatra’s repertoire.

line on the A-sections and the harder swinging locked-hands style on the bridge. Though similarities abound, Davis's rhythm section performs the piece at a slower, bluesier tempo than the original. This slight alteration of tempo produces more of a shuffle feel than the characteristic bounciness of Jamal's trio.

On the ballad "It Never Enters My Mind," Davis plays the melody on muted trumpet, but leaves the soloing to Garland, who once again attempts to recreate Jamal's delicate swing. Though Garland and the rest of Davis's rhythm section had "all the accoutrements of Jamal," Davis biographer Jack Chambers contests that it failed to match the original. Instead, he believes that the recording provides particularly strong evidence as to the extent in which Davis considered Jamal's trio as foundational for his own group, even if his sidemen were not in complete agreement:

The total effect is what one might expect if Jamal were to write an arrangement for the quintet, and the unassimilated, even undigested, foisting of Jamal's mannerisms onto the members of the quintet represents the apogee of Davis's fascination with Jamal.²⁸⁴

Nevertheless, Davis was pleased. He believed that Garland and the others had achieved the essence of Jamal's playing. When speaking of the album in his autobiography, Davis explains how Jamal indirectly affected his decision-making during its production:

It was a nice little album, the *Miles Davis Quartet*, and it really showed Jamal's influence on me at the time. Both "A Gal in Calico" and "Will You Still Be Mine" were tunes that Jamal always played, and with Red playing that Jamal feeling and touch, we got close on that album what I wanted to hear. That kind of melodic understatement that Jamal had, that lightness, we put into this album.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ Chambers, *Milestones*, 235.

²⁸⁵ Davis, *Autobiography*, 190.

4.6 “BILLY BOY:” LITERAL EMULATION – ARRANGEMENT, ORCHESTRATION, AND PIANISTICS

Like “Ahmad’s Blues” a few years prior, for the album *Milestones* (Columbia 1958), Davis selected the English folk ballad “Billy Boy” from Jamal’s repertoire for his rhythm section to play as a trio without him.²⁸⁶ In the analysis that follows, it is evident that Davis asked his rhythm section of Garland, Jones, and bassist Paul Chambers to copy Jamal’s trio arrangement, down to the block-chord piano voicings, rhythmic nuances, interludes, and shout chorus. However, neither the original album’s liner notes written by Charles Edward Smith nor the vinyl label recognize the arranger, and the description of the tune avoids any reference to Jamal as well:

Miles has an ear for a pop tune (*Billy Boy*)...[it] is unabashed fun, from the solo passages of Red’s authentic Red Garland style piano to the point where “Philly” Joe Jones, with exuberant blockbusters and sundry side arms, completes the composition.²⁸⁷

Like “A Gal in Calico” and “Ahmad’s Blues,” “Billy Boy” was recorded by Ahmad Jamal’s Three Strings during their May 5, 1952 Okeh session.²⁸⁸ Similarities abound between the melodic and rhythmic content of Jamal’s 1952 and Davis’s 1958 recordings of “Billy Boy,” but Garland also recorded the tune as leader of his own quartet, less than a year before he went into the studio for Davis. The album, titled *Red Garland Revisited!*, was recorded on May 24, 1957 and featured

²⁸⁶ Alto saxophonist Julian “Cannonball” Adderley also appeared on the album, but did not play “Billy Boy.”

²⁸⁷ Charles Edward Smith, *Milestones*, Liner notes, (New York: Columbia, 1958).

²⁸⁸ Jamal recorded a second version of “Billy Boy” with bassist Israel Crosby and drummer Vernel Fournier at the Pershing Lounge on January 17, 1958, only a month or two prior to Davis, but it was not released until 1961. Even if Davis had heard Jamal’s trio play at the Pershing before constructing his album, comparative analysis of the recordings proves that Jamal’s 1958 version had little or no bearing on Davis or his sideman.

Kenny Burrell on guitar, Art Taylor on drums, and fellow Davis sideman Paul Chambers on bass. By this point, Garland had been emulating Jamal for roughly two years at Davis's request, so it is no surprise that even without a directive from Davis to "play like Jamal," Garland's version proves to be a rather literal rendering of Jamal's arrangement, particularly in terms of tempo, lightness of touch, and ensemble balance. Because Garland's recording predates that of Davis's, contains much of the same musical content, and includes Chambers on both sessions, it is likely that Garland used it as the basis for the subsequent recording session.

While neither Garland's nor Davis's are direct copies of Jamal's arrangement, they borrow several key elements. At first listen, Garland's recording is nearly the same tempo as Jamal's and drummer Art Taylor plays a rhythm similar to that of Crawford's guitar percussion, while imitating the light, muted percussion with brushes. While these two stylistic characteristics differ drastically in Davis's recording, both versions align more significantly in orchestrational properties. Garland not only appropriates most of the melodic and rhythmic content from Jamal's version, but also harmonizes the melody in the same manner as Jamal, with dense, block chords. According to Dr. Billy Taylor, this "locked-hands" style of piano playing was pioneered by Milt Buckner in the 1940s to emulate the four-, five-, and even six-part harmonic voicings used in big band scoring.²⁸⁹ Garland is often considered to be a master of the technique, in the line of Nat Cole and George Shearing, but Jamal is rarely mentioned as an equal influence. In a comparison of the 16-measure head chorus, as notated in Figure 14, Garland retains Jamal's use of locked-hands and several other rhythmic and stylistic traits.

²⁸⁹ Billy Taylor, *Jazz Piano: History and Development*, (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1982), 104-107.

The figure displays three systems of stacked musical notation for the 'Billy Boy' Head A-Section. Each system consists of two staves. The first system is for Ahmad Jamal and Red Garland. The second system is for Jamal and Garland, featuring an 'ARPEGGIATED FILL' annotation above the Jamal staff in the fourth measure. The third system is also for Jamal and Garland. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and articulation marks like accents and slurs.

Figure 14. Jamal-Garland Stacked Scores: “Billy Boy” Head A-Section

Garland seems particularly drawn to the syncopated rhythmic pattern found in the fourth, sixth, and twelfth measures of Jamal’s arrangement, as he transfers it to every other measure. Both Chambers and Taylor punctuate its every reoccurrence with bass and cymbal accents, respectively. Garland also retains Jamal’s left-handed descending counter-melody in the ninth measure of the form, but its progression is slightly different within the chromatic line and its preparation in the preceding measure. In Figure 15, the melody and counter-melody have been isolated from the rest of the chord tones for clarity:

Figure 15. Jamal-Garland Stacked Scores: “Billy Boy” measure 9 counter-line comparison

Because Jamal harmonizes the E in the melody with A7, the left-hand plays a C-sharp lead into the D of the ninth measure. Garland chooses to harmonize the first three melody notes with a diatonic tenth in the left hand, thereby resulting in a C natural. Though both descend chromatically from the tonic, through the major and minor sevenths, only Jamal’s goes one more step to the third of the impending G7 chord, with an anticipation of that measure.

After the statement of the head, Garland includes Jamal’s eight-measure B-Section (Figure 16).²⁹⁰ Like Jamal, he begins with just over three measures of improvisation and plays the same descending chromatic figure before the shout chorus:

²⁹⁰ This material is not part of the original melody, but was composed by Jamal for his arrangement.

Figure 16. Jamal-Garland Stacked Scores: “Billy Boy” Head B-Section

Thematically, Garland also copies Jamal’s final A-section; its sharp, syncopated block-chords resemble a big band shout chorus. In addition to slight rhythmic reductions, Garland stays closer to the natural motivic sequences than Jamal’s original, which builds to a climax in measures 7-8 of the chorus. After that, Jamal briefly resumes the melodic strain, but instead of finishing it, veers off into a four-measure lead into his first solo chorus. Garland, on the other hand, chooses to complete the phrase in measures 13-15. Figure 17 reduces the thematic material of the melodic strain alone for ease of comparison:

Figure 17. Jamal-Garland Stacked Scores: “Billy Boy” Final A-Section

Garland ends the solo choruses with a return to the original song form, including a restatement of the first two A-sections. He improvises the full eight-measures of the B-section and omits the shout chorus-style final A-section, before issuing one more statement of the A-section. Although Jamal opted to conclude his solo choruses with a single A-section, Garland finishes the full $AABA_1$ form before copying Jamal’s ending. For the ending, the final four-measure phrase is repeated three times, the last of which is in half-time. A short solo phrase gives way to three descending dominant chords to signal the end of the tune.

For Davis’s album the next year, Garland retains all of these structural elements, save several slight departures: a 16-measure intro on a dominant pedal point, a much faster tempo, and harder, more intense drumming by Philly Joe Jones. Of these few orchestrational variances, the clearest departure of the Davis recording from the original Jamal arrangement occurs when Garland inserts accented upbeats with his left-hand on the fifth and ninth measures of the repeated

head; the accentuation is further punctuated by Jones’s snare comping and Chamber’s bass hits. (Figures 18-19). In the fifth measure, Garland also alters the quality of the left-hand chord by flattening the seventh and raising the ninth; what was Cmaj9 is now C7(#9):



Figure 18. Garland: “Billy Boy” Second Head, m5



Figure 19. Garland: “Billy Boy” Second Head, m9

The overall result is still not so much a variance in orchestration, but rather a minor shift in improvisational character. When Jamal’s trio takes a tune at a blazingly fast speed, as it does later in the *At the Pershing* (Argo 1958) recording of “Surrey with a Fringe on Top,” it retains all of its classic lightness, discipline, and control of dynamics and accents. Even with Jones’s use of brushes, there is a great sense of urgency set forth by the intensity of the drummer’s accents. Garland’s blues-tinged long, bebop lines are further driven by the active punches in his left hand (he was formerly a boxer, after all) and the pulsation of Chambers’s walking bass line. Chambers,

who was present in both Garland's solo recording and in Davis's the following year, opts to solo with a bow. Though Calhoun's only solo in Jamal's rendition was a plucked opening statement of the melody, Chambers's tactfully-bowed solo chorus in both recordings provides not only technical artistry, but a necessary moment of trio originality on behalf of the bassist. Another departure of this rendition occurs when Garland and Jones engage in an exciting exchange of four measure improvisations. In this case, Jones bursts to the forefront, while Garland alternates between single-note bebop phrases and two-handed, syncopated shouts.

Whether a product of Davis's prodding or the natural result of Jamal's rising popularity, the influence of Jamal on Garland was undeniable by this point within the scope of the latter's career. Even beyond Davis's intervention, the stylistic traits favored by Garland during this period directly point to at least some personal desire or willingness to appropriate Jamal's trio conceptions. As realized in comparative analysis, Garland's personal recording of "Billy Boy" was undeniably a more exact replica of Jamal than what he produced under the direction of Davis. Ultimately, others noticed the similarities between Garland and Jamal. French pianist and critic Henri Renault commented:

Garland is a marvelous pianist in his own right...an original artist with a very personal and creative approach to melody, rhythm, beat and sound. Yet there can be no denying that about 1955, when he made his first recorded appearance with Miles Davis, he was instrumental in most younger pianists the whole world over going in for both Ahmad Jamal's rhythmic conceptions...and Erroll Garner's harmonic ones...²⁹¹

²⁹¹ Ibid., 219.

As Jack Chambers notes, it may be difficult to separate the influences of Garner and Jamal on Garland as suggested by Renault, especially considering the importance of Garner on Jamal's own development and maturation as a youth in Pittsburgh.²⁹²

4.7 "NEW RHUMBA:" TRANSCRIPTION AND RE-ORCHESTRATION

By the mid-1950s, many musicians had started taking notice of the Ahmad Jamal Trio, particularly their innovative arrangements and detailed treatment of repertoire. Jamal developed a reputation among musicians for his ability to achieve the precision and texture of a jazz orchestra with his trio by implementing carefully constructed counter-melodies, interludes, and shout choruses and manipulating chord voicing, register, dynamics, and articulation to achieve textural difference. Gil Evans must have been so impressed by the orchestral qualities of the Ahmad Jamal Trio that when Davis requested he produce an arrangement of Jamal's composition "New Rhumba" for the 1957 large ensemble album *Miles Ahead: Miles +19*, he orchestrated Jamal's 1955 drummerless trio recording in preparation of his own score. Pianist Tommy Flanagan, who briefly worked with Davis the previous year, remarked that *Miles Ahead* was "almost a copy of what Ahmad recorded with a trio."²⁹³ According to Steve Lajoie, who prepared an extensive analysis of Evans's and Davis's "New Rhumba," Evans and Davis only produced 35% of the melodic material for their recording.²⁹⁴ Evans appropriated a significant amount of material from

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Chambers, *Milestones*, 261.

²⁹⁴ Steve Lajoie, *An Analysis of Selected Gil Evans Works: Gil Evans and Miles Davis, 1957-1962*, (Advance Music, 2003), 115.

Jamal's 1955 version, including comping figures from both Jamal and Crawford, bass lines from Crosby, and even Jamal's improvised melodies for contrapuntal lines in the orchestration.

At first listen, the two recordings are undeniably similar, but the marked difference in instrumentation between the two can alter analytic perceptions. Evans adapted "New Rhumba" for Davis on solo flugelhorn, backed by flute, oboe, alto saxophone, bass clarinet, two horns in F, five trumpets, three trombones, bass trombone, tuba, string bass, and drum set. Evans's orchestration displays his acute awareness of the benefits and limitations of an ensemble of this size adapting a piece originally composed for a trio of vastly different instrumentation. In "New Rhumba" Figures 3.1 and 3.2, transcriptions of both recordings are stacked for direct comparison, placing Davis's solo and Evans's condensed score atop Jamal's trio, with Ray Crawford on guitar and Israel Crosby on bass.²⁹⁵

Because most wind instruments do not have the ability to shift registers every two measures in the way Jamal does during the opening statement, Evans manipulates his orchestration with dramatic shifts of dynamics and instrumentation. In the first four measures, he employs all of his winds in dense vertically-stacked harmonies at fortissimo, but then drops the dynamic level and intensity in the next four by reducing the orchestration to flute, alto sax, and two French horns. By omitting the trumpets, trombones, and tuba, he softens the timbre of the ensemble, in a manner that mimics Jamal's movement into the upper piano register. For additional variance in the final four measures, Evans reharmonizes the chord structure under the original melody, played by Davis. Similarly, bassist Paul Chambers improvises his own responses to the horns in measures two, four, and six, rather than reusing Crosby's original bass lines (Figure 20):

²⁹⁵ Lajoie, *Evans and Davis*, 113-186; Bruce Cameron Munson and Todd Lowry, et al., *The Ahmad Jamal Collection, Artist Transcriptions*, (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard Publishing Corp., 1998), 6-21.

The image displays a musical score for the introduction of "New Rhumba". It is a stacked score with five systems, each representing a different musician or instrument. The top system is for Miles Davis, showing a melodic line in the treble clef. The second system is for Gil Evans, with a piano part in both treble and bass clefs, including dynamic markings like *ff* and *mf*, and instrument labels for Trumpets (TPT.), Trombones (TBN.), Flute (Flute), Alto Saxophone (A. Sax), and Horns (2 Horns). The third system is for Ahmad Jamal, with a piano part in both clefs, marked *mf* and *mp*, and a *g^{ua}* (guitar) part indicated by a dashed line. The fourth system is for Crawford, with a piano part in both clefs, marked *mf* and *mp*. The bottom system is for Crosby, with a bass line in the bass clef. The score is in common time (C) and features various musical notations including chords, dynamics, and articulation marks.

Figure 20. Jamal-Evans Stacked Scores: “New Rhumba” Introduction

Even though Evans re-orchestrated Jamal’s introduction, he makes little effort to conceal his appropriation of the original arrangement during the head. Here, Davis plays Jamal’s melody over low brass background figures taken directly from Crawford’s comping and Crosby’s bass lines. In contrast to the beginning of Evans’s orchestration, the declaration of the head is much more subdued. Like the balance between Jamal and Crawford, neither Davis’s solo flugelhorn nor the background figures dominate, at least until the brass punctuate the final measure (Figure 21):

The image shows a musical score for the A-Section of "New Rhumba". It is a stacked score with five staves. The top staff is for Miles Davis, the second for Gil Evans, the third for Ahmad Jamal, the fourth for Chromford, and the bottom for Crosby. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The Gil Evans staff has multiple parts for horns and bass. The Ahmad Jamal staff has a melodic line with some rests. The Chromford staff has a block voicing accompaniment. The Crosby staff has a simple accompaniment.

Figure 21. Jamal-Evans Stacked Scores: “New Rhumba” A-Section

Throughout the remainder of the orchestration, Evans quotes and modifies various materials from Jamal, whether copying his accompaniment or reusing phrases from Jamal’s improvisations as counterpoint to Davis’s improvised solo. A closer look at each of the B-sections reveals that most of Evans’s background figures are drawn directly from the comping figures of Jamal and Crawford. Over the five scored choruses, Evans only slightly departs from Jamal’s one- and two-handed block voicings with a few alterations of rhythms and harmonic density. For the first B-section, Evans’s low brass backgrounds are a combination of both Jamal’s and Crawford’s comping, save a slight rhythmic variation in the third measure (Figure 22):

The image displays a musical score for the B-Section (First Chorus) of "New Rhumba". It is a stacked score for three musicians: Gil Evans, Jamal, and Crawford. The score is written in common time (C) and consists of 12 measures. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

- GIL EVANS:** The top system shows a complex harmonic texture. The treble clef part is mostly rests. The bass clef part features a series of chords and melodic fragments, including a prominent eighth-note line in the first measure.
- JAMAL:** The middle system shows a melodic line in the bass clef. The treble clef part contains several measures of rhythmic slashes, indicating a section where the instrument is not playing or is playing a specific rhythmic pattern.
- CRAWFORD:** The bottom system shows a melodic line in the treble clef, primarily consisting of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some rests.

Figure 22. Jamal-Evans Stacked Scores: "New Rhumba" B-Section (First Chorus)

The background figures on the second and fourth B-section choruses are near replicas of Jamal's (Figures 23-24):

Figure 23. Jamal-Evans Stacked Scores: “New Rhumba” B-Section (Second Chorus)

Figure 24. Jamal-Evans Stacked Scores: “New Rhumba” B-Section (Fourth Chorus)

Conversely, the third B-section is a greater melodic and rhythmic departure than the others (Figure 25):

Figure 25. Jamal-Evans Stacked Scores: “New Rhumba” B-Section (Third Chorus)

In the fifth and final bridge, Evans handles Jamal’s first arpeggio by sustaining a composite of the chord over the same 3.5 beats, resulting in a C13sus, then omits the subsequent F7 arpeggiation altogether (Figure 26):

The image shows two systems of musical notation. The top system is labeled 'G. EVANS' and consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The bottom system is labeled 'JAMAL' and also consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The notation includes various notes, rests, and accidentals, with some notes connected by slurs. The key signature has two flats, and the time signature is 4/4.

Figure 26. Jamal-Evans Stacked Scores: “New Rhumba” B-Section (Fifth Chorus)

Apart from Gil Evans adaptation of Jamal’s trio arrangement into large ensemble form, Lajoie discovered that Davis also appropriated material from the Jamal recording. Davis begins his own solo by quoting the first four measures of Jamal’s solo improvisation, which itself is a paraphrase of the folk song “Put Your Little Foot Right Out.” Davis borrows from Jamal’s right hand, while Evans’s scores his left for French horn and three trombones (Figure 27):

Figure 27. Davis-Evans-Jamal Stacked Scores: “New Rhumba” (Solo chorus)

Davis develops the ideas over the next four measures, before breaking into new improvisatory material. According to Steve Lajoie, whose orchestral transcriptions of the Gil Evans-Miles Davis collaborations are referenced here, Davis began his solos in this manner for all known live performances of *New Rhumba*.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁶ Lajoie, *Evans and Davis*, 116.

