AUTHENTICATING JAZZ IN JAPAN

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Since whiteness tends to be a sign of inauthenticity within the world of jazz, the appeals of white musicians [or writers] to universalistic rhetoric can be perceived as a power play rather than genuine expressions of universal brotherhood. If jazz is one of the few cultural categories in which being African American is evaluated as “better” or more “authentic” than being non-African American, a white musician’s appeal to a colorblind rhetoric might cloak a move to minimize the black cultural advantage by “lowering” an assertive African American musician from his or her pedestal to a more “equal” playing field. It is this rhetoric that provokes African Americans to take more extreme positions on ethnic particularity.10

To charges that I am diminishing the importance of African Americans as creators of jazz music by seeking acknowledgment of Japanese (and other non-American) contributions to the art and validation of the meanings they have found in it, I can only respond that it is out of respect for my own African American musical heroes that I do so. It seems to me a magnificent accomplishment to create an art and a culture so potentially inclusive and open to revision that anyone can contribute authentically to it, if its performers and advocates will only allow it be so.

THE JAPANESE JAZZ ARTIST AND THE AUTHENTICITY COMPLEX

AKIYOSHI TOSHIKO: How do you play the blues that way?

How can I learn to play them so authentically?

HAMPTON HARNES: I play the blues right because I eat collard greens and black-eyed peas and corn pone and clabber.

AKIYOSHI [sighs]: Where can I find that food? Do I have to go to the United States to get it?

HARNES [laughs]: All you need is the feeling. If you have the feeling, you could eat Skippy peanut butter and play the blues right. And if you don’t have that feeling, you could eat collard greens and all that so-called Negro food all the time and sound corny—quoted in Nat Hentoff, The Jazz Life

I was born with Eric Dolphy for a father, and Billie Holiday for a mother. So in my alto performances, I must somehow surpass Eric Dolphy. That is my duty.—saxophonist Abe Kaoru, quoted in Morita Yuko, Abe Kaoru, 1946–1978

While touring Japan in 1977, some members of the Art Ensemble of Chicago made the following indiscrete if not ungracious remarks: “We have listened to performances by Japanese groups, but they are making music that stands atop Afro-American traditions. So it is not original.” “Only black people’s music has progressed with the times,” the AEC musicians continued. “In the past we [black people] made music in Africa. We were making music in times of slavery. With the times it has progressed in different forms. Our [black] music moved with the world. If you [Japanese] don’t start from this, you’ll never create original work. It takes five hundred years.” Now, while many Japanese jazz fans
must have had no quarrel with this statement, others took it as well as a poke in the eye. A similar response met saxophonist Branford Marsalis nearly two decades later when he made the following remark in the December 1993 issue of Playboy in reply to a query regarding his band’s popularity in Japan:

The Japanese, for whatever reason, are astute in terms of [jazz’s] history and legacy. Unlike many other people, they have identified jazz as part of the American experience. But I don’t think they understand it most times, especially at my shows. They just stare at us, like, “What the hell are they playing?” But they come to hear me anyway. It’s almost like classical music. Somebody told them it’s necessary and that we’re good. So they come and scratch their heads and clap and they leave. The audiences are strange when you play; they’re hipper and the club owners are great. They take care of you. They take you out to eat, and they’ll even get a great-looking girl for you if you want one. I’ve declined.

While the Art Ensemble’s statement questioned the authenticity of jazz performed by Japanese, Marsalis’s remarks challenged the much-heralded Japanese understanding and appreciation of jazz, arguing that they are superficial at best. Coming as they did in the wake of a torrent of American invective against Japan (“Japan bashing”), Marsalis’s comments (and similar remarks made later by saxophonist Kenny Garrett) wounded a substantial number of devoted jazz fans, who recognize that Japan has done more than its part to keep this art alive and viable in the merciless 1990s marketplace.

Who made the statements was as important as what was said. The Art Ensemble is of the 1960s black militancy in the arts; Marsalis and Garrett are major figures in a new generation of African American jazz artists with a somewhat politicized view of jazz, its history, and its future. It is unfair to portray the predominantly black “Young Lion” movement (of which the Marsalis brothers and Garrett are leading lights) as a monolith, but it nevertheless has acquired a reputation for obsessing about authenticity and for equating that virtue with African American ethnicity. Thus to many Japanese jazz fans, who by virtue of their chosen hobby are for the most part unusually well-informed and sensitive to racial injustice in the United States, Branford Marsalis and Kenny Garrett’s statements sounded uncomfortably like the popular T-shirt slogan “It’s a black thing, you wouldn’t understand.”

Some responded angrily: “The reason that audiences are cheerless at your [Marsalis’s] concerts is because they know ‘this guy’s not putting him-

self into it.’” Terajima Yasukuni, owner of the Meg jazz coffeehouse in Kichijoji, retorted. To Garrett, who had criticized Japanese fans for being too conservative in their tastes, Terajima said mockingly: “He says, ‘it’s strange that records with standards sell better in Japan’ than our personal originals. . . . do these people really understand jazz?” It’s because we understand jazz that we buy records with standards on them. What is so ‘personal’? You write boring originals with stupid melodies. . . . Try to write a melody better than a standard. We’re all waiting for that.” Other responses were more coolly analytical. In an essay in the intellectual journal Gendai, Murakami Haruki argued that, given Marsalis’s base of support within a militant, “aggressive” black middle class for whom racial pride is paramount, the saxophonist’s remarks were to be expected: “If Branford Marsalis had said in an American interview that ‘Japanese are a wonderful audience who understand jazz as well as we black people do,’ he probably would have been booed down harshly by his supporters in his home country.” But Murakami conceded that Marsalis may have had a point: he urged Japanese who listen to jazz, rap, or blues to appreciate them as more than music, and to “pay a bit more attention to the totality of the history and culture of black people in America.”

Certainly there are many American jazz artists who vociferously dispute the opinions of Marsalis and Garrett. The liner notes to Cannonball Adderley’s 1963 LP Nippon Soul noted “a special quality that Japanese fans bring to adulation of their heroes, an intensity of feeling that many jazz artists have said they often experience as a physical sensation when they perform for Japanese audiences.” “[The Japanese] treat jazz as a high class art form,” drummer Donald “Duck” Bailey has said. “They know, they really know about jazz. . . . They knew more about me than I knew about myself.” In his liner notes to the 1988 live album Pick Hits, guitarist John Scofield complimented Japanese fans for their understanding and appreciation: “When we play in Tokyo we always think the audience is a little more sophisticated than in other places, a little more ‘in tune’ with what we’re trying to do.” Expatriate pianist Tom Pierson also rejects Marsalis’s statement with a sense of wonderment that years of experience have yet to erase, he tells of Japanese fans who treat him “like a soccer star” and kiss his hands in gratitude for his music. In his autobiography, Miles Davis remembered warmly the reception he received on his first visit to Japan in 1964, in spite of his rather inauspicious entrance:

Flying to Japan is a long-ass flight. So I brought coke and sleeping pills with me and I took both. Then I couldn’t go to sleep so I was drinking, too. When we landed there were all these people to meet us at the
airport. We’re getting off the plane and they’re saying, ‘Welcome to Japan, Miles Davis,’ and I threw up all over everything. But they didn’t miss a beat. They got me some medicine and got me straight and treated me like a king. Man, I had a ball, and I have respected and loved the Japanese people ever since. Beautiful people.¹

Ultimately the accuracy of Marsalis’s and Garrett’s allegations about audiences is less important than the assumptions that produced them and the reactions they elicited. The angst that the Marsalis-Garrett controversy engendered in many Japanese jazz devotees was rooted in their historical ambivalence or “complex” about the authenticity of their own jazz culture. The implication that jazz, a music that has touched them deeply, was not really theirs but someone else’s was understandably frustrating. For not only were the remarks made in the wearisome context of “Japan bashing,” but they also forced many Japanese to rethink the various attempts they had made to “authenticate” or legitimate the meanings jazz held for them and the music they produced themselves. Many had grown comfortable with the idea that jazz was a “universal language,” and that one’s appreciation of jazz was as unique as an artist’s “voice.” Many felt that their very obvious preference for the music of black American artists showed that they were “down,” that they understood. Now they were being told that they had missed something, that the meanings they found in jazz were not real, and that their efforts to study, collect, and support the music had amounted to no more than a superficial comprehension.

We might regard the AEC and Marsalis-Garrett controversies as nothing more than examples of the dissonance between artists’ and audiences’ expectations: artists, the conventional wisdom goes, want to press forward into hitherto unknown realms of expression, while audiences want to hear what they already know they like. On the other hand, we might view them as additional manifestations of the contemporary Japanese obsession with their image abroad. One can scarcely watch the television news in Japan without seeing the results of some poll taken among people in foreign countries, which asks them to sum up their impressions of Japan in ridiculously simplistic terms. But these controversies were also the product of particular historical experiences. The respective uproars were products of the Japanese jazz community’s special history of negotiating and defining its own identity in relation to Japan and America. They challenged the dominant narrative of the jazz community’s history, which traced a linear development of artistic progress from “imitation” of American models to “innovation” of original, Japanese music. In sum, the controversies seemed to invalidate, or at best render ineffectual, a consistent, century-long campaign to authenticate jazz in Japan.