When asked how he felt after learning of Davis's use of his compositions and/or arrangements, Jamal later revealed that he mostly took it as complimentary, with a couple of exceptions. In 1957, Columbia Records contacted him for the licensing of "New Rhumba," which Davis intended to record for his *Miles +19* album. After realizing he never had the piece copyrighted, Jamal panicked. He was especially concerned knowing that Gil Evans orchestrated a note-for-note transcription of his small ensemble arrangement for Davis's ensemble, so he rushed to have it copywritten before Davis could record it.²⁹⁷ Similarly, when Davis had his rhythm section emulate Jamal's recording of "Billy Boy" for the *Milestones* album, it ultimately became just one of several others to appropriate the arrangement, including Garland a year earlier. Jamal later complained, "I was stupid enough not to copyright the arrangement, and then Oscar Peterson did it, Red Garland did it, Ramsey Lewis did it, everybody did it, and I didn't get paid for it."²⁹⁸

4.8 KINDRED SPIRITS

Although much can be said of Miles Davis's admiration and emulation of Ahmad Jamal, the two certainly shared enough similarities from the onset that Davis likely found in Jamal a kindred spirit. The comparison of recordings in Table 1.1 reveals their shared affinity for popular song forms and highlights the influence Jamal's repertoire selection had on Davis. The connection also points to their mutual engagement with the signifyin(g) tradition of jazz. While Jamal's conceptualizations of melody, harmony, rhythm, and texture, are rooted primarily in the

²⁹⁷ Cawthra, "Sensational Pulse," 80.

²⁹⁸ Chambers, *Milestones*, 276-277; Richard Cook, *It's About That Time: Miles Davis On and Off Record*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 89.

orchestrational devices employed by the likes of Duke Ellington and Count Basie, he employs them in unique ways that challenge the listeners' preconceived notions of how the music should sound in performance. His conceptualizations of time, space, and discipline force the audience to listen to his trio beyond the solo-driven performance practices of the time. Davis sideman saxophonist Cannonball Adderley, who himself came to an appreciation of Jamal through Davis, explains:

I don't think it's accurate to call Jamal a 'cocktail' pianist because I have to *listen* to Ahmad. He commands attention. One quality of his work that impresses me – a quality that Miles brought to my attention – is that he uses and creates very interesting interludes...It is true that Ahmad had influenced Miles Davis. Miles, for example, depends more on the rhythm section than he used to...Miles has also become fonder of tags and transitory passages since listening to Ahmad.²⁹⁹

Drawing again from Gates's model, whether considering Jamal's arrangements or Davis's appropriation of them, neither reject the tradition, but rather extend it. The selection of popular song certainly attracts widespread audience appeal, but it also provides the best opportunity to signify on prior performances. In choosing repertoire that was already ingrained in the public's ear, Jamal and Davis challenged preconceived notions of how each tune should sound, according to previously recorded versions. Both Jamal and Davis became masters of altering melodic and rhythmic structures by paraphrasing and displacing it so much so that the listener can hardly follow the known form. Utilizing a combination of phrase displacement and editing out of material, the listener does not know what is coming next, or if it is even going to come at all.

²⁹⁹ Jullian "Cannonball" Adderley, Ahmad Jamal (Argo LP-636), Record Review, *The Jazz Review* 2, no. 2 (February 1959), 33.

4.9 CRITICAL RESPONSE TO THE JAMAL-DAVIS CONNECTION

Davis's oft-spoken admiration and unabashed emulation of Jamal codified the pianist's placement in jazz historical discourse, but under highly-debated circumstances. When *At the Pershing: But Not for Me* (Argo 1958) unexpectedly rose to public acclaim, critics like Martin Williams printed searing album reviews, seemingly in response to Davis's praise. In fact, Williams indicates that he reviewed the album in *Down Beat* simply because of Jamal's influence on Davis and his associates, and lists several correlations between the them:

Some of Miles Davis's quintet performances were clearly based on Jamal's recordings, some of the scores in *Miles Ahead* are little more than orchestrations of Jamal records, and (whether he began it on his own or with Davis) Red Garland uses Jamal frequently...³⁰⁰

Though he encourages his readers to compare and re-examine the recordings, he still leaves Jamal as a "cocktail" pianist who employs "gimmicks" and "meaningless improvisational tinkling."³⁰¹

Davis was quick to respond. Just months after Williams's scathing review and in the wake of negative commentary from Nat Hentoff, Davis's conversation with Hentoff as published in the December 1958 *Jazz Review* is likely the most cited documentation of his praise for Jamal. However, also from that interview, Davis's critique of Oscar Peterson and confession that he hired Red Garland because he played like Jamal no doubt angered the likes of Williams and cast a permanent shadow over any subsequent connections made between the two.

Davis's sidemen were certainly more willing to accept their leader's admiration and emulation of Jamal, and following his lead, voiced their own appreciation for the pianist.

³⁰⁰ Martin Williams, "Jazz Album Reviews: Ahmad Jamal" in *Down Beat* 25, no. 19 (September 18, 1958), 38-39.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

Saxophonist Cannonball Adderley became a staunch advocate for Jamal at Davis's urging, as indicated in his favorable review of Jamal's first release following the Pershing album, *Ahmad Jamal* (Argo 636), for the *Jazz Review*.³⁰² Though Davis was able to convince Hentoff of Jamal's significance, others balked at the notion.

Hentoff's liner notes for *The Piano Scene of Ahmad Jamal* (Epic LN-3631) recount Davis's scolding and can almost be read as the critic's apology for doubting Jamal's contributions. On the other hand, two books published in 1965 offer critical assessments of Jamal's influence on Davis. Leonard Feather briefly mentions Jamal in his *The Book of Jazz* solely because of Davis's reiterated admirations, but immediately casts off the pianist's style as "cute," "simple," and "an unusual blend of embellishment and economy."³⁰³ In *Jazz Masters of the Fifties*, Joe Goldberg asserts that "Ahmad Jamal may be remembered only as inspiration for some of Miles Davis's rhythmic ideas."³⁰⁴ Goldberg cites Davis's use of Jamal's repertoire, two-beat rhythmic ideas, space, and tag endings, but contests that any praise awarded Jamal due to the trumpeter's apparent admiration is meaningless:

Miles's adulation of Jamal...has led many others to praise the pianist. But if Davis is able to derive valuable ideas from Jamal's music, that does not make Jamal Davis's musical equal. Most artists borrow, often from unlikely sources, and if they are good enough they invariably enrich what they borrow.³⁰⁵

Goldberg concludes that from Jamal Davis discovered a principle so simple that it apparently eluded everyone else: space. And when the rhythm section applied this space behind its main

³⁰² Adderley, "Ahmad Jamal Record Review, 33-34.

³⁰³ Leonard Feather, *The Book of Jazz: From Then 'till Now: A Guide to the Entire Field*, (New York: Horizon Press, 1965), 69.

³⁰⁴ Joe Goldberg, *Jazz Masters of the Fifties*, First edition, 1965, (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1980), 3.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

soloists – Davis, Coltrane, and Garland – Davis’s performances evoked an emotion that was “comparable to nothing else in jazz.”³⁰⁶

Later publications, including Larry Birnbaum’s 1981 *Down Beat* feature, Dr. Billy Taylor’s book on the history of jazz piano, Len Lyons’s 1983 book of jazz pianists, and Stuart Nicholson’s 1990 book on the modern resurgence of jazz, all reference Jamal’s influence on Davis to either validate or add credibility to his status as an important jazzman.³⁰⁷ Most major jazz history textbooks fail to mention Jamal at all, even within the context of Davis’s music and career.

Conversely, each of the Miles Davis publications reviewed in preparation of this chapter cite Jamal’s influence on the trumpeter’s development and conceptions as a leader. In addition to Davis’s autobiography with Quincy Troupe, these include works by Ian Carr, Benjamin Cawthra, Jack Chambers, Gerald Early, Steve Lajoie, and Paul Maher, Jr. with Michael K. Dorr. Only Lajoie’s analysis of “New Rhumba” and Chambers’ album-by-album commentary attempt to detail specific musical and aesthetic correlations beyond stylistic similarities alone. Even so, none of the aforementioned authors seek to qualify Jamal’s role in Davis’s conceptions. Unlike the critics that passed off the relationship between the two musicians as trivial, Davis scholars rather unanimously accept it without question or hesitation, out of respect for Davis’s ardent praise. Perhaps they sensed the sincerity of Davis’s admiration for Jamal – a quality not often associated with the bandleader. After all, Davis’s concluded his *Jazz Review* interview with Nat Hentoff with

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 75.

³⁰⁷ Larry Birnbaum, “Ahmad Jamal,” *Down Beat*, (March 1981): 14-15, 65; Billy Taylor, *Jazz Piano: History and Development*, (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1982); Len Lyons; *The Great Pianists: Speaking of Their Lives and Music*, (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1983), 114-119; Stuart Nicholson, *Jazz: The Modern Resurgence*, (London: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 84-85.

one final declaration of faith in the pianist: “I’d love to have a little boy some day with red hair, green eyes and a black face – who plays piano like Ahmad Jamal.”³⁰⁸

³⁰⁸ Hentoff, “Miles Davis,” 12.

5.0 DRUMMERLESS NO MORE

In the fall of 1956, Jamal travelled to New York with Crawford and Crosby to work at The Embers, located on 161 East 54th Street. In the *Chicago Defender*, Al Monroe reported that the trio had just concluded a stint as top attraction at the Preview Lounge in Chicago at the end of July. The booking at the Embers signaled Jamal's return to where he was "a sensation for several months' run."³⁰⁹ Sam Lacy of *The Baltimore Afro-American* announced that The Ahmad Jamal Trio "skedded into the Embers" on August 6, 1956, but this particular occasion signaled an unlikely turning point in Jamal's career.³¹⁰

During his previous visit to The Embers in the fall of 1951, Jamal garnered the attention of Columbia executive John Hammond. However, The Embers was a bustling New York supper club, and Jamal's trio was booked to play as the intermission act between headliners like Jackie Gleason, Peggy Lee, Joey Bushkin, Buck Clayton, and Jo Jones. The boisterous crowds paid no attention to Jamal and his trio. Jamal recounts, "Of course, here's a little guy coming in playing intermission.

³⁰⁹ Al Monroe, "Swinging the News" in *Chicago Defender (National edition) (1921-1967)* (Aug 4, 1956), 14, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Defender, (Accessed February 17, 2017),

<http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/492946238?accountid=14709>.

³¹⁰ Sam Lacy, "Theatrical Whirl" in *Afro-American (1893-1988)* (Aug 4, 1956), 11, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American, (Accessed February 17, 2017), <http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/531915901?accountid=14709>.

No one listened to us. It was noisy, people were eating steaks and all that kind of stuff.”³¹¹ In a record review (for the Bobby Hackett Quartet) in the *Jazz Review*, Bill Crow gives a telling assessment of the typical scene: “Any date recorded at the Embers would be predominantly the roar of a hundred conversations punctuated by frequent drunkenly bellowed requests for the band to play something besides what they’re busy playing.”³¹²

One night, a man approached the bandstand in a drunken state to request a song, and after placing his glass of red wine on the piano, he spilled it all over the keyboard. Jamal, who had already been harboring ill-feelings towards the club scene in New York, got up from the piano, put on his coat, and returned to the hotel so he and Crosby could load up his station wagon and drive back to Chicago.³¹³ When Crawford opted to stay in New York, Jamal knew he had a serious decision to make. Before replacing his longtime sideman with another guitarist, Jamal decided that the piano-guitar-bass combination was perhaps too subtle for large, crowded rooms. In an interview with Ted Panken for *Down Beat* in 2002, Jamal explained how he came to decide on the future instrumentation of his trio:

When I got back to Chicago, I went to Miller Brown, who owned the Pershing Lounge, and said, ‘I want to become an artist-in-residence; I want a steady gig.’ That gave me time to get the people I wanted. Ray Crawford stayed in New York, and I decided to hire a drummer. It was almost impossible to get Vernel Fournier, because he was busy [with Tom Archia]. But I waited for the right moment, and I finally hired Vernel.³¹⁴

³¹¹ Kenny Washington, Ahmad Jamal Interview Transcript (February 9, 2003) in *The Complete Ahmad Jamal Trio Argo Sessions 1956-62* Boxset Booklet, (Stamford, CT: Mosaic Records, L.L.C., 2010), 5.

³¹² Bill Crow, Bobby Hackett *At the Embers* (Capitol T1077), Record Review, *The Jazz Review* 2, no. 2 (February 1959), 32.

³¹³ Washington, “Ahmad Jamal Interview,” 5; Josephine Reed, “Ahmad Jamal,” *Art Works* Podcast (January 2012), National Endowment for the Arts, (Accessed July 1, 2016), <https://www.arts.gov/audio/ahmad-jamal>.

³¹⁴ Ted Panken, “For Ahmad Jamal’s 85th Birthday, a *Down Beat* feature from 2002,” (July 2, 2015), Interview Transcript (2002), *Today Is the Question: Ted Panken on Music, Politics and*

Jamal was unable to acquire Fournier until the end of 1956. In the meantime, he hired Walter Perkins, a versatile drummer from Chicago who previously served in the military and studied at the Cosmopolitan School of Music in Chicago.³¹⁵ He was known to be a responsive accompanist, who favored a supportive role in the ensemble over self-centric displays of his own technique.³¹⁶ For Jamal's trio, he adapted Crawford's conga-styled rhythms to the drums by using a mallet instead of a stick in his left hand, which mimicked the mellow sound of the fretboard taps. Paired with right-handed brush strokes on a cymbal, he could still keep time, swing, and complement Jamal's light touch. With his new drummer, Jamal went back into the Argo studio to record fifteen titles on September 27 and October 4, 1956. Nine of them appeared on the 1956 LP *Count 'Em 88* (Argo 610), with only "I Just Can't See for Looking" selected from the October session.³¹⁷

In Jamal's first album with a drummer, there were several stylistic elements that closely resembled his work with guitarist Ray Crawford. With Perkins's use of brushes on each track, paired with a soft mallet on "Volga Boatman" and "Jim Love Sue," the trio retained much of the bright, bouncy character of Crawford's guitar percussion from the drummerless sessions. In terms of orchestration, the trio maintains its characteristically-polished organization of voices which permits every instrumentalist to be heard with clarity. However, unlike Jamal's earlier recordings,

the Arts, (Accessed December 12, 2016), <https://tedpanken.wordpress.com/2015/07/02/for-ahmad-jamals-85th-birthday-a-downbeat-feature-from-2002/>.

³¹⁵ "Walter Perkins," *Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, 4th ed., Colin Larkin, ed., Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, (Accessed January 3, 2017), <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/subscriber/article/epm/21732>.

³¹⁶ J. Kent Williams and Barry Kernfeld, "Perkins, Walter," *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed., Barry Kernfeld, ed., Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, (Accessed January 3, 2017), <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/subscriber/article/grove/music/J351300>.

³¹⁷ According to the discography on Jamal's official website, the trio also recorded "I Know," "Cheek to Cheek," "Speak Low," "Makin' Woopie," "I Wish I Knew," and "But Not for Me" during these sessions, but none were released. See "Discography" at <http://Ahmadjamal.com>.

the sidemen often fall into the background of the piano. Jamal plays with his usual expressive dynamism, but Crosby and Perkins mostly function as static support for their leader. For the majority of the album, Perkins provides the time/groove with little embellishment and Crosby sticks to two-beat and walking bass patterns. Even when Jamal leaves space between phrases, there is no active dialogue, just continuous accompaniment.

Jamal still contributes a measurable amount of uniquely-contrived, prearranged material, particularly on introductions, endings, and head choruses. Starting at the introduction of “On Green Dolphin Street,” for example, the piano and bass introduce a rhythmic ostinato on a pedal-point. When the piano departs to play a rhythmic variation of the original melody, the bass continues on the ostinato pedal through the entirety of the song form and into the short interlude that precedes Jamal’s first solo chorus. At times the seemingly-indefinite harmonic and rhythmic dissonance is jarring, but makes its eventual resolution all the more satisfying. Jamal’s accented punches and dramatic shifts of dynamics almost feel exaggerated over the even-tempered bass and drums. Apart from moments of orchestrational interest such as these, *Count ‘Em 88* is possibly Jamal’s most solo-centric album to date, as he remains at the forefront of each track. Nevertheless, with the acquisition of New Orleans-born drummer Vernel Fournier in the months that followed, Jamal soon had the personnel to achieve the ensemble dynamic he desired.

When Jamal first called Fournier, the drummer was working in the house band at the Beehive, a popular Chicago club located on 1503 East 55th Street, and played there for over a year with pianist Norman Simmons and bassist Victor Sproles. While at the Beehive he backed the likes

of Lester Young, Ben Webster, Sonny Stitt, J.J. Johnson, Kai Winding, and Red Rodney, among many others.³¹⁸

Fournier was born and raised in New Orleans, and like other New Orleans children, by the time he was old enough he joined the school band. In addition to his school music studies, he took lessons from Sydney “Beffy” Montegue, whom Fournier called “the best technician in New Orleans.”³¹⁹ Montegue, who played Sousa marches with the WPA band in the parks and some jazz, taught Fournier how to read music and play marches and rudiments. He credits his teacher for teaching him the press roll, the “basis of New Orleans drumming.”³²⁰ Though his foundational drumming skills were rooted in his New Orleans upbringing, Fournier’s first bebop influence came when he was fourteen or fifteen years old by way of two prominent Pittsburgh musicians: drummer Art Blakey and vocalist Billy Eckstine. On the influence of Blakey, who played in Eckstine’s bebop big band, Fournier explains:

Once I heard Art Blakey it cancelled out everything...[The Billy Eckstine band] was everything. When Billy Eckstine came on the scene he wiped out everybody. He used to pack ‘em in.³²¹

Blakey had a particularly significant impact on Fournier and other drummers at the time:

Art gave us what I call a lot of standard beats that a drummer has to play whether he knows it or not. If you listen to the old records like *Second Balcony Jump*, you hear things that he played on those records that guys still play. He had about fifteen or twenty things that he did that everybody had to play.³²²

³¹⁸ Herlin Riley, Johnny Vidacovich, and Dan Thress, *New Orleans Jazz and Second Line Drumming*, (Los Angeles, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., Inc., 1995), 46.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

³²² *Ibid.*, 44.

Fournier decided to leave New Orleans in 1946 to attend Alabama State Teachers College. But at the encouragement of his high school friend Benny Powell (trombonist for Thad Jones, Mel Lewis, and Count Basie), he ended up leaving during the second semester to play with King Kolax's R&B band in Oklahoma City for a year. At the end of the engagement, Fournier returned to New Orleans, but not for long. In 1948, Kolax sent for Fournier to travel to Chicago (Kolax's hometown) to play with his quartet. He recalled there being so many great drummers in Chicago, like Ike Day, Dorell Anderson, and Wesley Landers, that he simply "wanted to go home the second day [he] was there!"³²³ Personal sentiments notwithstanding, Fournier became one of the most sought after drummers in Chicago; so much so that Jamal had to wait in line before he could hire him for his own trio.