Ain’t Nothin’ Like the Real Thing:
The Authenticity Fetish

If we think of “jazz” not only as a music but as a relatively self-contained and identifiable culture, we are unlikely to discover other cultures as consumed with the idea of authenticity. It is an obsession that potentially undermines the rhetorical universality of jazz, as expressed here by Down Beat contributor Michael Bourne in 1950: “Jazz, more than ever before, is a universal language. Around the world, more than the classics, more than rock and roll, jazz has become a universal language, what all music is supposed to be, especially among the young. The spirit of jazz has endured even when outlawed.”³

Though authenticity by definition favors the particular over the universal, it is interesting to note, as have Ingrid Monson and Charley Gerard, that universalist and particularist rhetorics coexist in jazz discourse, often in the same person. “An individual speaking to an interlocutor who underplays the role of African American culture in the music . . . might choose to respond with ethnically assertive comments,” Monson observes. “In a context in which something closer to racial harmony prevails, a musician might choose to invoke a more universalist rhetoric.”⁴

What does authenticity mean? It appears that there is no authentic definition of authenticity: it is so malleable a trope that each author can and does construct a plausible definition appropriate to virtually any historical or artistic subject. While there seems to be general agreement that the idea of authenticity was invented as a peculiarly modern response to the perceived erosion of particularized heritages and identities in an era of globalization, there is otherwise a considerable diversity of definitions and applications. Anthropologists investigating how authentic Third World cultures represent themselves to First World tourists, or how historical sites and artifacts are presented to the public, have defined the concept as verisimilitude, credibility, originality (as opposed to a copy), or authoritativeness. For ethnomusicologists, authenticity means preserving the social contexts of performances, original performance practices, and the spiritual and cultural meanings of music—in other words, accurately representing unfamiliar “world musics” in a manner faithful to their original contexts. Edward Bruner adds that authenticity implies that someone has the power or authority to “authenticate” a representation; the concept of authenticity thus privileges one voice as more legitimate than another. Musicologist Peter Kivy’s analysis of authenticity as an aesthetic standard in music suggests roughly two conceptions: “historical authenticity” (authorial intention, contemporary sound, and contemporary performance practice—the kind of authenticity valued by practitioners of “early music”); and “personal au-
thenticity" (emotive “sincerity,” expressiveness, or assertiveness). Kyri acknowledges that one kind of authenticity necessarily entails sacrifice of the other: “Personal authenticity comes into conflict with a composer’s performing intention or wish, even though the composer may have intended personal authenticity as well.” Philosopher Joel Rudinow offers yet another aesthetic definition of the term as “a species of the genus credibility . . . [whose] most precise, formal, and fully institutionalized application in the artworld is to distinguish from the forgery a work ‘by the author’s own hand.’ . . . More broadly, less precisely, but in an essentially similar way, ‘authenticity’ is applicable to the artifacts and rituals which are a culture’s ‘currency,’ conferring value on those ‘acceptably derived’ from original sources. . . . In such applications authenticity admits of degrees.”

In keeping with established practice, here I adapt and refine the term authenticity to reflect its meaning(s) in the jazz culture. Authenticity in jazz, as in other folk arts, implies that an artist must possess specific qualities—educational background, life experience, ethnic heritage, motivations, or artistic vision—which confer upon the artist the right not only to work unchallenged in a particular medium, but to establish the standard by which all others working in that medium will be judged. Those who are influenced by such work may be deemed “authentic” or “inauthentic” depending either on how closely they adhere to the aesthetic standards enshrined in the “original,” or how closely their personal profiles match the specific experiential, ethnic, or motivational qualities of the “original’s” creator. The standards for determining authenticity may change or be contested, yet some such standard is always in operation and its power is significant.

Authenticity, in this sense, is aestheticized as a criterion in the judgment of taste. Conceptualized thusly, it rather resembles what Pierre Bourdieu has called the “aesthetic disposition” in the reception of art: “Any legitimate work tends in fact to impose the norms of its own perception and tacitly defines as the only legitimate mode of perception the one which brings into play a certain disposition and a certain competence. . . . [A]l agents, whether they like it or not, whether or not they have the means of conforming to them, find themselves objectively measured by those norms.” But whereas Bourdieu (with reference to José Ortega y Gasset) describes an aestheticism in the “legitimate” arts that actively distances itself from human emotions and realities—favoring “form over function”—jazz and other folk or “black expressive” forms value precisely those human qualities that constitute lived experience: earthiness, funk (bodily odor), pain, anger, carnality, and joy. Neither an aristocracy nor a bourgeoisie with aristocratic pretensions establishes these aesthetic norms, but rather a historically despised underclass—whose aesthetic values are then interpreted, translated, codified, and

communicated by bourgeois bohemians (jazz critics) who explicitly reject the value system in which they were brought up. These aesthetic values, ideally rooted in real life experience, represent a standard of authenticity that holds for all who would dare engage in the creative activity in question.

Authenticity and originality are “paramount” in the aesthetics of jazz, and charges of “imitativeness, insincerity or inauthenticity” are the most “devastating” that a jazz artist can suffer. There are a number of standards by which jazz performers are judged for authenticity: they are expected to defy commercial pressures, revere “the tradition,” and “pay dues” as a journeyman or “scuffling” musician. Theoretically, every jazz aficionado would agree that Kyri’s notion of “personal authenticity” is the major criterion for superlative jazz performance. In the real world, however, preoccupied as it is with issues of race and power, what we might call “national authenticity” and “ethnic authenticity” often have more operational power, perhaps because they are easier to determine “objectively” than personal authenticity. In any case, jazz is regarded as an authentic folk expression of quintessentially American values (although since many regard American values to be universally acceptable, that fact does not necessarily disqualify jazz as a “universal language”). In pianist and educator Bill Taylor’s racially neutral language, jazz is “America’s classical music.” “The equation of jazz and America is easy enough to figure,” Robert G. O’Meally writes:

Jazz is freedom music, the play of sounds that prizes individual assertion and group coordination, voices soloing and then (at their best) swinging together, the one-and-many e pluribus unum with a laid-back beat. . . . For all its abstruseness, jazz is an insistently democratic music, one that aims to sound like citizens in a barbershop or grocery line, talking stuff, trading remarks. . . . According to the jazz/democracy perspective, in the growing blueprint society that is the United States we are all improvisers, making it up as we go along and depending on flexibility and resiliency—both hallmarks of the music—to make our way together.10

Yet O’Meally concedes that “while some hear in jazz these broad American themes, others hear in it the essence of black particularity, mystery, and memory: blackness traced in rhythm and tune back to the Old World of Africa.” The racial or ethnic element to the virtue of authenticity has held strong currency ever since the days when French critics such as Hughes Panassie held up Louis Armstrong as an “instinctive” musical genius, a musical “noble savage.” Simply put, it is no mystery that many regard African American ethnicity as a basic precondition of authentic jazz expression. Musicians and critics of diverse ethnic backgrounds concur with
Ralph Gleason’s famous assertion that “the blues is black man’s music, and whites diminish it at best or steal it at worst. In any case they have no moral right to it.” The “black music ideology” first articulated in the 1960s by Amiri Baraka, Frank Kofsky, Stanley Crouch, and others contends that the blues, the root of jazz and other musical genres, is “not an idiom made up of rules that can be taught and transmitted like any other musical form. . . . The blues is not just a music but a world view. The blues is not something that African Americans do but how they live. They are blues people.” Even though the blues has perhaps been lodged in contemporary music by funk and dance music, the ideology continues to resonate in the work of hip-hop critics and authors like Rickey “Uhuru Maggot” Vincent, whose Funk: The Music, the People, and the Rhythm of the One (1996) asserts that “Funk is the means by which black folks confirm identity through rhythm, dance, bodily fluids, and attitude. . . . The idea and the importance of funk comes from the depths of black American life, particularly that aspect of black America which never got around to integrating. . . . The impulse of The Funk rests deep in the ‘Soul of Black Folk’ (to borrow from W. E. B. Du Bois). . . . One might even claim that it is the funky nature of black Americans that is the salvation of this nation.” Rudinoff reflects that in the age of political correctness such assertions of racial essentialism and cultural ownership seem “paradoxically to be both progressive and reactionary.”