Jamal finally had his chance to acquire Fournier while he was between contracts. Fournier's previous work with bassist Israel Crosby helped to solidify the deal. The two played together in 1949 for tenor saxophonist and singer Buster Bennett. In an interview with historian, writer, and saxophonist Loren Schoenberg for WKCR, Fournier revealed that at this particular occasion he learned restraint. At intermission, the first thing Crosby said to him was that he was playing too loud. Because they had just met, Fournier was offended:

Was I angry man! 'Cause I was young. I was really angry. I didn't know Israel Crosby. I didn't know the background he had, but I listened.³²⁴

Fournier soon learned that Crosby was perhaps the most demanded bassist in Chicago at the time. The two continued to work periodically together from then on, their paths crossing regularly through five or six groups in which they both played, including bands led by Clarence Anderson,

³²³ Ibid., 44-45.

³²⁴ Vernel Fournier, interview by Loren Schoenberg, WKCR Radio.

Johnny Thompson, and Gene Ammons. Together they recorded in February 1953 with pianist Teddy Wilson and formed the house rhythm section at the Blue Note with pianist Lou Levy.³²⁵ Fournier was no stranger to Jamal either. He often frequented the Kit Kat Club, on the South Side of Chicago, to hear him play:

It was a very small place, but it stayed packed for Ahmad... So we'd all head over to see Ahmad, pay him a visit, listen... But we always knew he was there. We'd get full of his sounds, and we'd leave and come back and get replenished with them later on, like guys do today.³²⁶

Prior to joining Jamal, Fournier had little trio experience. In fact, most of his work at the time was rock-and-roll studio drumming for the Dells, The Spaniards, and the Oreos. He soon learned that playing with Jamal was much more than a side job, explaining:

When I got with Ahmad I had to put it [studio drumming] down, 'cause Ahmad's thing was too demanding. When I got with Ahmad, he must have had 50 or 60 different arrangements of different tunes. So I couldn't fool with the rock thing, because with rock-and-roll you had to rehearse all day and record the following day and it took up too much time.³²⁷

He remembered that his first gig with Jamal was at the London House, but Crosby was not on bass. When Fournier joined Jamal, Johnny Pate was the bassist in the trio but eventually Pate's activities as an arranger got in the way of his ability to maintain an active playing schedule. Crosby was clearly Jamal's bassist of choice, but as a highly-demanded musician he "came in and out," as Fournier remembered, at least in one case to record for Benny Goodman. With Crosby's permanent

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ted Panken, "Vernel Fournier on Ahmad Jamal" (July 3, 2011), WKCR Interview Transcript (1990), *Today Is the Question: Ted Panken on Music, Politics and the Arts*, (Accessed December 12, 2016), <http://tedpanken.wordpress.com/2011/07/03/vernell-fournier-on-ahmad-jamal-wkcr-1990>.

³²⁷ Riley, *New Orleans Jazz*, 46.

return to the trio, Fournier recollected that most of Jamal's book consisted of previously set arrangements: as the new guy, he just had to figure out what to play!

Even though Fournier followed Perkins, who left after a year to lead his own group, the MJT+3, Jamal never asked Fournier to play like him or adapt his style. He explained, "Did I have to play like Walter? Naw. It was never like that when I was coming up. A guy hired you because he liked what you were playing."³²⁸ Yet it was clearly Jamal's group. Fournier indicates the difficulty he had in figuring out how he fit into his leader's master plan:

Well, as things would progress, you'd have more input. But in the beginning it was generally Ahmad's format. Ahmad Jamal laid down the format, then you tried to fit something into that you thought would be worth it...As a musician he didn't ask anything...but if there was something in particular he wanted, he would repeat it with the piano many, many times until you understood what he was saying, or he might tell you – but very seldom would he speak to you about your playing.³²⁹

5.1 *AT THE PERSHING: THE MAKING OF THE SURPRISE HIT RECORD*

Acquiring a steady booking was of utmost importance for Jamal. As a feature act in a singular establishment, he could focus on rehearsing and developing his new trio and its repertoire. He previously played a single-night at the Pershing Lounge in 1952 after begging manager Sonny Boswell for the booking, earning him roughly \$51-52 dollars that evening.³³⁰ He also worked there intermittently in late-1954 through mid-1955, as announced in columns appearing in *The Chicago*

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Panken, "Vernel Fournier."

³³⁰ Eugene Holley, Jr., "Gold Standard: Pianist Ahmad Jamal Chartered a New Popularity for Jazz" in *Wax Poetics* (December/January 2008-2009), 98.

*Defender*³³¹ and *Philadelphia Tribune*.³³² On his return to Chicago, Jamal ran into Miller Brown and Grant Smith who had purchased the Pershing. He said to Brown, “I don’t want to travel anymore. I want to stay in one place.”³³³ The owners were glad to offer him the job, but he insisted on having a Steinway for the engagement. Together, Jamal and Brown located an antique Steinway built in 1890 with sculptured legs and a broken soundboard with wood screws piecing it together. It was the same instrument on which he would record in less than two years one of the top-selling jazz records in history.³³⁴

Located on East 64th Street and Cottage Grove, the Pershing Hotel housed three floors of entertainment: the lounge on the main, a small club on the lower, and a large ballroom on the upper that boasted top talent like Charlie Parker, Lester Young, and Charlie Ventura.³³⁵ With the flurry of constant activity, the Pershing Lounge also provided much of the “word-of-mouth” publicity necessary for continued success. As a result, Jamal’s trio developed a particularly strong following among musicians. A number of notable artists came to hear the group play, including Billie Holiday (with her Chihuahua), Lena Horne, and Sammy Davis, Jr.³³⁶

³³¹ “Ahmad Jamal Rated New Jazz Sensation” in *Philadelphia Tribune (1912-2001)* (December 21, 1954): 13, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Philadelphia Tribune, (Accessed February 27, 2017),

<http://search.proquest.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/news/docview/532084920/fulltextPDF/2EB452EB8072480FPQ/1?accountid=14709>.

³³² “The Chicago ‘Stem’ Boasts Tops in Combo and Exotic Entertainment” in *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967)* (November 6, 1954): 6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Defender, (Accessed February 27, 2017),

<http://search.proquest.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/news/docview/492860957/fulltextPDF/2EB452EB8072480FPQ/2?accountid=14709>.

³³³ Molly Murphy, “NEA Jazz Masters: Ahmad Jamal,” Interview (January 11, 2007), National Endowment for the Arts, (Accessed July 1, 2016), <https://www.arts.gov/honors/jazz/ahmad-jamal>.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Panken, “Vernel Fournier.”

³³⁶ Holley, “Gold Standard,” 98; Len Lyons, *The Great Pianists: Speaking of Their Lives and Music*, (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1983), 117.

For Jamal, who was still contributing arrangements for his trio, the residency granted ongoing opportunities for his group to spontaneously create, distill, and modify new ideas as a cohesive unit. Jamal describes the residency as having an outcome completely different than that of a rehearsal:

When you're working every night, five, six nights a week in the same ensemble, magic happens. Magical things happen. Wonderful things happen... So that and support by some of the finest musicians in the world.³³⁷

When Jamal later reflected on the success of the recording session that came from that residency, he explained how the trio's orchestrational conceptions unfolded over time and ultimately produced one of the best-selling singles from the album:

Not a word did I mention on the lines Israel played on "But Not for Me." That just built over a period of time – one chorus, two choruses, that's what happened. They [Crosby and Fournier] just had that built-in concept of what to do.³³⁸

After working in residence at the Pershing for nearly a year, the Jamal-Fournier-Crosby trio had developed a particularly treasured arrangement of Nat Simon and Buddy Bernier's "Poinciana, which itself is based on the Cuban folk song "La Cancion del Arbol" or "The Song of the Tree."³³⁹ Jamal first came to know the song while a member in Joe Kennedy's Four Strings. He then recorded it for Epic with his own drummerless group on October 25, 1955 with Crawford and Crosby. Unlike these previous versions, this new version developed chorus-by-chorus over the

³³⁷ Howard Reich, "Ahmad Jamal at 84: Still inventing" in *Chicago Tribune* (October 8, 2014), (Accessed December 11, 2016), <http://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/music/reich/ct-jazz-ahmad-jamal-20141008-column.html>.

³³⁸ Washington, "Ahmad Jamal Interview," 6.

³³⁹ Ted Gioia, *The Jazz Standards: A Guide to the Repertoire*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 337.

year at the Pershing, just as “But Not for Me.”³⁴⁰ Convinced that it would soon become a success, Jamal went to Leonard Chess and said, “I have to record this on location. I’m not going to play it anymore, perform it anymore until we record it, because I’m afraid someone’s going to take the idea and run with it.”³⁴¹ With “clarity” and “faith” in what he had, Jamal opted to stop playing it until it could be recorded. According to Jamal, Chess always cooperated with what Jamal wanted to do musically.

By the end of 1957, Jamal and Leonard Chess along with friend and WGES disc jockey Sid McCoy came up with a plan to record an album on location at the Pershing. Jamal preferred the idea of recording at the club and what the environment had to offer artistically in contrast to a studio. Together, they agreed that Jamal would hold sole responsibility for the musical part of the evening without interference from any additional producer. Settling on the evening of January 16, 1958, they hired Malcolm Chisholm, a veteran sound engineer from Universal. With two headphones and a recorder setup in an enclosed, adjacent liquor room, Chisholm recorded a total of forty-three takes over a span of four evenings. From the original cuts, Jamal selected only eight for the album, which was released in 1958 as *Ahmad Jamal Trio At the Pershing: But Not for Me* (Argo LP-628).³⁴² Eleven additional tracks were released in 1961 as *Ahmad Jamal At the Pershing, Volume 2* (Argo LP-667).³⁴³ Reflecting on the experience nearly fifty years later in an interview with Molly Murphy for the National Endowment for the Arts, Jamal explained:

It had all the spontaneity and all the excitement that happens when you do a record, but particularly, on location. They called it a live

³⁴⁰ The same is true for “But Not for Me” (Argo, 1956). See Washington, “Ahmad Jamal Interview,” 6.

³⁴¹ Murphy, “NEA Jazz Masters.” Also see Washington, “Ahmad Jamal Interview,” 6.

³⁴² Nadine Cohodas, *Spinning Blues into Gold: The Chess Brothers and the Legendary Chess Records*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 153.

³⁴³ No other tracks beyond these have been released from the recording sessions at the Pershing Lounge.

performance...but I call them ‘remote recordings,’ removed from the studio... so there are certain things that happen with an audience that don't happen. The studios become very surgical at times. And with the audience, all the mistakes are there. You have to live with them. But the whole setting is one that dictates sometimes the best results.³⁴⁴

In the accompanying booklet from the 2010 Mosaic Records box set *The Complete Ahmad Jamal Trio Argo Sessions 1956-62*, producers Kenny Washington and Michael Cuscuna attribute at least one factor of the album's success to Jamal's sense of pacing in choosing the final album track listing. In addition to selecting the specific tracks, he also edited and sequenced the album.³⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the release was not without its complications. As noted in Nadine Cohodas's account of the Chess brothers and their record company, all of the songs were registered with the performance rights group ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers) rather than BMI (Broadcast Music, Inc.), which controlled the rights associated with most of the previously-released songs for the label.³⁴⁶

Yet, despite a few negative reviews from critics, the public responded enthusiastically. *But Not for Me* sold an unprecedented five thousand copies within a day of its release.³⁴⁷ Aware that competitors would dismiss the numbers, Argo chief Dave Usher encouraged his boss Leonard Chess to invite a *Billboard* reporter to personally review the sales figures. The magazine's August 25, 1958 issue ran the headline “Argo, Buoyed by Jamal Hit, Plans Big Fall” and the reporter wrote of Usher's “unprecedented action” of opening “Argo's sales books to *The Billboard*.” As stated in the column, the act confirmed that the firm's distributors had purchased 47,762 copies of *But Not for Me* since its release in mid-May. Citing a recent story in the magazine about album sales, the

³⁴⁴ Murphy, “NEA Jazz Masters.”

³⁴⁵ Washington, “Ahmad Jamal Interview,” 8.

³⁴⁶ Cohodas, *Spinning Blues into Gold*, 154.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

article explained that since any album that sold 15,000-20,000 copies was considered to be “big,” Argo had clearly achieved “its first big 12-incher.”³⁴⁸ Additionally, the mid-June release of “But Not for Me” and “Music, Music, Music” on opposing sides of a promotional 45-rpm single (Argo 5294) sold 27,500 copies. The extended play (EP) 45-rpm of “Music, Music, Music” issued in July sold another 11,362. By December, *Down Beat* reported that *But Not for Me* was the number-one jazz bestseller.³⁴⁹ The album remained on *Billboard’s* album chart for 107 weeks, and the *Cash Box* deemed it to be one of the strongest sellers of 1958.³⁵⁰

The repertoire was particularly unlikely for such a standout album. “But Not for Me” and “Surrey with the Fringe on Top” came from the Broadway musicals *Girl Crazy* and *Oklahoma!* respectively. Three standards were from the Great American Songbook: “Moonlight in Vermont,” “No Greater Love,” and “What’s New.” Teresa Brewer’s recording of “Music, Music, Music (Put Another Nickel In)” was already a million-seller in 1950. Compared to the other repertoire, Dizzy Gillespie’s bebop chart “Woody ‘N You” simply seemed to be an odd fit. Nevertheless, the accolades from the trio’s recording of “Poinciana,” a love song from the 1952 movie *Dreamboat*, were particularly surprising. Running at seven-and-a-half minutes at length, it was normally considered to be too long to get radio airtime. Yet, with the unsurpassed popularity of the album off the shelves, it was played on both AM and AM/FM and was made into an EP (Argo EP-1076). Jamal recalled that at the time EPs were typically reserved for the vocalists, like Dinah Shore and

³⁴⁸ “Argo, Buoyed by Jamal Hit, Plans Big Fall” in *The Billboard (Archive: 1894-1960)* 70, no. 34 (August 25, 1958): 3, Accessed February 27, 2017, <http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1040484398?accountid=14709>.

³⁴⁹ Cohodas, *Spinning Blues into Gold*, 154.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 155.

Perry Como, but his “Poinciana” ushered in the beginning of instrumental EPs.³⁵¹ When asked what he thought made that take so successful, he told journalist Eugene Holley, Jr.:

It was a combination of things: Israel Crosby’s lines, what I was playing, and Vernel – if you listen to his work on “Poinciana,” you’d think it was two drummers! He was so multidimensional: a master of brushes, master of content, master of metronomic time, and feeling. All of those elements from all three of us made that recording. [The song] was seven minutes and some seconds long. There are five different choruses, and each chorus is an entity into itself: a statement that builds and builds and builds. Each chorus became a stepping-stone to something higher. And when we got to the fourth chorus, that was it! We had a hit on our hands!”³⁵²

Jamal’s confidence in the album had been guarded, and although he had hoped to get attention for *Pershing* beyond Chicago, he certainly never expected its unprecedented response. At only twenty-eight years old, Jamal struggled to comprehend it:

I knew it was going to get some audience. Naturally, I didn’t know how much of an audience. Where it really took off was in Philadelphia...It took off in Chicago and New York...Once it broke those markets, forget about it. There was no turning back. I didn’t have any idea it was going to do what it did. 108 weeks. So I was a bit disoriented. I wasn’t quite ready for that kind of challenge, the success of that.³⁵³

Nonetheless, Jamal was named 17th on the 1958 *Down Beat* Reader’s Poll and rose to ninth the following year, due in part to the overwhelming success of the album. When he was later asked how he handled his newfound popularity, he replied, “I’d been recording for seven long years before this so-called meteoric rise came along. Nothing happens overnight in this business – maybe to the Beatles or Kiss, but not to us.”³⁵⁴

³⁵¹ Murphy, “NEA Jazz Masters.”

³⁵² Holley, “Gold Standard,” 101.

³⁵³ Washington, “Ahmad Jamal Interview,” 6.

³⁵⁴ Larry Birnbaum, “Ahmad Jamal” in *Down Beat* (March 1981), 15.

The remainder of 1958 continued to produce a flurry of activities and accolades for Jamal and his trio. In April, Jamal joined fellow Chicagoan and former sideman Johnny Pate to open for Count Basie at Chicago's Orchestra Hall.³⁵⁵ With the success of recording on-location at the Pershing, Argo producer Dave Usher once again employed his sound engineer Malcolm Chisholm to record Jamal, Crosby, and Fournier at the Spotlight Club in Washington, D.C. Recorded on September 5-6, the album was released as *Portfolio of Ahmad Jamal* (Argo LP 2638) and additional tracks from that session were later released in 2007 as *Complete Live at the Spotlight Club 1958* (Argo LP636). The September 17 issue of *Variety*³⁵⁶ printed that Jamal joined the Music Corporation of America (MCA) booking agency and the October 6 *Billboard*³⁵⁷ wrote that both he and rock guitarist Chuck Berry – “breadwinners for the firm” – were re-signed to the label. On October 3, the Ahmad Jamal Trio shared the billing at Carnegie Hall in New York with a sixteen-piece big band led by Englishman Ted Heath and singer Dakota Staton.³⁵⁸ By December 15, *Billboard* named the Ahmad Jamal Trio as one of “Three Newcomer Groups” in the Top 10

³⁵⁵ Ted Ston, “Heard and Seen” in *Daily Defender (Daily Edition) (1956-1960)* (April 16, 1958): 41, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Defender, (Accessed February 27, 2017) <http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/493744501?accountid=14709>.

³⁵⁶ “Retail Album Best Sellers” in *Variety (Archive: 1905-2000)* 212, no. 3 (September 17, 1958): 69, (Accessed February 27, 2017), <http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1017039483?accountid=1470>.

³⁵⁷ “Fenwick, New Chess Subsid, Makes Debut” in *Billboard (Archive: 1894-1960)* 70, no. 46 (October 6, 1958): 14, (Accessed February 27, 2017), <http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1040474483?accountid=14709>.

³⁵⁸ Ted Ston, “Heard and Seen” in *Daily Defender (Daily Edition) (1956-1960)* (October 6, 1958): 17, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Defender, (Accessed February 17, 2017), <http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/493764696?accountid=14709>.

Favorite Instrumental Lists that did not make the list the previous year. The trio, it explained, had “zoomed to popularity as the result of a string of hit albums on Argo.”³⁵⁹

5.2 CRITICAL RESPONSE

In the September 4, 1958 issue, *Down Beat* listed *At the Pershing: But Not for Me* atop the bi-weekly jazz best-sellers list, up from number seven on the previous survey. Up until this point, however, there was little mention of Jamal or his trio in the press, apart from occasional advertisements and performance announcements. But with the overwhelming success of the *Pershing* album, that all changed. Suddenly, Jamal became the target of critics, whose accusations followed him for decades.

Despite the ongoing success of the album, *Down Beat's* jazz record reviewer Martin Williams was unimpressed with the sales statistics. He wrote a scathing review of the album for the September 18, 1958 issue, giving it a mere two-and-a-half-star rating. According to Williams, Jamal's newest album should not even be considered a jazz record. Though he cites Davis's and Garland's appropriation of Jamal, he appears to criticize them for it:

Apparently this is being marketed as a jazz record. It is being reviewed in this section for that reason and also because of Jamal's current influence of certain jazzmen. Some of Miles Davis's quintet performances were clearly based on Jamal's recordings, some of the scores in *Miles Ahead* are little more than orchestrations of Jamal records, and (whether he began it on his own or with Davis) Red

³⁵⁹ “Three Newcomer Groups in Top 10 ‘Favorite Instrumental’ Lists” in *Billboard (Archive: 1894-1960)* (December 15, 1958): 18, (Accessed February 17, 2017), <http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1040506374?accountid=14709>.

Garland uses Jamal frequently; it seems to me that anyone who has had extravagant praise for their recordings might get some of Jamal's previous releases and do some serious comparing, re-examining, and thinking.

In the second half of his review, Williams casts off Jamal as a "cocktail pianist." Even though he references what he believes to be some of the trio's redeeming qualities, he ultimately criticizes its "rhythmic gimmicks," "meaningless tinkling," and "innocuous" music:

Jamal plays very good cocktail piano with praiseworthy musicianship. The trio's chief virtue is an excellent, smooth, light, but flexible beat which moves *forward* in a way that is almost exemplary. *Woody 'n' You* is a more or less typical performance: it skates along on pleasant rhythmic gimmicks until it is almost two-thirds over, then Jamal goes into some rather meaningless upper-keyboard improvisational tinkling. Throughout, the music is kept emotionally, melodically, and organizationally innocuous.³⁶⁰

In the years that followed, Williams's ambivalence towards Jamal only grew. In 1963, he admitted that Jamal was a success, but only in terms of his record sales, supper-club following, and imitators. He also resigns himself to the fact that Davis was affected by Jamal, but attributes the latter's success to having received the "compliment" of the former, "an important jazzman." To Williams, the mere suggestion that Davis emulated Jamal is proof that "good art can be influenced by bad."³⁶¹ He contested that though Davis and Jamal share interests in "openness of melody, space, and fleeting silence," those qualities which become "aspects of haunting lyric economy" for Davis are nothing more than "crowd-titillating stunt work" when employed by Jamal. In fact, Williams points to Jamal's recording at the Blackhawk in San Francisco as evidence that "Jamal's real instrument is not the piano at all but his audience."³⁶²

³⁶⁰ Martin Williams, Ahmad Jamal *But Not for Me* (Argo LP-628), Record Review in *Down Beat* 25, no. 19 (September 18, 1958), 39.

³⁶¹ Martin Williams, *Jazz Changes*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 281.

³⁶² *Ibid.*

Whitney Balliett was equally dismissive of Jamal's approach, in response to the trio's performance at Carnegie Hall on October 3, 1958. Balliett labels Jamal "a genuine musical curiosity" and his style "an attenuated version of Count Basie."³⁶³ He describes Jamal's persistent use of rests as giving "the impression achieved by spasmodically stopping and unstopping the ears in a noisy room," and after several tunes in this fashion, Balliett complains that "everything was blotted out but the attempt to guess when he would next lift his hands to hit the piano. It was trying work."³⁶⁴

However, Jean P. LeBlanc shot back at Balliett's criticisms in an article for *Negro Digest*, titled "Is Jazz Sick?" Originally printed in the April 1962 edition of *Esquire*, his article claims: "The happy sound is dying...and the jazz critics are doing their damndest to hurry the ailing music to its grave."³⁶⁵ In it, LeBlanc criticizes a number of Balliett's accusations against jazz musicians, including his jab at Jamal, and rhetorically returns the inquiry back on Balliett: "Why does Balliett find it 'trying work' to listen to the delightfully unpretentious piano of Ahmad Jamal, whose work is so much more broadly accepted than Monk's?"³⁶⁶ In doing so, he cites a trend towards ugliness in criticism he sees as a "cancer" in jazz and American popular art, but remains confident that the "real truths of jazz" will be seen and heard long after the critics fade.³⁶⁷

Such ugliness is evident in Leonard Feather's tumultuous relationship with Jamal, which seemingly began when Miles Davis told him to write in the liner notes for his 1958 collaboration with Cannonball Adderley *Something Else* (Blue Note 81595) that he developed his treatment of

³⁶³ Whitney Balliett, *The Sound of Surprise*, (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1978), 172. Reprint of edition published by E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc. of New York, 1961.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁵ Jean P. LeBlanc, "Is Jazz Sick?" in *Negro Digest* 11, no. 8 (June 1962), 35.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

Autumn Leaves while listening to Jamal.³⁶⁸ Apparently, Davis's admitted emulation of Jamal did not impress Feather, who only made a brief mention of Jamal in the section on pianists in his 1965 *The Book of Jazz: From Then 'till Now: A Guide to the Entire Field*. He characterizes Jamal as one of two pianists (the other is Bill Evans) who gained national prominence in the late-1950s due to Miles Davis's voiced admirations. But Feather is clearly unimpressed with Jamal's style:

Jamal swings in a manner best characterized as light, airy and even, at times, cute. His technique, though admirable, is rarely put to ostentatious use; often he uses the ploy of understatement, leaving unexpected gaps in his simple, lacy charming lines. At his best he displays an unusual blend of embellishment and economy.³⁶⁹

Not unlike Williams's labeling of Jamal as "innocuous cocktail piano," Feather's criticisms are curiously gendered: light, airy, cute, lacy, charming. Though his commentary is not an outright attack like Williams, Feather indirectly insults Jamal with his choice of effeminate descriptors.

Interestingly enough, by the time of Jamal's 1970 trio album *The Awakening* (Impulse AS-9194), Feather thought highly enough of Jamal to provide the liner notes, which were extremely complimentary if not gushing at times. Feather now ranks Jamal atop a category of contemporary pianists that is both passionate and musically sophisticated. He also contests that the likes of Jamal, whom he calls "one of the most pianistic of pianists," are especially needed for their virtuosity on and respect for the instrument. When read alongside his previous critique of Jamal, Feather's change of heart is most intriguing:

Still, when you listen to the music on these sides, you will react, as those of us who have followed his career through the years have always reacted, to the brilliance of his command, the singular articulation, the pearl-like strands of his arpeggios, all the qualities

³⁶⁸ Jack Chambers, *Milestones: The Music and Times of Miles Davis*, (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1998), 276.

³⁶⁹ Leonard Feather, *The Book of Jazz: From Then 'till Now: A Guide to the Entire Field*, (New York: Horizon Press, 1965), 69.

that have establishes him as one of those genuine masters, who deserve nothing but the best as their medium of expression.³⁷⁰

Feather then speaks of Jamal's work as possessing "Ellingtonian beauty," his playing with "Tatum-like authority," and his group "a genuine trio."³⁷¹ Rather than chiding the "light, airy, cuteness" of Jamal's swing or the "ploy" of his understatement, embellishment, and economy as he did in the past, Feather refers to Jamal's "ability to extract from a composition everything the writer put into it (sometimes more), and that same distinctive sound that established his national popularity back in the days of *But Not for Me*" as indicative of his everlasting genius.³⁷² Though Feather's contradictory positions are only five years apart, he retracts much of his gendered language (with exception of "pearl-like"). Instead, he imparts a sage-like wisdom on Jamal, noting his "brilliance of command," "genuine mastery," and "everlasting genius," and draws correlations to Ellington and Tatum.

Nevertheless, the relationship faced further strain when in 1986, Jamal sued Feather for printing his former name in a publication. Although Feather wrote a favorable review of Jamal's six-night engagement at Catalina's in Los Angeles in March 1989, at least two articles – one in 2003 and the other in 2010 – indicate demands by Jamal's management barring quotes from Leonard Feather and Ira Gitler and insisting on approval to print quotes from other sources.³⁷³

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 3-4.

³⁷¹ Ibid., 6-7.

³⁷² Ibid., 9.

³⁷³ It is not known what publication initiated the lawsuit. For demands barring Feather, see Andrew Gilbert, "Ahmad Jamal to Play S.F. Davies Hall" in *SFJAZZ News* (June 12, 2013), (Accessed February 17, 2017), <http://sfjazz.tumblr.com/post/52890350891/ahmad-jamal-interview-with-sf-chronicle-61213>; Ashleigh Wilson, "Ahmad Jamal: The Classicist" in *The Australian* (April 10, 2010), (Accessed February 17, 2017), <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/ahmad-jamal-the-classicist/story-e6frg8n6-1225850533942>.

Conversely, there were also critics that expressed positions in Jamal's favor after news broke of his record sales. In February 1959, Bob Snead of the *Cleveland Call and Post* announced that *At the Pershing: But Not for Me* was the top-selling jazz LP for nearly 40 weeks and noted that "no other jazz album has held the number one position that long."³⁷⁴ Snead indicated his own surprise over the extent in which Jamal was outperforming the record sales of his contemporaries, especially considering all of the negative press leveled against Jamal by his critics. He admitted to labeling Jamal a cocktail pianist himself in the past, but recognized that regardless of Jamal's style, the pianist had "created more new listeners for jazz than any artist." Record store owners revealed to Snead that people would "come in and ask for Jamal, then look around awhile, then come back to the counter and ask about other jazz LPs," and that, "Several of the youngsters who use to buy rock-and-roll 45s now save their money until they can buy a Jamal LP."³⁷⁵ Snead retracts his previous label for Jamal and reintroduces him as a "jazz artist" who is "highly-regarded by other jazz musicians," such as Davis, Garland, and Gene Harris, and has obtained his newfound popularity by playing with the "depth and perception that a great artist must convey."³⁷⁶

Randy Weston, four years Jamal's senior and a jazz icon in his own right, was both a working jazz musician and a record shop manager when *At the Pershing* was released. He was working with Fats Waller's son at the Record Center on 125th Street when shipments of the album first arrived. When they played "Poinciana" in the shop, he remembered that "people would stop in their tracks." Weston attributed it to the innate feeling and spirit of the album, between

³⁷⁴ Bob Snead, "Jazz Profile: Ahmad Jamal, Hot Name in Jazz" in *Cleveland Call and Post (1934-1962)* (February 14, 1959), 4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Cleveland Call and Post, <http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/184302976?accountid=14709>.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

Fournier's New Orleans beat and Jamal's natural swing.³⁷⁷ He recalled selling so many copies of the album that they were continually re-ordering boxes to keep up with demand. For Weston, this particular record had a sing-ability about it that reached everybody, "With Jamal you could almost hum every note of his solo when you heard it. Comes right back to you and that is great art!"³⁷⁸

Like Weston, Jamal's contemporaries are quick to reference their experiences hearing Jamal's trio for the first time and its impact on their own musical development. Harold Mabern, for instance, spoke of how he heard Jamal in 1954 as a nineteen-year-old new to the Chicago music scene. Along with trumpeter Booker Little, he witnessed Jamal's trio at the Pershing. He was instantly taken by Jamal's ability to "transform songs on the corny side like 'Music, Music, Music' into something memorable." In the case of "Poinciana," Mabern exclaimed:

What he did with that! He puts his mark on it and it becomes his...When I go to see Ahmad nobody is going to talk. Before he's sitting down he's played three or four chords that are a masterpiece. We talk when the music is over.³⁷⁹

Roughly two decades later in a feature article in *Down Beat*, Larry Birnbaum attributes the *Pershing* trio as having an influence on the early Bill Evans trios and the ECM (Third Stream) school. Birnbaum also boldly proclaims Jamal to be "the musician who instituted the jazz piano trio."³⁸⁰ In an attempt to refute some of the critiques inflicted on Jamal over the years, he dedicates much of the article to questioning why critics have continued to chide the pianist for his success. At no point in the article does Birnbaum actually support his claim that Jamal is the originator of

³⁷⁷ Jim Macnie, "Intricacy and Groove: At Home with Ahmad Jamal" in *Down Beat* 77, no. 3 (March 2010), 28.

³⁷⁸ Randy Weston, *Ahmad Jamal: The Legendary OKEH & Epic Recordings*, Liner notes, (New York: Sony BMG Music Entertainment, 2005, 11.

³⁷⁹ Andrew Velez, "Ahmad Jamal: It's Magic" in AllAboutJazz (May 14, 2008), (Accessed July 1, 2013), <https://www.allaboutjazz.com/ahmad-jamal-its-magic-ahmad-jamal-by-andrew-velez.php>.

³⁸⁰ Birnbaum, "Ahmad Jamal," 14.

the jazz trio format, but he describes Jamal as an enduring popular favorite – despite accolades from Miles Davis and Art Tatum – who remains one of the most underrated pianists of the time. He even compares Jamal to Tatum, who himself had been dismissed as an embellisher rather than an improviser, as one who could “rework the most hackneyed standard into a fresh and personalized statement.”³⁸¹

On his originality and inventiveness, Birnbaum states, “Other musicians borrow revelations and beat them into clichés; Jamal takes clichés and transfigures them into revelations.”³⁸² Birnbaum’s accolades for the group extended from each sideman’s unique attributes that complimented Jamal’s own style so well: New Orleans-Chicago transplant, Fournier, whose “superb brushwork and tasty accents gave crisp definition to Ahmad’s lightly-bouncing, Latin-inflected rhythms,” and Fletcher and Horace Henderson veteran Israel Crosby, who was responsible for the “oft-maligned Jamal ‘bounce.’”³⁸³

In *The New York Times Essential Library: Jazz: A Critic’s Guide to the 100 Most Important Recordings*, author and critic Ben Ratliff similarly considers the asymmetry between Jamal’s popular success and failure to appease his critics. He equates the ways in which Jamal utilizes the extreme ranges of the piano to those of Duke Ellington. In another parallel to Ellington, Ratliff cites, “There’s an amount of bandleader control in Ahmad Jamal’s performances that you seldom see in any jazz trio” and notes his equally-controlled, dramatic contrast of dynamics.³⁸⁴ With such overwhelming popular acclaim, he contests that Jamal was too obvious to the jazz critics at the time who were quick to label him as “effete,” “entertainer,” and “cocktail pianist.” But Ratliff also

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Ibid., 15.

³⁸⁴ Ben Ratliff, *The New York Times Essential Library: Jazz: A Critic’s Guide to the 100 Most Important Recordings*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 2002), 130-131.

considers that Jamal may have had a public advantage (and highly-critical disadvantage), based on the timing of *At the Pershing*. Since the album was released soon after figures such as Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, and Lennie Tristano had come to be known as “rebels, opposers, overturners,” Ratliff contends that a superficial listening of Jamal’s record at the time may have left the mainstream audience with the opposite impression, as if he was playing directly to them for mere entertainment. According to Ratliff, the fallout that Jamal suffered signaled a “paradigm shift in jazz, when gentility and finesse were suddenly signs of artistic fraud,” in a manner recalling the accusations of Louis Armstrong’s smiling onstage persona as “Uncle Tomming.”³⁸⁵ Ratliff only seems to take issue with the polished precision of Jamal’s trio, which he argues tends to be “too sweet and too micromanaged” at the hand of “Jamal’s control-freak tendency.”³⁸⁶

Even though *At the Pershing: But Not for Me* shattered jazz record sales at the time and has since remained one of the best-selling jazz albums of all-time, the trio itself of Jamal, Crosby, and Fournier was perhaps its most enduring aspect for other jazz musicians. Unlike Jamal’s critics, professional musicians were not concerned with popular reception, but rather were drawn to the inventive musical concepts exhibited by the trio in performance. For instance, *Portfolio of Ahmad Jamal* (Argo LP 2638), recorded just months after *At the Pershing*, proved to be a definitive influence on the members of a veritable jazz piano trio consisting of pianist Keith Jarrett, bassist Gary Peacock, and drummer Jack DeJohnette. In an interview with Ted Panken in 2000, Jarrett told of a moment when they simultaneously realized their mutual affinity for the Ahmad Jamal Trio while traveling by van to a concert date in Berkeley, California. As they were driving, a conversation about the past and musicians led to Jamal’s “white album.” The white album to which

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 132. His assessment here is not entirely accurate as questions of authenticity, race, and popularity have long polluted jazz criticism.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

they were referring was *Portfolio of Ahmad Jamal*. This double LP of fifteen tunes recorded at the Spotlite Club was packaged in a white album sleeve, featuring gold-embossed text and a silhouette of Jamal's side profile. Jarrett recounts their shared reaction with Panken:

I mentioned the white album, and they both looked at me, stunned, because all three of us had had the same momentous experience when we heard that particular album. I mean, we didn't know each other until years and years later. But that album meant the same thing to all three of us when we first heard it.³⁸⁷

When Jarrett first discovered the album, he was a child in Allentown, Pennsylvania where the record stores only carried the big names acceptable to the predominantly white community: Oscar Peterson, Andre Previn, Erroll Garner, and Dave Brubeck. So, he regularly scoured the records at the local shop in hopes that the buyer had mistakenly purchased something interesting. Having that album was what he considered to be "the one, most important mistake they made there, if they wanted me to stay in Allentown and stay white."³⁸⁸ Jarrett told jazz pianist Ethan Iverson that *Portfolio of Ahmad Jamal* "changed everything about what [he] thought could happen:"

Up to then it was a virtuosity thing: playing fast, or swinging. (At least swinging was there.) But then there was a spatial thing, and not a need for constant playing. I used to practice drums to that album all the time: not to get rid of Vernel Fournier, but because Vernel was so wonderful. He didn't even have to pick up the sticks but did just incredible stuff with brushes.³⁸⁹

Jarrett's bandmate and drummer Jack DeJohnette studied piano as a child in Chicago's South Side and was working as a professional pianist when he first heard Jamal on *At the Pershing*. However,

³⁸⁷ Ted Panken, "For Keith Jarrett's 69th Birthday, Full Interviews From 2000, 2001, and 2008," Interview Transcripts, *Today Is the Question: Ted Panken on Music, Politics and the Arts*, (Accessed December 12, 2016), <https://tedpanken.wordpress.com/2014/05/09/for-keith-jarretts-69th-birthday-full-interviews-from-2000-2001-and-2008-plus-an-2008-interview-with-manfred-eicher>.

³⁸⁸ Ethan Iverson, "Interview with Keith Jarrett," *Do the M@th* (September 2009), (Accessed February 4, 2017), <https://ethaniverson.com/interviews/interview-with-keith-jarrett>.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

he was drawn to more than just Jamal's piano-playing; Fournier's brushwork on that album ultimately inspired him to take up the drums. He bought a pair of brushes and practiced on the LP cover, until his trio's drummer left his drum set in DeJohnette's basement.³⁹⁰

Both Jarrett and Iverson agreed that Jamal's drummers over the years, which included Fournier, Frank Gant, and Idris Muhammad, were "distinctive," not simply "present" like those of his contemporaries. Jarrett attributed their use of accents and the way in which they dealt with space as reasons why Miles Davis was drawn to them.³⁹¹ Jarrett indicated that, like Davis, he too was taken by the space, but more specifically how much Jamal's trio seemed to accomplish with so little. Upon hearing the album, he remembered thinking, "This is swinging more than any of the things I've been listening to, but they're doing less."³⁹² He heard intensity in the spaces, asserting that "It was the way they played simply that made the swing work the way it did."³⁹³

The jazz critics were certainly slower to warm to Jamal and his trio than the musicians. While some came to appreciate the group after its success was proven by exceptional record sales, others like Martin Williams and Whitney Balliett forever dismissed him as a "cocktail pianist" – a terrible insult in the jazz world. On the other hand, scores of musicians have not only been drawn to Jamal's trio from the onset, but have also remained vocal supporters ever since, most notably Miles Davis, Keith Jarrett, and Jack DeJohnette. Out of ardent admiration for the pianist, Davis instructed others to alter their approach to listening to Jamal's music so as to hear what he heard. One such individual was jazz critic Nat Hentoff, who later admitted in the liner notes he wrote for

³⁹⁰ Larry Blumenfeld, "Playing Musical Chairs: Cultural Conversation with Jack DeJohnette" in Wall Street Journal (January 10, 2012), (Accessed February 4, 2017), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204257504577150683082339386>.

³⁹¹ Iverson, "Interview with Keith Jarrett."

³⁹² Panken, "Keith Jarrett."

³⁹³ Ibid.

Jamal's *The Piano Scene of Ahmad Jamal* in 1956 that he wrongfully dismissed the pianist until Davis convinced him otherwise. With Davis's assistance, Hentoff learned to understand that Jamal, like Davis, did not need to play dizzying passages to show off his technique, taking control of his ensemble by commanding dynamics and space. He points out that Jamal directs his ensemble without regard to popularity, criticism, and trends, commanding attention with his strong yet serene personality. Hentoff praises Jamal's simplicity of character and ability to maintain a calmness of spirit despite the critics, noting that "He doesn't pay any attention to negative reviews, he once said, because he knows all too well that the worst reviews he ever gets are from Ahmad Jamal."³⁹⁴

Jamal's approach to managing the critics stayed with him as he progressed through his career. Four years after Hentoff's liner notes and after mixed receptions from critics for the *Pershing* album, a *Down Beat* interviewer wrote, "Faced with certain critics who challenge his artistry (in contrast to various jazz artists, including Miles Davis, who praise his music), Jamal refuses to be antagonized."³⁹⁵ With confidence in his experience and work ethic, Jamal asserts:

My records sell because they're good. There's a great amount of time and work in them. The things I play are based on the hard times. I was playing six years ago. I attempt to make good records...Every man is entitled to his own opinion. My success is dependent on what I do, not what people say about me.³⁹⁶

Ever since he became leader of his own trio, Jamal has consistently maintained a discipline of character equivalent to the musical discipline of his ensemble. Although Jamal's past musical experiences are evident in his musical output, he continues to focus on building the identity of *his* trio based on *his* conceptions of how it should function. Jamal's trio is firmly rooted in jazz

³⁹⁴ Nat Hentoff, *The Piano Scene of Ahmad Jamal*, liner notes, (Epic LN 3631), 1956.

³⁹⁵ "Ahmad Jamal's Way of Life," *Downbeat* 26, no. 6 (March 19, 1959): 17.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

tradition, but the manners in which Jamal and his sidemen interact with one another and engage that tradition result in an ensemble that defied definition. In an effort to ascertain how the unique musical and personal relationships between Jamal, Crosby, and Fournier synthesized three individuals into a cohesive whole, an analytical framework rooted in Ingrid Monson's theory of intermusicality preserves the musical and sociocultural integrity of these musicians and their performance practices in the jazz piano trio format.

6.0 THE ART OF THE TRIO

Jazz pianist Bill Charlap was only eleven or twelve when he first heard *At the Pershing: But Not for Me*. Though he was listening to Bill Evans and Oscar Peterson at the time, Jamal's trio caught his attention:

Everyone in the band is an arranger on that date. A trio is about three equal parts making a whole...When I heard Ahmad's group, well...it sounded like a completely modern point of view. He could be a big band at one moment, a small group at another, a singer at another. Every note means something.³⁹⁷

Charlap's commentary is reminiscent of John Hammond's assertion a few years earlier that "Ahmad's trio is not just Ahmad, not all piano like Erroll Garner. It's a trio."³⁹⁸ Even though Hammond was referring to the drummerless trio with Ray Crawford and Eddie Calhoun, Jamal's overall trio concept changed little over that time period. Just as the title of *Chamber Music of the New Jazz* insinuated, he always favored the balanced discipline of a chamber ensemble. If anything, his work with Crosby and Fournier moved him one step closer towards realizing this goal.

By the late-1950s, Jamal's trio shifted seamlessly between notions of orchestration, arrangement, improvisation, and interaction over the infectious grooves of his carefully-crafted

³⁹⁷ Jim Macnie, "Intricacy and Groove: At Home with Ahmad Jamal," *Down Beat* 77, no. 3 (March 2010), 28.

³⁹⁸ Larry Birnbaum, "Ahmad Jamal," *Down Beat*, (March 1981), 15; Jack Chambers, *Milestones: The Music and Times of Miles Davis*, (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1998), 202.

repertoire. But there is no particular method of musical analysis to readily accommodate such a setup. The common practice of transcription and analysis in jazz studies too often focuses on improvised solo performance. By virtue of isolating the soloist from the accompanying individuals, it assumes that each entity is mutually exclusive of its other parts. This practice, however, inadvertently disengages the multi-faceted processes of interaction that occur between musicians during performance. In the case of the Ahmad Jamal Trio, this particular ensemble functions primarily as a singular unit, in which interactions are not limited to improvisation alone, but also arrangement, orchestration, and groove.

Furthermore, analysis based on performance transcriptions alone risks transforming what was an active performance into an equally inactive musical product, thereby neglecting the processes of artistic creation that simultaneously inform and have been informed by musical and social interactions. In jazz, all of the players are compositional participants, making decisions regarding what and when to play in accordance (or in opposition) to structural frameworks, such as form, harmony, and groove. Although Jamal's arrangements include pre-determined elements, the indeterminacy of collective improvisation (or any other collaborative performance) structurally resembles conversation much more so than text, thus necessitating a revision of analytical practices.

With emphasis on the communicative properties of performance, this chapter explores personal and instrumental relations within the context of the Ahmad Jamal Trio as it existed from its origins in the early 1950s through the *Pershing* album. The piano trio format is particularly challenging for both performance and analysis because it is not simply a rhythm section minus a soloist; concepts and techniques applicable to rhythm section performance do not readily translate to performance in a trio. Ingrid Monson's theory of intermusicality offers insight into processes of

interaction, interplay, and improvisation in performance by recognizing that each distinctive combination of interacting personalities produces distinct, idiosyncratic intermusical revelations. Monson's *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (1996), along with earlier works by Rinzler and Paul Berliner, privileges the authoritative voices of the musicians when considering the musical processes either observed directly in performance or through analysis of transcribed performance. Doing so not only directs us to specific points of conceptual thought, but perhaps more importantly honors and preserves the integrity of the musicians as conceptualists.

6.1 WRITINGS ON JAZZ INTERACTION

Scholarship on the interactive properties of jazz improvisation has been rather scant, save the influential work of three scholars - Paul Rinzler, Paul Berliner, and Ingrid Monson – though new studies have appeared in recent years. Published in 1988, Rinzler's article "Preliminary Thoughts on Analyzing Musical Interaction Among Jazz Performers" was among the first to address the issue. Dismayed by trends at the time that favored computational and scientific models for musical analysis, Rinzler feared that such analytics were "incapable of meaningful insight" into the primary function of art: to order the reality of human experience.³⁹⁹ Drawing from Christopher Small's critique of Western culture, he asserted that the language of science and mathematics was limited to numeric and computational renderings of the artistic or musical product alone, thereby neglecting the human element in artistic creation. However, a crucial aspect

³⁹⁹ Paul Rinzler, "Preliminary Thoughts on Analyzing Interaction Among Jazz Performers" in *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* (1988), 153.

of the reality of experience for jazz musicians is interacting with other people. Although Rinzler admits that “scientific” methods could offer meaningful insight, he contests that any analysis that ignores human processes in jazz performance dismisses a crucial aspect of the music – the interaction among musicians.⁴⁰⁰

Rinzler’s answer focuses on what he calls the “rules of the game,” or the presupposed functions of each instrument in a jazz combo and how musicians negotiate these individual roles with varying degrees of creativity and aesthetic sensibility while satisfying more general positions as accompanist or soloist.⁴⁰¹ Performers can be analyzed according to what he considers to be a measurable amount of creativity and interaction present in a group performance in relation to the rules of the game. Drawing from his own experiences as a jazz musician, Rinzler details specific kinds of interaction that often occur in improvised performance – call and response, fills, accentuation of phrase and large form structures, common motives, and rhythm sections responses to the “peaks” of the soloist. For his analysis of a recording by the Phil Woods Quartet, he narrates the specific occurrences of these interactions, measure-by-measure, within the song form. Reflecting on his analysis, he concludes that the specific interactions between players were crucial in producing the final compositional product as realized in recorded form. The formal recognition of these interactions in the analysis is intended to preserve the human element in performance.⁴⁰²

Like Rinzler, Paul Berliner frames his musical analysis in relation to the common rules of improvised jazz performance. In *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (1994), Berliner considers the constant negotiation between adherence to and radical departures from stylistic conventions. However, he extends his analytical considerations by utilizing ethnographic

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 154.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 155.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 158.

practices to demonstrate how stylistic conventions associated with particular idioms (era, genre, geography) not only guide solo and accompaniment considerations, but also shape musicians' expectations for group interplay. In response to analytical methods that only consider the practices of individual master soloists, Berliner directs his focus on the dynamism of the rhythm section – the individuals who effectively fulfill their roles by formulating mutually complementary parts while simultaneously negotiating between each other's artistic creations. He elucidates that the players must maintain constant balance between developing individual ideas for musical invention and anticipating and/or interpreting another's ideas for the sake of cohesiveness and continuity. Unexpected departures by a singular participant require the others to react at an instant by maneuvering or responding.⁴⁰³ “Over the years,” he explains, “pianists, drummers, and bass players have assumed greater independence from one another, facing increased challenges of performance and invention. Not only must they compose interesting individual parts, but they must confidently uphold them amid the group's dynamic and complex musical texture.”⁴⁰⁴

Berliner's discussions with the musicians themselves are particularly informative. Most notable is the oft-cited metaphor of group improvisation as conversations between players in the jazz language.⁴⁰⁵ Citing the rhythm section's ongoing improvised accompaniment within the groove as most representative of this metaphor, he delineates the “circle of interaction” between rhythm section musicians. This infinite series of exchanges occurs between the pianist and drummer, the pianist and bassist, and between the bassist and drummer.⁴⁰⁶ In detailing the primary functions, options, and variables accessible to each rhythm section musician, Berliner posits that

⁴⁰³ Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 349.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 336

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 348.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 357.

the extent of interplay is dependent upon the improviser's aural skills and ability to instantly grasp and respond to his/her colleagues' ideas. Here, Berliner considers how a musician's ability to do so represents the "culmination of years of rigorous training" that began in his/her initial efforts to acquire a "jazz vocabulary" through exercises in transcription, translation, and recreation with individual difference.⁴⁰⁷ In doing so, Berliner effectively redirects analysis away from the hegemonic jazz genius narrative towards one that recognizes and seeks to understand more individualized narratives of musical learning, conceptualization, and performance.

In *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (1996), Ingrid Monson offers her own "interpretive trajectory with ethnographic materials" about the rhythm section and improvisation, guided by instrument roles, responsibilities, musical options, and social frameworks.⁴⁰⁸ In a manner similar to Berliner, Monson attests that "interacting musical roles are simultaneously interacting personalities, whose particular characters have considerable importance in determining the spontaneity and success of the musical event."⁴⁰⁹ However, her discourse is not limited to performativity alone. By extending her consideration to the social, cultural, and racial constructs of collaborative jazz improvisation, she posits that interaction in jazz performance can be perceived at several analytical levels:

1. The creation of music through the improvisational interaction of sounds
2. The interactive shaping of social networks and communities that accompany musical participation
3. The development of culturally variable meaning and ideologies that inform the interpretation of jazz in American society⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 362.

⁴⁰⁸ Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 5.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 7.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 2.

By centering on interaction in this multiple sense, Monson evaluates the reciprocal and multi-layered relationships that affect the meaning of jazz improvisation.

Like Rinzler and Berliner, Monson privileges the documentation and interpretation of vernacular perspectives as offered by the musicians themselves and considers the practice of doing so to be “the only ethical point of departure” in jazz studies and ethnomusicology. In her own work, she “concentrates on what implications musicians’ observations about musical processes may have to the rethinking of musical analysis and cultural interpretation from an interactive point of view, with particular attention to the problems of race and culture.”⁴¹¹ During the writing of this dissertation, Benjamin Givan contributed a new article to the discussion of interaction in jazz improvisation that revisits the work of Berliner and Monson.⁴¹²

6.2 THEORIZING IMPROVISED INTERACTION

6.2.1 The Groove

Rinzler, Berliner, and Monson all begin their discussions with what they consider to be primary and fundamental to group interaction – the groove. It is the one element perhaps most obvious to veteran jazz musicians and is yet the most elusive to analysis. This negotiation of a

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 5.

⁴¹² Givan offers three specific points of improvised interaction: microinteraction, macrointeraction, and motivic interaction. In the case of motivic interaction, the interactions between musicians can be either dialogic or monologic. See Benjamin Givan, “Rethinking Interaction in Jazz Improvisation,” *Music Theory Online* 22, no. 3, (September 2016), Society for Music Theory, (Accessed April 12, 2017), <http://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.16.22.3/mto.16.22.3.givan.html>.

shared sense of the beat incorporates connotations of stability, intensity, and swing. Although the groove unites all improvisational roles into a musical whole, it often correlates to the effective coordination of the rhythm section as a singular unit. Striking a groove also implies a sense of rhythmic phrasing, both within and outside the pulse; the stronger the groove or the time feel, the easier it is for soloists to take risks with rhythmic phrasing. With experience, players develop the ability to negotiate even more subtle nuances involving the collective maintenance of the beat: variations, fluctuations, and interpretations of the beat (e.g. playing “before,” “on top of,” or “after” the beat).

Defining and maintaining the groove is an ongoing responsibility for all members of the ensemble to ensure a truly collective performance, even while attending to the complementary interactions between participants. Whether implicitly stating the time or subtly implying it, the time-keeping responsibility is often rotated between players, resulting in a juxtaposition of time or poly-time within the overarching groove. Berliner views it as a trade-off: the freedom of one restricts another.⁴¹³ Moreover, the implications of a player having good time or a rhythm section striking a groove are so essential that Monson discovered in her interviews that jazz musicians often emphasize time and ensemble responsiveness as indicative of higher levels of improvisational achievement, whereas harmonic and melodic competence are assumed.⁴¹⁴

6.2.2 Improvisation as Conversation

In noting that communities of musicians often function as learning environments for young, aspiring players, Berliner concludes that collaboration and communication are embedded into the social and musical fabric of jazz improvisation. According to Monson, this points to a possible

⁴¹³ Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 353.

⁴¹⁴ Monson, *Saying Something*, 29.

reason why musicians rely on the metaphor of conversation to describe the improvisational process: jazz as a musical language, improvisation as musical conversation, or when a musician plays a particularly good improvised solo, they are “saying something.” Since this metaphor is so common among jazz musicians, Monson asserts that “Meaningful theorizing about jazz improvisation at the level of the ensemble must take the interactive, collaborative context of musical invention as a point of departure.”⁴¹⁵

6.2.3 Intermusicality

Though the conversation metaphor used by jazz musicians elicits innate structural connections between music, speech, and the sociability of jazz performance, Monson suggests that this metaphor also includes a temporal dimension. Drawing from W.E.B. DuBois’s notion of African-American double-consciousness and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s Theory of Signifyin(g), Monson considers how the musical, cultural, and linguistic systems of diasporic Africans in America affect how jazz is perceived and understood by performers and listeners alike, in terms of metaphors and tropes.⁴¹⁶ She posits that analyzing the interaction between improvising musicians in performance reveals the ways musical sounds can refer to the past while offering social commentary through irony or parody. In doing so, Monson frames musical functions as relational and discursive, rather than simply rooted in sound. In other words, when a jazz musician demonstrates an awareness of musical history through quotation, imitation, or evocation, the sonic material of his/her performance contains allusions to dimensions beyond melody, harmony, and rhythm alone. Whether subtle or overt, these audible references simultaneously influence how a collaborating musician or audience member interprets and/or reacts to any singular moment or

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 74.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid, 76.

combination of sonic elements in the present performance. Through what she calls intermusicality, musicians convey both cross-cultural and intra-cultural ironies by manipulating previous forms, whether in transforming American popular song, referencing European classical repertoire, inserting humor, or quoting other musicians and styles within or outside the jazz tradition.⁴¹⁷

In *The Signifying Monkey*, Gates cites John Coltrane's version of "My Favorite Things" (1960) from the Broadway musical *The Sound of Music* as an example of "ironic reversal," in which resemblance can be evoked by dissemblance.⁴¹⁸ As part of a longstanding tradition within African-American musical practices, the transformation of such a piece into an alternative musical aesthetic offers the potential for ironic interpretations of musical devices and cultural meanings. When a jazz musician alters a previously composed work by modifying its form, instrumentation, orchestration, and other stylistic devices, it is not intended to replace the original version, but rather to extend and trope figures present in it. In doing so, he/she is "Signifyin(g)" on the intertextual content of the original composition, other interpretations, and preconceived notions of style and idiomatic expression, as well as his/her own experiences.⁴¹⁹

However, Monson reminds us that an ironic interpretation at either the musical or cultural levels will always be subject to the eye (or in this case the ear) of the beholder. Whether a participating musician or an audience member, each individual's ability to recognize and interpret intermusical cues in a performance and the extent of such recognitions is subject to factors like age, experience, aural skills, and familiarity with musical and cultural aesthetics. One's reaction to and evaluation of intertextual influences, references, and (dis)connections will also reflect the

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 97-106.

⁴¹⁸ Henry Louis Gates, *Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 1988), 291.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid, 63.

strength of his/her personal and cultural identities in relation to beliefs and/or boundaries (if any) regarding musical style and aesthetic. Further complicating the issue, jazz musicians often incorporate elements from a range of musical and cultural expressions, both within and outside the tradition, into the sonic detail of their performances and compositions.⁴²⁰

Due to the absence of lyrics in instrumental jazz improvisation, Monson suggests that the notion of intermusicality offers a way to consider relationships in communicative processes that occur primarily through musical sound. For instance, the intermusical aspect of perception helps to explain the ability of musicians to pick up on one another's ideas and to respond accordingly. But Monson explains that intermusicality is not limited to theoretical constructs alone; "The idea that intermusical associations are part of the musical communication process during performance highlights the practical...implications of the ideas of intermusicality" because the intimate, social process of developing musical ideas in improvised performance necessitates interactive musical responsiveness among all participants to referential or familiar musical gestures, whether rhythmic, melodic, harmonic, or textural.⁴²¹

Privileging the authoritative voice of the artists themselves as integral to the analytical framework, Monson contests that while recording transcriptions offer a visual representation of the musical conversation between musicians "in time," the added element of the musician's post-performance commentary directs us to the conversation "over time" and its intermusical ramifications. In her own work, Monson discusses her observations of a Jaki Byard Quartet performance through the group's leader and discovers new connections that she believes could have only been made through her conversations with him. In addition to my personal interview

⁴²⁰ Monson, *Saying Something*, 125-126.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 128.

with the subject of my study, I used archival interviews of Jamal and his sidemen speaking of their performance conceptions as a means to pinpoint specific concepts for musical analysis and intermusical consideration.

6.3 INTERMUSICAL ANALYSIS

The interactions between Ahmad Jamal and his sidemen are not rooted in improvisational practices alone. The underlying groove is central to Jamal's general framework. In fact, it occupies a more pronounced role in his trio configurations than in those of his contemporaries. In creating arrangements for his ensembles, Jamal has a strong sense of the jazz tradition of interpreting American popular song forms. According to Jamal, he follows the likes of Art Tatum and Erroll Garner who, as musicians of "American Classical Music" as he prefers to call jazz, take the works of Gershwin or Berlin "beyond the wildest dreams of the composers."⁴²²

But his unique way of modifying the original score by editing out material, displacing phrase structures, and imposing deliberate alterations of form is particularly representative of the process Henry Louis Gates, Jr. explains as "ironic reversal with signal difference." Not unlike the big band leaders of his youth, Jamal is a master of orchestration. With precision and impeccable order, he organizes the voices of his trio to achieve balance, by employing various combinations of space, texture, register, dynamics, and articulations. His arrangements contain many pre-composed elements – not to detract from improvisation, but rather to enhance it. Lastly, Jamal's

⁴²² Fordham, "Ahmad Jamal"; Panken, "Ahmad Jamal's 85th Birthday."

structural discipline provides the necessary restraint to allow balanced interactions between musicians without overcrowding or becoming too busy.

In an effort to engage recordings of the Ahmad Jamal Trio in meaningful intermusical analysis, I examine the most representative aspects of Jamal's trios in relation to observations by Jamal, his colleagues, and contemporaries as realized in performances of "But Not for Me" and "Poinciana." These levels of analysis include:

1. Groove
2. Arrangement
3. Orchestration and Improvisation
4. Interaction

These concepts are not mutually exclusive, as they continually overlap during performance. Though each are introduced individually for the sake of categorizing analytical points of interest, intersections between them are prioritized for intermusical analysis. For instance, improvisations in the Ahmad Jamal Trio seldom occur as isolated solo features, as the musicians continually shift between arranging, orchestrational, and improvisatory, practices to achieve varying degrees of space, texture, and complexity. The musical analysis of this chapter employs the following terminological definitions:

1. Arrangement – the reproduction or modification of preexisting material
2. Orchestration – the act of organizing instrument parts to produce varying degrees of balance, texture, and timbre
3. Improvisation – the spontaneous creation of new material

6.3.1 Groove

Jamal surprisingly speaks very little about the role of groove in his playing or ensemble conceptions, especially considering that his sidemen and contemporaries frequently cite the groove as one of the most significant characteristics of his trios. A brief review of Jamal's recorded material during the 1950s confirms their assertions. The groove is so integral and undeniable in all of Jamal's recordings that it often goes unnoticed. The uniformity of the groove, regardless of the style or tune being played, became one of the identifying features of Jamal's trios. Unlike many other groups at the time, the groove was not limited to straight-ahead swing in common time (4/4), in which the drummer keeps time with his cymbals and the bassist "walks" a bass-line on each beat of the measure. Saxophonist Cannonball Adderley, who was instructed in Jamal's conceptions by Miles Davis, noticed that Jamal's typically "unobtrusive" left hand also dictates the groove. During the second chorus of "Music! Music! Music (Put Another Nickel in)" from *At the Pershing*, Jamal shifts his left hand from mid-register rootless-chord comping patterns down to an octave spread in the lower register to impose an ostinato rhythm on the tonic pedal-point.

According to Adderley, by constantly creating new rhythmic variations, "[Jamal] doesn't allow a groove to become stagnant:"

First of all, he doesn't play many long things. After maybe a chorus, he'll go into an interlude that changes the mood, and then he'll go out of the interlude into a different groove that's even more swinging than the first was...He also always gives the impression of having something strong in reserve. He doesn't try to put everything into each number... "Don't shoot everything in one tune, and play fifty choruses, it'll all sound the same," he's told me.⁴²³

⁴²³ Jullian "Cannonball" Adderley, "Reviews: Recordings" of Ahmad Jamal Argo LP-636 in *The Jazz Review*, Vol. 2, no. 2 (February 1959), 33-34.

For example, on Jamal's take of "Cherokee," recorded at the Pershing in 1958 but released at a later date, his trio executes the blazingly-fast tempo as is traditional practice for the tune, but then shocks the listener with a flawless shift to a waltzing 3/4-time on the bridge.

In other instances, Jamal either deserts the swing-feel altogether or shifts between swing and another style of groove. Fournier explains the constant variation in Jamal's music:

He never did sort of, for the trend of the time, the straight-ahead Jazz thing. He always intermixed, I guess for lack of a better word, exotic times, or exotic feelings into Jazz. Rumbas, tangos, believe me, you were able to do all these kinds of things and still make it sound like Jazz.⁴²⁴

Pianist Harold Mabern noted that Jamal had a tremendous command of rhythm within the time signature. Having followed Jamal since his early days at the Kit Kat Club in Chicago through the residency at the Pershing, Mabern believed that "if Ahmad Jamal's time was the brakes on a car, you would never have an accident...He will play a run and stop on a dime. And he's a master at playing without being cliché in time signatures like 5/4 and 7/4."⁴²⁵

In his drummerless trio recordings, the sense of time was clearly defined by bassist Eddie Calhoun's quarter note pulsations, while Jamal and guitarist Ray Crawford jockeyed positions between soloing and accompaniment. For the version of "But Not for Me" first recorded on Parrot in 1953, Crawford employs his fretboard percussion from the onset, resulting in the light bounce that would come to define that trio. The rhythmic pattern itself is simple, with emphasis on beats two and four (Figure 28):

⁴²⁴ Ted Panken, "Vernel Fournier on Ahmad Jamal" (July 3, 2011), WKCR Interview Transcript (1990), *Today Is the Question: Ted Panken on Music, Politics and the Arts*, (Accessed December 12, 2016), <http://tedpanken.wordpress.com/2011/07/03/vernell-fournier-on-ahmad-jamal-wkcr-1990>.

⁴²⁵ John Fordham, "Ahmad Jamal: 'After A Time You Discover the Mozart in You,'" (February 1, 2013), *The Guardian*, (Accessed July 1, 2013), <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2013/feb/01/ahmad-jamal-discover-mozart-in-you>.



Figure 28. Crawford “But Not for Me” Guitar Percussion (1953)

The muted, bongo-like quality of Crawford’s percussion falls peacefully into the background, but maintains the pulse with its ostinato-like precision. Jamal’s balanced playing neither over-powers nor under-performs the other musicians, even as he shifts registers, dynamics, and articulations. His improvisations range from long single-note lines to short, upper-register phrases to locked-hand harmonizations, but all remain comfortably within the natural swing of the pulsating groove.

In the *Pershing* version of “But Not for Me,” Jamal utilizes the same general principles of improvisation as in his Parrot recording, but he alters the placement of phrases against the beat with perceived confidence. Fournier’s drums offer a much stronger presence than Crawford’s guitar percussion for Jamal to assert rhythmic modifications of the song structure. Nonetheless, Fournier utilizes the same rhythmic pattern as Crawford. After the initial statement of the melody, Fournier directly emulates Crawford’s rhythm beginning in the fifth measure and continues it as an ostinato throughout the remainder of the piece, just as Crawford had done previously. Like Crawford, Fournier allows himself to fall into the background, offering little to no variation or fill, even when bassist Israel Crosby interjects melodic improvisations in the midst of Jamal’s space or when Jamal offers intricate, declamatory statements.

In keeping with the discipline of ensemble balance, Fournier uses brushes almost exclusively. However, his accompaniments seldom sound alike. As Fournier explains, being limited to brushes ultimately forced him to develop new techniques and approaches to playing:

I was with Ahmad from 1957 to 1960 and all I did was play brushes. The only time I touched a stick was for “Poinciana.” So, I had to learn how to do things to keep myself interested in what was going

on. I learned different grooves, different ways to do the brushes, different sounds, and improved on them. If you had to play brushes for three years and you are really interested in playing, you'll come up with a lot of things.⁴²⁶

For the trio's brisk "Surrey with the Fringe on Top," Fournier plays intricate rhythmic patterns and syncopated accents both within the context of the groove and without compromising the balance of the ensemble.

The march-like stability of Fournier's groove closely resembles traditional New Orleans street beats, which likely explains Jamal's clear preference for New Orleans drummers. Jamal's future drummers Herlin Riley and Idris Muhammad both grew up playing drums in New Orleans, like Fournier. Riley explains the fundamental difference in New Orleans drumming that lends itself to the strong sense of groove that Jamal desired:

I think one thing about New Orleans drummers is the fact that most of us grew up within the street band and parade band traditions, and the bass drum is very prevalent inside of that...New Orleans drummers play the drums from the bottom up, from the bass drum up, as opposed to a lot of other guys who perhaps play from the cymbals down. I think Ahmad is one that likes the groove. And when you hear most music that has a solid groove on it, it comes from the bottom up. He really likes playing grooves. I think he just has an affinity for the nuances that New Orleans drummers bring him; that is, incorporating the bass drum inside of the grooves.⁴²⁷

But according to drummer Jack DeJohnette, Jamal's use of groove is not of purely musical function; he uses it to connect with his audience and maintain balance:

Ahmad's challenge is to juggle the intricacy with the groove...His music always has a groove...Groove is a common denominator

⁴²⁶ Herlin Riley, Johnny Vidacovich, and Dan Thress, *New Orleans Jazz and Second Line Drumming*, (Los Angeles, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., Inc., 1995), 48.

⁴²⁷ Ted Panken, "It's Ahmad Jamal's 81st Birthday: Ahmad Jamal Profile" (July 2, 2011), WKCR Interview Transcript (February 5, 1995), *Today Is the Question: Ted Panken on Music, Politics and the Arts*, (Accessed December 12, 2016), <https://tedpanken.wordpress.com/2011/07/02/its-ahmad-jamals-81st-birthday/>.

that brings people in, but it's also a relief from the intricacy. Ahmad's always doing a balancing act with that.⁴²⁸

If the groove is the balancing factor, as suggested by DeJohnette, Jamal achieves melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic intricacy by carefully-developing arrangements that exist within the groove structure.

6.3.2 Arrangement

Jamal's trio arrangements are not simply performance suggestions, nor are they limited to pre-composed material alone. Prior to becoming a leader in the early 1950s, the majority of Jamal's musical training and development centered on experiences listening to and performing in well-rehearsed, orchestrated groups. Whether as a child collecting big band records or a young man performing as an ensemble pianist in Hudson's and Kennedy's bands, Jamal was always surrounded by individuals who valued arranging as an integral part of ensemble direction and performance. When he became a leader himself, he was already well-versed in arranging and orchestrational practices, drawing from various eras of music:

The first era was as a fan, as a kid listening to Benny Goodman, Count Basie and Jimmie Lunceford. Then I was also in my teenage years, listening to the revolutionary works of Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker...So I am drawing on a great body of work. The greater the body of work, the broader the results."⁴²⁹

Just as he continually explores shifts of groove, Jamal's arrangements are in a constant state of development. In a review of his recorded material, Jamal maintains a selected repertoire that he revises and revisits over time. Even with songs he has played "hundreds of times," Jamal discovers new ways of expressing himself. "It's true that after a while," he admits, "I usually work out a

⁴²⁸ Macnie, "Intricacy and Groove," 28.

⁴²⁹ Andrew Velez, "Ahmad Jamal: It's Magic," (May 14, 2008), *AllAboutJazz.com*, (Accessed July 1, 2013), <https://www.allaboutjazz.com/ahmad-jamal-its-magic-ahmad-jamal-by-andrew-velez.php>

particular approach to each tune, but within that framework, I never play it exactly the same.”⁴³⁰

When Jamal reuses arrangements, he paraphrases and tropes his own material, evoking freshness out of familiar material:

Sometimes I’ll resurrect a composition that I haven’t done in years, because it fits in that spot. Then I use the same basic structure, although the approach is more musically mature than it was years ago. Why change a good minuet or a good concerto? You just interpret as best you can. If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.⁴³¹

On the arrangement of “But Not for Me,” recorded at the Pershing in 1958, Jamal retains several elements from his earlier drummerless version. In both recordings, Jamal follows the same ABAC 32-measure structure: one opening head and two solo choruses, the last of which is cut short midway through the final C-section to give way to a short vamp that brings the piece to its close. He also retains much of the harmonic structure, beginning in C Major for the opening head and first solo chorus before modulating up to Eb Major for the remainder of the tune. As observed in the previous section, Fournier adapts Crawford’s original rhythmic pattern for the drums (Figure 29):



Figure 29. “But Not for Me” Percussion Comparison, Crawford (1952)/Fournier (1958)

⁴³⁰ Nat Hentoff, Liner Notes, *The Piano Scene of Ahmad Jamal* (Epic LN 3631), 1956.

⁴³¹ Ted Panken, “For Ahmad Jamal’s 85th Birthday, a *Down Beat* feature from 2002,” (July 2, 2015), Interview Transcript (2002), *Today Is the Question: Ted Panken on Music, Politics and the Arts*, (Accessed December 12, 2016), <https://tedpanken.wordpress.com/2015/07/02/for-ahmad-jamals-85th-birthday-a-downbeat-feature-from-2002/>.

Nevertheless, the Pershing recording proves to be as much of an adaptation of his own arrangement as it is of the original Gershwin composition. Figure 30 is a lead sheet rendering of Gershwin's original melody. The lyrics are of particular note, because Jamal modifies the text structure as part of his rhythmic interpretation of the song form:

D^{MIN7} G⁷ C^{MAJ7} A^{MIN7} D^{MIN7} G⁷ C⁷ E^{MIN7} A⁷
 THEY'RE WRIT-ING SONGS OF LOVE, BUT NOT FOR ME. A LUCK-Y

D⁷ D^{MIN7} G⁷ C⁷
 STAR'S A - BOVE, BUT NOT FOR ME. WITH LOVE TO

F^{DIM7} F^b D^{MIN7} G⁷ D^{#DIM7} E^{MIN7} A^{MIN7}
 LEAD THE WAY I'VE FOUND MORE CLOUDS OF GREY THAN AN - Y

E^{DIM7} D^{MIN7} F^{b/C} D^{MIN7} G⁷
 RUS - SIAN PLAY COULD GUA - RAN - TEE. I WAS A

C^{MAJ7} A^{MIN7} D^{MIN7} G⁷ C^{MAJ7} E^{MIN7} A⁷
 FOOL TO FALL AND GET THAT WAY; HEIGH - HO! A -

D⁷ D^{MIN7} G⁷ C⁷
 LAS! AND AL - SO, LACK - A - DAY! AL - THOUGH I

F^{DIM7} F^b D^{MIN7} G⁷ D^{#DIM7} E^{MIN7} E⁷ A⁷
 CAN'T DIS - MISS THE MEM - R'Y OF HER KISS, I GUESS SHE'S

D^{MIN7} G⁷ C^b
 NOT FOR ME.

Figure 30. "But Not for Me," lead sheet (transposed to C Major)

In the *Pershing* recording, Jamal creates more space in the head melody (to make room for Crosby’s solo interjections) by carefully editing out material from the Gershwin original and shifting registers. Although it is common practice for jazz musicians to alter the original melody in performance, Jamal modifies both the text and the melodic line. In the opening phrase, for instance, Jamal does not complete the first occurrence of the song’s title in the lyrics, “They’re writing songs of love, but not for _____,” nor does he resolve the G7(b9) chord to Cmaj7 (Figure 31):

The image shows a musical score for the first three measures of the A-section of "But Not for Me" (1958). It is presented in 4/4 time. The top staff, labeled "ORIGINAL", shows the melody in treble clef with lyrics: "THEY'RE WRIT - ING SONGS OF LOVE, _____ BUT NOT FOR ME." Above the staff are the chords: G⁷, CMAJ⁷, A^{MIN}⁷, D^{MIN}⁷, G⁷, and CMAJ⁷. The bottom staff, labeled "JAMAL", shows his performance in grand staff (treble and bass clefs). He uses block-chords in the right hand and a more active bass line in the left hand. The lyrics are the same as the original, but the phrasing is modified, particularly in the first measure where he does not complete the phrase "writing songs of love, but not for _____".

Figure 31. “But Not for Me” (1958) first A-section measures 1-3, comparison of lyric phrasing

Even with significant rhythmic modification and the octave transposition midway through the opening line, the top note of Jamal’s block-chords faithfully follows the melody. He delays the second statement more than a full measure and adds embellishments, but the lyrical text is complete and the melodic line is still recognizable through the end of the phrase (Figure 32):

The image shows a musical score for the song "But Not for Me" (1958), comparing the original version (top) with a version by Jamal (bottom). The original version is written in treble clef with a simple melodic line and lyrics: "A LUCK - Y STAR'S A - BOVE, BUT NOT FOR ME." The chords are E MIN7, A7, D7, D MIN7, G7, and C7. Jamal's version is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and features a more complex melodic line with triplets and a bass line with chords.

Figure 32. “But Not for Me” (1958) first A-section measures 4-7, comparison of melodic phrasing

Because of the relative clarity of this line, one expects the following phrase – “with love to lead the way” – to occur in the second eight-measures of the song form, but Jamal builds anticipation by delaying its entrance. Arriving six beats later, Jamal reduces the four-measure phrase to two-and-a-half with altered rhythms. He waits another six beats for the next phrase, but departs from the melodic material after only four notes (Figure 33):

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the B-section of "But Not for Me" (1958). Each system compares the original melody (labeled "ORIG.") with a piano accompaniment (labeled "JAMAL").

System 1:

- ORIG.:** Treble clef, 4/4 time. Lyrics: "WITH LOVE TO LEAD THE WAY I'VE FOUND MORE CLOUDS OF GREY". Chords: F^{DIM7} , F^6 , D^{MIN7} , G^7 , $D^{\#DIM7}$, E^{MIN7} .
- JAMAL:** Treble and Bass clefs. The right hand has a melodic line with a 8^{va} (octave up) marking and a triplet of eighth notes. The left hand provides harmonic support with chords.

System 2:

- ORIG.:** Treble clef, 4/4 time. Lyrics: "THAN AN - Y RUS - SIAN PLAY COULD GUA - RAN - TEE." Chords: A^{MIN7} , E^{DIM7} , D^{MIN7} , F^6/C , D^{MIN7} .
- JAMAL:** Treble and Bass clefs. The right hand features a melodic line with a 8^{va} marking and four triplet markings. The left hand continues with chords.

Figure 33. "But Not for Me" (1958) B-section, comparison of melodic phrasing

Jamal continues in this manner for the second A-section. For the first four measures, the pick-up notes are once again delayed past the start of the measure and played with rhythmic modification, but the melodic line remains intact. He dramatically reduces the text of the following phrase – (Heigh-ho) Alas! And al(so, lack-a-day!) – which starts late, ends early, and is played an octave lower than the previous phrase (Figure 34):

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the song "But Not for Me" (1958). Each system compares the original recording (labeled "ORIG.") with a version by Jamal (labeled "JAMAL").

System 1:

- ORIG.:** Chords: G⁷, C^{MAJ}⁷, A^{MIN}⁷, D^{MIN}⁷, G⁷, C^{MAJ}⁷. Lyrics: "I WAS A FOOL TO FALL AND GET THAT WAY;".
- JAMAL:** The piano accompaniment is identical to the original, but the vocal line is absent.

System 2:

- ORIG.:** Chords: E^{MIN}⁷, A⁷, D⁷, D^{MIN}⁷, G⁷, C⁷. Lyrics: "HEIGH - HO! A - LAS! AND AL - SO, LACK - A - DAY!".
- JAMAL:** The piano accompaniment is identical to the original, but the vocal line is absent.

Figure 34. “But Not for Me” (1958) second A-section, comparison of lyric phrasing

He demonstrates his attention to the lyrics during the C-section, when he sings the lyrics that belong to the final two pitches he removed. Although Jamal vocalizes lyrics from the B-section instead of the C-section, the phrasing is the same and therefore produces the same effect (Figure 35):

Figure 35. “But Not for Me” (1958) C-section measures 1-3, comparison of melodic phrasing
 Jamal finishes the song form with one final phrase reduction and lyric omission, before transitioning into his first solo chorus two measures early (Figure 36):

Figure 36. “But Not for Me” (1958) C-section measures 4-8, comparison of melodic phrasing
 With exception of the first three and the last three measures of the arrangement, which are taken directly from his 1952 version, any additional instances of self-emulation come in the form of melodic motifs. Here, Jamal uses the melodic material of his earlier arrangement as a vehicle for improvisation. When reviewing both recordings in succession, the latter performance sounds



Figure 38. “But Not for Me” (1958) six-note riff into solo chorus

He continues in this manner for the majority of the performance, offering moments of nearly-identical phrase structure to his earlier recording that break off into newly-improvised ideas and back again. The pitch classifications are virtually identical at these points of self-emulation, but Jamal modifies the rhythm and ornamentation in a manner that preserves the spontaneity of new material. By mapping Jamal’s use of new and reused content (Figure 39), we can ascertain the extent in which Jamal tropes his own improvisations for his performance of “But Not for Me” at the Pershing, noting specifically the relationship of the head, two solo choruses, and coda material to the 1952 recording:

Form	Section	Content
Head	A	First three measures: identical, but cut short. The rest of the head features more syncopated, metrically-displaced, and reduced phrases to accommodate two-measure bass solo interjections
	B	
	A	Last three measures into Solo Chorus 1: Same six-note riff in augmented form, extended to ten measures
	C	
Solo Chorus 1	A	Riff carried over, followed by new material
	B	Last four measures: Four-note, block-chord harmonized line with slight rhythmic/melodic difference
	A	Nearly identical
	C	New material
Solo Chorus 2	A	Same key change up P4 to F Major; Nearly identical material
	B	Nearly identical
	A	Nearly identical; Recapitulation of head melody
	C	New material; same shortened C-section (cut to four measures)
Coda		Same vamp rhythm and harmony, but without improvisation (as in 1952 recording). Identical ending.

Figure 39. Comparison of “But Not for Me” (1958) to 1952 recording

In review of his arrangement and improvisatory principles alone, it is apparent that Jamal does not simply follow the bebop-based fashion of playing a head melody, improvising several choruses using the chord changes and ending the piece with a restatement of the melody. Rather, he demonstrates a profound knowledge of the composition itself and its lyrics that can only be achieved through meticulous study. Cannonball Adderley observes that when Jamal formulates his arrangements, “[He] also allows the tune to be the tune:”

He does what he does within the context of each particular song. He’s not like the average jazz musician who uses pop tunes as a vehicle. Ahmad approaches each one as a composition in itself and tries to work out something particular for each tune that will fit it...⁴³³

Borrowing techniques from big band arranging, Jamal does not shy away from working out ideas in advance. On writing bass parts, he explains:

⁴³³ Adderley, “Reviews,” 33.

Most of the bass lines I myself have done. The rare exception was the bass line that Israel played on “Autumn Leaves.” That was his bass line, which has been widely used. So most of the bass lines I have developed myself, because I have a thing for that. I love bass lines. So most of the things, 99 percent of the things, I write.⁴³⁴

Jamal welcomes contributions from his fellow musicians more often than he indicates here. Later in the interview, he reveals that Crosby created his own bass lines for both “But Not for Me” and “Poinciana.”⁴³⁵ Jamal and Crosby shared a unique relationship when developing arrangements for the group, as Fournier recalled, “Ahmad either adjusted his [chord] changes to Israel if Israel came up with some finer changes, or Israel always would adjust himself to Ahmad, because Ahmad always had fine changes.”⁴³⁶

The drum part then evolved from the rhythmic structure of the piano and bass. Though Jamal did not specially write parts for Fournier, he gave enough information to his drummer to create his own part. Fournier describes his role in the arranging process:

Ahmad would set a pattern. And actually, the whole rhythmic pattern derived from the melodic pattern that he set with the bass line and himself, and once he set that then you just joined in... Until you did something that pleased whoever you're working with. If they set up a pattern, then you try to do something... You keep looking for something until you think that that's what they want.⁴³⁷

6.3.3 Orchestration and Improvisation

Whereas many improvising musicians find rules to be constricting, Jamal believes that there cannot be freedom without them, asserting that “there's a joy in discipline that's much

⁴³⁴ Panken, “Ahmad Jamal’s 81st Birthday.”

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Ted Panken, “Vernel Fournier on Ahmad Jamal” (July 3, 2011), WKCR Interview Transcript (1990), *Today Is the Question: Ted Panken on Music, Politics and the Arts*, (Accessed December 12, 2016), <http://tedpanken.wordpress.com/2011/07/03/vernell-fournier-on-ahmad-jamal-wkcr-1990>.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

overlooked.”⁴³⁸ In fact he indicated that most of his early recordings consisted of written arrangements for piano, guitar, and bass. As part of the discipline of arranging and orchestration, Jamal left space for improvisation and soloing. He attributes the “space” that many have cited over the years as an acquired discipline of restraint that promotes balance among musicians in performance. He describes it as an overlooked concept of performance that is as essential as any other basic practice:

You know it's just like dynamics. I don't think you can play loud all the time. I don't think you can play soft all the time. And I don't think you can play all the time. You have to respect what they call a rest, and you have to respect openness, as well. If it's too congested, when it gets too complicated, something is wrong. I think I acquired that discipline that people call space over the years, because I've worked in so many configurations and I've been a leader a long time.⁴³⁹

These diverse configurations of instrumentations began during Jamal’s youth in Pittsburgh and expanded as he matured: “You have to have more than one exit door...If a fire breaks out, you always have an escape plan.”⁴⁴⁰ Though many of his early bookings came out of economic need, such as the Caldwells, he noted that the experience of doing so provides an individual with the depth necessary to master their craft.⁴⁴¹

Jamal’s concept of arranging exacts a certain amount of discipline on each performing member of the trio, including himself. For instance, in a demonstration of restraint in the *Pershing* performance of “But Not for Me,” Jamal removes material from the original melody to provide enough space for Crosby to offer brief improvised statements. With Fournier’s time pattern

⁴³⁸ Josephine Reed, “Ahmad Jamal,” *Art Works* Podcast (January 2012), National Endowment for the Arts, (Accessed July 1, 2016), <https://www.arts.gov/audio/ahmad-jamal>.

⁴³⁹ Molly Murphy, “NEA Jazz Masters: Ahmad Jamal,” Interview (January 11, 2007), National Endowment for the Arts, (Accessed July 1, 2016), <https://www.arts.gov/honors/jazz/ahmad-jamal>.

⁴⁴⁰ Jamal, interview with author.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

remaining constant throughout the entirety of the piece, Jamal and Crosby are free to shift positions without loss of the underlying groove. Improvisationally, Jamal's practices are equally methodical and deliberate. As examined in the previous section, he draws from a great body of work including his own when arranging and improvising, but he also employs orchestrational techniques to alter the texture of his playing style (e.g. single-note melodic lines vs. two-handed block chords) and the texture of the other trio musicians in relation to one another (e.g. solo vs. accompaniment, homophonic vs. polyphonic interactions, and conversational improvisation).

Jamal's careful planning of how all three musicians engage each other in performance is part of his philosophy of musical discipline that extends from his experiences with big band scoring. When asked how his trio produces such orchestrationally-rich arrangements that the likes of Gil Evans can so readily transfer them to a large ensemble setting, Jamal responded:

Because I've been trained to think orchestrally. That's the difference between the sound we get in our trio and some other bands. Thankfully, my three pieces sometimes give the illusion that they are six or seven pieces. We've become one instrument. Having been influenced in my childhood by the bands of Duke Ellington, Earl Hines, and Count Basie, and having stayed up late at the Savoy in Pittsburgh to hear those big bands, and playing with big bands, well, that's what happens. I don't think in single lines. I think in big band concepts.⁴⁴²

Jamal explained that for him, it is only natural that as a pianist he thinks like an orchestrator: "The piano is an orchestra within itself – no one demonstrated that better than Erroll Garner."⁴⁴³ As in the big band orchestrations of Ellington and Basie, Jamal's use of varying textural layers provides continuous musical interest. In fact, he considered the textural content of the *Pershing* album to be what ultimately engaged listeners:

⁴⁴² Len Lyons, *The Great Pianists: Speaking of Their Lives and Music*, (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1983), 117.

⁴⁴³ Jamal, interview with author.

It was a record composed (of) – made up of a lot of interesting textures. Lot of textures...The lines that Israel (Crosby) played, for example, people are still trying to emulate...It was the textures, it was the things that we were doing...Improvisation is an acquired skill. It's not an accident.⁴⁴⁴

In his performance of “But Not for Me,” Jamal dramatically maneuvers between two techniques to modify the texture of his piano-playing: one with Swing Era origins, the other a Bebop practice. Pioneered by pianist Milt Bruckner, the “locked-hands” style of harmonizing lines in block-chord fashion produces the effect of a big band section tutti, like a section of five saxophones. Conversely, common practice among bebop pianists is to play eighth note-centric, single-note melodies in the right-hand with little or no left-hand comping using rootless chords. One particularly effective use of these techniques occurs during the restatement of the head melody in the second A-section of the second chorus. Jamal declares the return of the melody utilizing the locked-hands style to play seven- and eight-note harmonies, mimicking a big band shout chorus (Figure 40):

⁴⁴⁴ Howard Reich. “Ahmad Jamal at 84: Still inventing” in *Chicago Tribune* (October 8, 2014). (Accessed December 11, 2016). <http://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/music/reich/ct-jazz-ahmad-jamal-20141008-column.html>



Figure 40. Locked-hands style in “But Not for Me,” second A-section of the second chorus (1958)

After seven measures, he makes an abrupt detour with a brisk two-measure phrase of single-note sixteenth notes, before concluding the paraphrased head melody with a Basie-like, light embellishment of the melody in the upper register (Figure 41):



Figure 41. Upper register embellishment of the melody in “But Not for Me” (1958)

Within the trio, Jamal and Crosby produce several different textures in relation to one another over the consistent groove provided by Fournier. From the opening of the head, Crosby responds to Jamal’s block-chord melody with upper-register descending arpeggios based on C6 (Figure 42):

The image shows a musical score for two instruments: Jamal and Crosby. Jamal's part is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and consists of block-chord patterns in the upper register. Crosby's part is written in a single bass clef staff and features a descending arpeggiated line with triplets. The time signature is 4/4.

Figure 42. “But Not for Me” (1958) call-and-response, Jamal’s locked-hands to Crosby’s solo

Crosby uses this same sequence three times: twice during the first A-section and once for the second A-section (in the ABAC form). He concludes all other sections of the head form with different melodic material. Crosby plays a different sequence on the last two measures of the B-section, beginning with a three-note pattern on Ab that implies a tri-tone substitution (of the original D minor ii chord) as he steps down a half-step to the G dominant in the subsequent measure (Figure 43):

The image shows a musical score for Crosby in a single bass clef staff. It features a descending melodic sequence starting with a three-note triplet on Ab, followed by a half-step descent to G. The time signature is 4/4.

Figure 43. Crosby sequence, B-section m7-8 “But Not for Me” (1958)

Engaging in call-and-response, Jamal rests while Crosby solos until the final ten measures when Jamal overlaps two of Crosby's phrases. The first occurs when Jamal's block-chord lead into the C-section interrupts the completion of Crosby's new sequential line on the C7. The tension is immediately resolved, however, when the two share the same rhythm at the start of the C-section (Figure 44):

The musical score for Figure 44 consists of three staves. The top two staves are for Jamal's piano accompaniment, with the right hand in treble clef and the left hand in bass clef. The bottom staff is for Crosby's bass line, also in bass clef. Jamal's part begins with a rest, followed by a series of block-chords in the right hand and a corresponding bass line in the left hand. Crosby's part begins with a triplet of eighth notes, followed by a walking bass line. The two parts overlap in the final ten measures of the head.

Figure 44. Jamal's locked-hands overlap Crosby's phrases, "But Not for Me" (1958)

During the final four measures of the head, Jamal leaves space for Crosby to improvise a melody, but as soon as Jamal enters with his own six-note riff, Crosby retreats to a walking bass line. In addition to the counterpoint created as the two instruments overlap melodies, Jamal signals a textural shift as he supplants the accented block-chords that opened the C-section with lightly-played single-note lines. Positioned at the upper end of the piano with no left-hand comping below, the sparsity of the single-notes in that register produces a dramatic shift to a softer dynamic level. In doing so, one can hear a slight accent on the second note of the six-note riff and its metric displacement in the measure with each oscillation of the sequence (Figure 45):

Figure 45. Jamal and Crosby “But Not for Me” (1958) transition to first solo chorus

According to Fournier, these sudden changes of texture and dynamics were not easy to accommodate: “Ahmad used difficult dynamics, and so many of them!”⁴⁴⁵ Jamal did not use dynamics simply to alter the volume of his ensemble, but moreover to control formal changes in compositional structure with varying degrees of contrast. As mentioned above in the transition from the head into the first solo chorus of “But Not for Me,” the shifts of dynamics and texture were sudden. For the song’s coda, a two-measure vamp diminishes in volume as the piano and bass descend in registration with each repetition ultimately leaving the bass and drums alone. One expects the trio to fade out altogether, but accented off-beat punctuations on ascending major-ninth

⁴⁴⁵ Panken, “Ahmad Jamal’s 85th Birthday.”

chords interrupt the progression.⁴⁴⁶ During the final fermata, Crosby’s arpeggiated triplets recollect his earlier phrases (Figure 46):

The image displays a musical score for the ending of the 1958 recording of "But Not for Me" by the Miles Davis Quintet. The score is arranged in three systems, each featuring three staves: Jamal (piano), Crosby (bass), and Fournier (drums). The music is in 4/4 time and B-flat major. The first system shows the initial ending with a *mf* dynamic. The second system shows the final ending, where Crosby plays arpeggiated triplets and Jamal plays chords, both reaching a *ff* dynamic. The score concludes with a double bar line and repeat signs.

Figure 46. “But Not for Me” (1958) ending

⁴⁴⁶ For their recording of Dizzy Gillespie’s “Woody ‘n You” at the Pershing, the group ended the piece by completing the fade-out to silence, not by using the sound engineer’s apparatus, but rather by diminishing as a collective unit.

6.3.4 Interaction

Herlin Riley, Jamal's drummer from 1982 to 1987, elucidates that "Jamal uses dynamics to denote a spontaneous inner narrative," and describes how "[Jamal] developed techniques to spontaneously shape and arrange the flow" by communicating with his sidemen during performances with gestures and hand signs.⁴⁴⁷ Not limited to dynamics alone, Jamal continuously adjusts and adapts orchestrations during the course of performance. In a manner not unlike Count Basie and Duke Ellington, Jamal employs hand signals from the piano to maintain organizational cohesiveness as the ensemble shifts between arrangements and improvisations. Riley explains:

Ahmad's music has structure and form, but he directs inside the form with hand signals... One signal tells you if you're playing the top of, say, the head section or A-section, he has another cue for the bridge, and another for the interlude. If he wants any of the cycles repeated, he'll give the appropriate cue, and when it's done he cues you to go to the next part. So it's always organic and rich.⁴⁴⁸

When asked about his use of hand signs in an interview with Eugene Holley, Jamal responds:

My finger pointed to the top means I'm going to the top of the composition. When I cross my wrist, that means either I'm going to the bridge, or I'm going to cut the time. And sometimes I do verbal cues. I don't always confine myself to hand signals.⁴⁴⁹

Whether physical, verbal, or musical cues, Jamal's interactions with his fellow musicians dictate the spontaneous yet seamless flow of his ensemble in improvised performance. As evidenced in the following analysis of "Poinciana," for instance, Jamal's manipulates the song form with specific thematic material that can be stated and restated, with or without variation. Like "But Not for Me," he draws from multiple sources: previous versions of the song (his own and others),

⁴⁴⁷ Panken, "Ahmad Jamal's 85th Birthday."

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ Eugene Holley, Jr., "Gold Standard: Pianist Ahmad Jamal Chartered a New Popularity for Jazz," *Wax Poetics*, (December/January 2008-2009), 102.

thematic material from the arrangement itself, and improvised variations of any of these. Similarly, he inserts improvised content in-between, over-top, and within reused material to maintain a continuous sense of newness. As Fournier explains, Jamal's ability to do so imposes a significant challenge upon the other musicians:

I mean, there were five or six ways he could play one tune. He might insert something from another tune into the tune you're playing, and would want that accent with it when he did it. You had to consciously be aware that he was playing the piano.⁴⁵⁰

6.3.4.1 "Poinciana"

"Poinciana" has been part of Jamal's repertoire since he was first introduced to the song as a member of the Four Strings under Joe Kennedy, Jr. Unlike "But Not for Me," he does not base his 1958 arrangement of "Poinciana" on his earlier drummerless version. Even Crosby, who was also part of the 1955 recording with Crawford, forgoes most of his previously-performed bass lines in favor of new ideas. The new arrangement sat atop of a drum part developed by Fournier, who later indicated that it was based on a New Orleans street beat from his youth known as "Two-Way-Pocky-Way."⁴⁵¹ He used the back end of a stick on the bell of the ride cymbal in one hand and a mallet going from snare drum (with snares off) to floor tom in the other, mimicking the movement of a New Orleans bass drummer. Fournier later remembered that he had just joined the trio, which was playing at the London House in Chicago, when they first developed their take on "Poinciana:"

We were the house band, so I was playing intermission and I was re-adjusting the drums. And Ahmad started playing "Poinciana," so I just sat down and figured something out, you know, and it evolved. All it is, is New Orleans beats. You've seen the drummers in New Orleans with the bass drum and the cymbal on top, that's all it is.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵⁰ Panken, "Vernel Fournier."

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Riley, *New Orleans Jazz Drumming*, 47.

In the same interview, Fournier points to a key component of Jamal's orchestrational concept; the continual modification of content to produce difference from chorus to chorus:

You don't want to be doing the same damn thing over and over again. I never did believe in that; I always try to improve. Ahmad had one chorus, then another, and another and before you knew it we had six or seven choruses we could play that were all different. We could play that tune ("Poinciana") for ten, fifteen, twenty minutes.⁴⁵³

A closer look at the melodic content and performance structure of "Poinciana," as recorded by Jamal, Crosby, and Fournier at the Pershing in 1958, reveals how Jamal communicated thematic variations of the song form to his sidemen during the performance. Figure 47 outlines these structural components in relation to the macroform:

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

Macro-form	Pershing Song Form	Pershing Thematic Content
Intro	Vamp	Vamp
	Intro	Intro
	Intro	Intro
Head Chorus	A	A
	A	A
	B	B
	A ₁	A ₁
Solo Chorus 1	A	A Var. 1
	A	A Var. 1
	B	B Var. 1
	A	A Var. 2
Solo Chorus 2	A	A Var. 3
	A ₁	A ₁ Var. 1
	B	B Var. 2
	A ₁	A ₁ Var. 2
Solo Chorus 3	A	A Var. 4
	A	A Var. 4
	B	B
	A	A Var. 3
Solo Chorus 4	A	A Var. 5
	A	A Var. 5
	B	B Var. 2 ₁
	A	Bass/Drum
Coda	Intro	Intro
	Coda	Intro (4), Coda (4)
<p>Notes: All score and form letters are eight measures in length, unless otherwise noted in parentheses.</p>		

Figure 47. Form and thematic content of Pershing recording of “Poinciana”

After performing the introductory material and head chorus, Jamal presents five different variations of the A-section, two of the B-section, and two of A₁. Although he maintains the AABA song form throughout, the variations of each section are interchangeable. For example, he employs his third variation of the A-section at the beginning of the second solo chorus, but rather than repeating it for the second A, he withholds it until the final A-section of the third solo chorus. The same is true for the B-sections: the head B-section makes its return in full during the third solo chorus, while the second variation of the B-section occurs in the second and fourth solo choruses. Conversely, there are several themes that only get one statement: B Variation One, A Variation Two, A₁ Variation One, and A₁ Variation Two.

Jamal's spontaneous adaptation of the thematic material during performance is particularly evident when comparing the trio's 1958 Pershing recording of "Poinciana" to two other performances around that time: the Newport Festival in 1959⁴⁵⁴ and the Alhambra in 1961.⁴⁵⁵ Though he repurposes melodic motifs from the 1958 Pershing version for these two later performances, he slightly modifies the content at the micro level and manipulates its placement at the macro. Alterations of individual phrases at the micro level include editing out measures, rhythmic variation, and melodic embellishment: techniques akin to those discussed in "But Not for Me."

Stylistically, the 1959 and 1961 recordings bear closer resemblance to one another than that of the Pershing, most notably in terms of intensity. At Newport and the Alhambra, the ensemble still demonstrates moments of quiet control and restraint, but these instances are

⁴⁵⁴ No album is currently available to purchase, but the recording can be streamed at <https://www.wolfgangs.com/the-ahmad-jamal-trio/music/audio/20020374-51327.html?tid=4861504>.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ahmad Jamal's Alhambra* (Argo 1961).

juxtaposed by dramatic shifts of dynamics and articulations and are generally more rhythmically-charged than the Pershing. In an interview for the book *New Orleans Jazz and Second Line Drumming*, Fournier recalled a specific moment when his leader asked him to play with more intensity by swapping his brushes for sticks. The trio was playing in Cleveland, sharing the billing with the Dave Brubeck Quartet. According to Fournier, “Dave was hot at the time, but Ahmad was hotter:”

They were bearing down! So, we got up there and we got into another chorus, or the bridge, and Ahmad looks over at me and yells, “Sticks,” and luckily I kept sticks on the drum because of “Poinciana.” So, that was the first time I played sticks with Ahmad. Dave Brubeck was the cause of me playing sticks. Ain’t that something! Then it got to the point where I was playing sticks 70% of the time.⁴⁵⁶

Nevertheless, a comparison between all three recordings points directly to how Jamal manipulates larger structural forms by cuing specific motivic variations of the song form. Even when lengthening the form in the Newport and Alhambra performances, he does so by supplementing new vamp material with content from the Pershing arrangement, as charted in Figures 48-49.

Apart from doubling the length of the opening bass and drum vamp, at Newport the trio maintains the same thematic material as the Pershing through the A-sections of the fourth solo chorus. From that point on, however, the content changes. Jamal begins the altered form with a restatement of the head chorus B-section followed by another eight measures of A-section Variation Five. At the onset of the two added solo choruses, he introduces a new harmonic and rhythmic variation based on the A-section vamp of the fourth variation. This leads to what begins as a new B-section variation, but transitions halfway to the head material. A repositioned bass and

⁴⁵⁶ Riley, *New Orleans Jazz*, 48.

drum solo concludes this chorus, and Jamal returns to the same format employed in the fourth solo chorus.

Macro-form	Pershing Song Form	Pershing Thematic Content	Newport Song Form	Newport Thematic Content
Intro	Vamp	Vamp	Vamp x2	Vamp (16)
	Intro	Intro	Intro	Intro
	Intro	Intro	Intro	Intro
Head Chorus	A	A	A	A
	A	A	A	A
	B	B	B	B
	A ₁	A ₁	A ₁	A ₁
Solo Chorus 1	A	A Var. 1	A	A Var. 1
	A	A Var. 1	A	A Var. 1
	B	B Var. 1	B	B Var. 1
	A	A Var. 2	A	A Var. 2
Solo Chorus 2	A	A Var. 3	A	A Var. 3
	A ₁	A ₁ Var. 1	A ₁	A ₁ Var. 1
	B	B Var. 2	B	B Var. 2
	A ₁	A ₁ Var. 2	A ₁	A ₁ Var. 2
Solo Chorus 3	A	A Var. 4	A	A Var. 4
	A	A Var. 4	A	A Var. 4
	B	B	B	B Var. 1
	A	A Var. 3	A	A Var. 3
Solo Chorus 4	A	A Var. 5	A	A Var. 5
	A	A Var. 5	A	A Var. 5
	B	B Var. 2 ₁	B	B
	A	Bass/Drum	A	A Var. 5
Solo Chorus 5			A	A Var. 6
			A	A Var. 6
			B	B Var. 3 (4)/B(4)
			A	Bass/Drum
Solo Chorus 6			A	A Var. 5
			A	A Var. 5
			B	B
			A	A Var. 5
Coda	Intro	Intro	Intro	Intro
	Coda	Intro (6), Coda (2)	Coda	Intro (6), Coda (2)

Figure 48. Form and thematic comparison between Pershing and Newport recordings of “Poinciana”

As viewable in Figure 49, the thematic content and form of “Poinciana” at the Alhambra is closer in nature to those in the Pershing performance, with the exception of the added solo chorus and extra A-section before concluding the piece:

Macro-form	Pershing Song Form	Pershing Thematic Content	Alhambra Song Form	Alhambra Thematic Content
Intro	Vamp	Vamp	Vamp (x2)	Vamp (16)
	Intro	Intro	Intro	Intro
	Intro	Intro	Intro	Intro
Head Chorus	A	A	A	A
	A	A	A	A
	B	B	B	B
	A ₁	A ₁	A ₁	A ₁
Solo Chorus 1	A	A Var. 1	A	A Var. 1
	A	A Var. 1	A	A Var. 1
	B	B Var. 1	B	B Var. 1 (4), B (4)
	A	A Var. 2	A	A Var. 2
Solo Chorus 2	A	A Var. 3	A	A Var. 3
	A ₁	A ₁ Var. 1	A ₁	A ₁ Var. 1
	B	B Var. 2	B	B Var. 2 (4), B (4)
	A ₁	A ₁ Var. 2	A ₁	A ₁ Var. 2
Solo Chorus 3	A	A Var. 4	A	A Var. 4
	A	A Var. 4	A	A Var. 4
	B	B	B	B Var. 1 (4), B (4)
	A	A Var. 3	A	A Var. 3
Solo Chorus 4	A	A Var. 5	A	A Var. 5
	A	A Var. 5	A	A Var. 5
	B	B Var. 2	B	Bass/Drum (2), B (4), B Var. 2 ₁ (2)
	A	Bass/Drum	A	Bass/Drum
Solo Chorus 5			A	A Var. 5
			A	C Var.
			B	D Var.
			A	New Vamp
Solo Chorus 6			A	A Var. 5 (3), Bass/Drum (5)
Coda	Intro	Intro		Intro
	Coda	Intro (6), Coda (2)		Intro (6), Coda (2)

Figure 49. Form and thematic comparison between Pershing and Alhambra recordings of “Poinciana”

The most significant manipulation of thematic material occurs when Jamal combines the content of two or three variations into one, as is the case for four B-sections and the added A-section before the ending. This practice of content interchangeability within the context of an eight-measure phrase directly correlates to his use of both A-section and B-section material from the head chorus in subsequent solo chorus passages. At the Alhambra, he splits the first three solo chorus B-sections in half, by substituting the last four measures with those from the head. Four measures of the head B-section follow four measures of B-section Variation One during the first and third solo choruses and B-section Variation Two during the second. Since all B-section variations include measures 3-4 from the head chorus, Jamal uses this link between variations to pivot from one variation to another.

6.4 ENSEMBLE COMMUNICATION

For Jamal to achieve the unity he desired in his ensemble, communication with Crosby and Fournier was key. However, as with the use of hand signals to cue specific thematic variations, he did not always rely on verbal commands to set the arrangements or dictate the course of a performance. As Fournier explains, Jamal favored auditory cues to interact with his drummer:

As a musician, he didn't ask anything...very seldom would he have any input. But if there was something in particular he wanted, he would repeat it with the piano many, many times until you understood what he was saying, or he might tell you — but very seldom would he speak to you about your playing. I don't think he

ever told any drummer that was with him to do this or do that, or do anything.⁴⁵⁷

Jamal gives direction in the interest of the trio concept, whether in terms of a cue or a specific rhythmic pattern, but leaves his sidemen to fulfill their roles as equals. According to Herlin Riley, Jamal's interaction with his musicians is one of his greatest strengths as a leader. He believes that Jamal not only understands his musicians, but also puts his faith in them, explaining:

He understands and he can hear musicians, and hear that musician's voice for what it is. Either it's something that he can work with or it's something he can't work with. If it's something that he can work with, then he'll let you really be yourself and let you speak your musical voice as it may be.⁴⁵⁸

For Riley, even when Jamal gave him specific instructions like "Don't fill in every time the phrase comes around; you don't have to play a fill," he did so not only to direct the dynamics of the music, but more importantly to guide his colleagues:

Really, he's just shaping whatever is already there; whatever talent you already have, he knows how to shape it, but just let it grow and be better. But he doesn't disturb it in trying to have you change your direction or change who you are musically speaking.⁴⁵⁹

Though Jamal wrote and organized a great deal of musical material, his interactions with his sidemen ultimately produced the consistency of performance he desired. In his trio with Crosby and Fournier, Jamal only directed what he felt he needed direction. In other instances, he did not want them to simply follow an arrangement, but *feel* where he was going. Reflecting on the balance between what was written and what was not for the recording at the Pershing, Jamal told Len Lyons:

I honestly don't remember whether I just wrote out the chord changes in symbols or if I did something more. You know, there

⁴⁵⁷ Panken, "Vernel Fournier."

⁴⁵⁸ Panken, "Ahmad Jamal's 81st Birthday."

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

were other things that we definitely did not write out. When players have been together for a long time, you can do things that sound written even if they're not. Ballads, especially. I don't write out ballads unless for some reason the band can't hear where I'm going with the chords. I prefer the players to feel what I'm doing on a ballad. Otherwise, whatever we do is carefully planned and thought out.⁴⁶⁰

Regardless of repertoire, instrumentation, or personnel through the years, Jamal always led an ensemble of precision, utilizing principles of arranging, orchestration, and improvisation both singularly and combinations thereof to produce the constant sensation of newness in the piano trio format.

Ultimately, the intermusical analysis of Jamal's recordings of "But Not for Me" and "Poinciana" reveals that though Jamal draws directly from the jazz tradition, he readily moves beyond it. Even by 1958, Gershwin's "But Not for Me" had been part of the standard jazz repertoire, but "Poinciana" was already forgotten. Jamal renewed both of these compositions, not by offering multiple choruses of improvisations, but by working out arrangements for his trio with the same attention to thematic development as an orchestrator of an eighteen-piece big band. However, neither of these arrangements were produced to predetermine the musical outcome, but rather to extend it. In performance, Jamal draws from all available sources and engages the material in what Monson calls "ironic interpretation" by modifying aspects of the original tune, his arrangement of it, his previous version of it, other recordings of it, and newly improvised ideas. Similarly, his use of single-note and locked-hands pianistic techniques elicits notions of orchestration in the big band tradition, but by imposing space and editing out what would otherwise be part of a melodic phrase or vocal lyric, Jamal challenges listener expectations.

⁴⁶⁰ Lyons, *The Great Pianists*, 118.

The negotiations of groove between Jamal, Crosby, and Fournier largely fall within the jazz tradition as described by Rinzler, Berliner, and Monson. However, the intermusical analysis of this chapter reveals that Jamal and his sidemen engaged varying notions of groove via processes of communication. Though audiences were certainly drawn to the endearing accessibility of the trio's groove concept, Jamal utilized the underlying sense of time as a grounding force over which he could communicate textural shifts, cue alterations of form, offer improvisatory statements, and dictate transitions to new grooves with vamps, aural cues, and/or hand signs. The fluidity with which these musicians collectively transition between concepts is indicative of their abilities to communicate effectively with one another on the bandstand. It is true that each of these musicians demonstrates a mastery of technique in his own right but, as Jamal suggests, only through the discipline of a balanced trio concept does each one have the freedom to be heard.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Making a value judgement on Ahmad Jamal's significance in the jazz canon simply based on his placement in the literature would be a struggle without guidance. The sheer disparity of Jamal's reception since his early days as leader of the Three Strings is unnerving. On one hand, there are the critics who discredited his "innocuous cocktail piano" as "trivial and cliché," and on the other, scores of jazz musicians that sang his praises. The response to Miles Davis's admiration of Jamal was equally polarizing: the association between the two either made critics take notice of Jamal or turned them further away. The same is certainly true of jazz history textbooks; Jamal is either omitted altogether, a footnote in Davis's career, or actually included in the historical narrative. Even Crouch's elevation of Jamal to Parkerian significance as a conceptualist is confusing, given all of the controversies surrounding his canonical worth.

Notwithstanding, this dissertation initiates active dialogue on several key issues. First, Jamal's biographical narrative reconstructs in detail a story that had yet to be told of a vitally-important jazz musician's life, musical training, career development, and contributions to the music. The act of doing so revealed pathways into the similarly under-researched Pittsburgh jazz piano school and the East Liberty neighborhood shared by Jamal, Williams, and Garner. In conjunction with the acquisition of the Erroll Garner archives by the University of Pittsburgh and Dr. Nelson Harrison's willingness to share his personal accounts, audio, and video of Garner's

contemporary Sam Johnson, this dissertation project provides a basis by which Pittsburgh's "rich legacy" of jazz pianists, as noted by Jamal, can be examined.

The drummerless piano trio format is another lacking area in jazz scholarship. Though some sources have noted its presence, such as Billy Taylor's book on jazz piano, the performance practices of the drummerless piano trio do not readily parallel those of a traditional piano-bass-drums setup. Jamal's trios in this format not only fall within the lineage of those led by Cole, Tatum, and Peterson, but were highly-influential during a period in which bebop combos and big bands still dominated the scene. Davis's emulation and appropriation of Jamal's drummerless trio shaped his repertoire selection and arrangements, sound concept, and use of space, in addition to Garland's piano style and Jones's drum patterns. Since the Jamal-Davis connection is one that continues to resurface, it was pertinent to engage the conversation here with meaningful consideration of the dialogue and music as correlated with comparative musical analysis.

Jamal's initial hiring of drummer Walter Perkins proved to be a transitional step in the evolution of Jamal's trio. Nevertheless, Perkins's contributions to the group must not go unnoticed, as he was the first individual charged with transferring Crawford's guitar percussion to the drums in a supportive yet subtle role. With Crosby and Fournier, Jamal not only realized his own performance conceptions, but also impacted performance practice in the jazz piano trio format. As a result of intermusical analysis, the importance of the interactions between these individuals becomes apparent, especially because Jamal employs techniques beyond that of improvisation alone. This particular line of inquiry would be well-suited for a larger analysis of performance practice in the jazz piano trio. In consideration of my published work on the Bill Evans Trio, it is

informative to juxtapose the modes of interaction utilized by these trios and others within the larger piano trio tradition through intermusical analysis.⁴⁶¹

Furthermore, as a long-time teacher of both public-school music education and higher education, I consider this research to be a tremendous opportunity to engage students with a figure who exists somewhat outside the canon, but who offers an abundance of applicability to pedagogical studies in jazz. As Ken Prouty concludes in “Towards Jazz’s ‘Official’ History,” canonically-derived pedagogies are inevitably part of the academic system; those that argue for the inclusion of extra-canonic figures seldom present methods for implementation.⁴⁶² Prouty centers his attention on the teaching of jazz history in the university classroom, whether for music majors or general elective students, and the role that classroom source materials enact on the narrative that is conveyed to these students. I believe that the same logic can and should be applied to the performance-oriented classroom as well. Davis’s proven emulation and appropriation of Jamal, as per Chapter 3 of this study, debunks the common practice that students of jazz should only focus on the canonized masters of jazz. By examining how one of these “masters” adapted another’s music and made it his own is a tremendous lesson in the processes of music learning.

Because of its focus on interacting musicians within an ensemble, Ingrid Monson’s theory of intermusicality is readily applied to performance practice. In jazz education, students are most often taught to transcribe a solo, analyze it, and learn how to play it. However, the act of doing so disengages the processes of interaction that simultaneously communicate information between

⁴⁶¹ Michael P. Mackey. “Improvisation, Interaction, and Intermusicality in the Bill Evans Trio” in *Epistrophy 2: Jouer Jazz/Play Jazz* (February 2007). <http://www.epistrophy.fr/improvisation-interaction-and.html>.

⁴⁶² Kenneth E. Prouty. “Toward Jazz’s “Official” History: The Debates and Discourses of Jazz History Textbooks” in *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 1, no. 1 (2010): 19–43.

members in the ensemble. The study of intermusical analysis in performance practice heightens students' awareness of these key interactions, how to recognize them in recordings and live performance, and how to negotiate interactions as a collaborative musician in improvised performance. In the case of the Ahmad Jamal Trio, the techniques at play extend beyond improvisation alone, whether in terms of melodic modification or pianistic techniques to achieve textural difference.

Like Nat Hentoff and others who warmed to Jamal with time, I find myself growing more intrigued with the man as I study his life and music. Though Jamal and his trio hit a pinnacle in 1958 with *At the Pershing*, it was by no means an end to his career or his musical accomplishments. At 87, Jamal continues to play, compose, and record. There is still a lot of story to tell and many more musical concepts to learn from studying him. Perhaps it is most fitting that Jamal occupies such a curious place in the discourse. Regardless of critiques, praise, record sales, and emulation, Jamal has maintained his own course in jazz for decades.

In my interview with him, I discovered a kind-hearted man, who seemed to be genuinely appreciative that I had put so much effort gaining as much knowledge as I could about his music and career *before* speaking with him. I read through so many interview transcripts of Jamal that it became clear that the same questions were being asked, whether about his first experience at the piano as a three-year-old or the monumental success of the *Pershing* album. As a Pittsburgh pianist who stayed, I enjoyed talking to him about the Pittsburgh of his youth, which in many ways paralleled my grandfather's youth in Pittsburgh. When I asked him what he enjoys most now, he answered that his "biggest joy is finding time to write."⁴⁶³ Jamal still uses paper and pen, while seated at his Steinway (he was one of the first jazz pianists to be awarded the designation of

⁴⁶³ Ahmad Jamal, interview with author (March 22, 2017).

becoming a Steinway artist). He orchestrates in his mind every day, occasionally committing it to paper for either small or large ensembles (he prefers not to use terminology like “trio” or “big band”). He considers this process to be part of his natural development and transition of musical ideas.

As Nat Hentoff reflected on his change of heart in 1956, he no longer wrote of Jamal as a “cocktail pianist,” but rather, very cogently, as representative of true jazz ideology:

It is true that Jamal does not slash into the marrow of existence as do some pianists, but it is also true that in a time of general emulation, Jamal has created a whole, consistent musical personality that does not, as Cannonball underlined, follow fashion and that does cogently and lyrically express exactly what Jamal as a whole person wants to say. In fact, the most attractive aspect of Jamal’s playing to this listener is that there is no trace in it of a conscious posturing to be “hip,” to be “au courant.” Jamal is himself when he plays, and that after all, is what jazz is supposed to be about.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶⁴ Nat Hentoff, *The Piano Scene of Ahmad Jamal*, liner notes, (Epic LN 3631), 1956.

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