The jazz culture is usually regarded as relatively exemplary in terms of race relations, and veteran musicians such as the late Doc Cheatham (who once said “I don’t know what they mean by black music. I have never seen any black music. I’ve seen black notes on white paper”) are appalled by the racial polarization of the jazz world at the end of the twentieth century. But today that world has become another battleground in the culture wars, prized turf to be secured and defended in the seemingly unending struggle to define and preserve essentialist notions of culture and identity. Working hands “voluntarily segregate” themselves: young black musicians have become marketable emblems of racial pride; and even institutions such as the National Endowment for the Arts American Jazz Masters Fellowships and jazz at Lincoln Center are accused of “Crow Jim” (or “reverse racist”) tendencies. Wynton Marsalis, artistic director of the Lincoln Center program, has retorted that “the great innovators in jazz have been African American and . . . it is necessary to spotlight the top rung first before moving on to the lesser contributions of whites.”

Dissonance in historical perspective underlies this debate: historically speaking, which “race” created jazz, and therefore owns it? Although in recent years a number of writers have responded to racial polarization by attempting to document significant contributions to the art’s development by nonblack artists (examples include James Lincoln Collier’s Jazz: America’s Theme Song, Gene Lees’s Cats of Any Color, and Richard M. Sudhalter’s Lost Chords: White Musicians and Their Contribution to Jazz, 1915–1945), the “melting pot” metaphor expressed by Dan Morgenstern of the Rutgers University Institute of Jazz Studies is hotly contested. “I see jazz as an American music which came into being through the interaction between different musical elements,” Morgenstern says. “And what was so fascinating about jazz was the mixture of European and African and Latin American and, you know, all kinds of Native American, all these elements coming together and out of that came a new music.” By contrast, saxophonist Archie Shepp dismisses this view: “This is my music. I want to make that clear. . . . In my estimation, so-called jazz music is founded on African American blues idioms. Now what did Western music give to the blues? Except to give the people who sang it the blues?” After all, Leadbelly once said, “Never was a white man had the blues, cause nothin’ to worry about.” Put even more succinctly, what Morgenstern calls “interaction” and “mixture” Amiri Baraka regards as the “Great Music Robbery.”

For any Japanese performing or identifying with a musical genre typically characterized as “black”—jazz, soul, reggae, funk, Afro-Cuban, rhythm and blues, or gospel—ethnic authenticity and credibility are major issues (“Japanese rap? Makes as much sense as Polynesian polkas, right?”). Suggestions that Japanese cannot be authentic jazz performers because of their lack of ethnic authenticity are puerile, but these musicians’ “personal authenticity” has often been maligned as well by Japanese and non-Japanese alike. Evaluations of the personal authenticity of Japanese jazz artists are too often rooted in common assumptions about the derivative nature and inherent uncreativity of Japanese people. In The Penguin Guide to Jazz on CD, LP and Cassette, British critics Richard Cook and Brian Morton simultaneously acknowledge the existence of these unflattering stereotypes, while shamelessly and gleefully using them to critique recordings. A review of Duke Jordan’s Kiss of Spain, featuring the rhythm team of Ino Nobuyoshi and Togashi Masahiko, states, “It would be nice to say that the Japanese rhythm section had managed to defy the stereotype and play relaxed, swinging jazz. Alas, no; not a hair out of place, not a cue missed, but hardly swinging.” Of keyboardist Akagi Kei, the authors note, “Like a lot of Japanese, he has a secure technique and a slightly chilly delivery.” A review of bassist Peter Kowald’s Duos: Europa, America, Japan singles out the Japanese participants for abuse: the music “works fine with the Westerners, but there are inevitable difficulties with the Japanese players . . . [rooted in] basic aesthetic philosophies . . . most of the [Japanese] espouse a kind of violent synthesis between great formality of diction and very disruptive abstraction.” A
Charles Mingus recording from 1971 is spoiled by a “typically well-coached but utterly uninspired Japanese band” (Miyana Toshiyuki’s New Herd). Even Japanese audiences are not immune from criticism: according to Cook and Morton, two of Scott Hamilton’s live albums are marred by “the irritation of a relentlessly self-congratulatory Japanese audience (who applaud themselves every time they recognize a standard).” Kodansha’s authoritative Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopedia does Japanese jazz artists no better service, but rather neatly sums up the stereotypes and prejudices with which many view jazz in Japan:

One Western genre that has firmly established itself within the Japanese music scene is jazz. Japan is home to an important and highly profitable market for jazz, boasting numerous clubs, some of the best jazz magazines in the world, and a steady core of avid fans. Major international jazz figures play extensively in Japan’s clubs and concert halls. The flourishing scene has also produced native musicians like saxophonist Watanabe Sadao, regarded as the patriarch of Japanese jazz, Hino Terumasa, and Watanabe Kazumi, and jazz fusion groups Casiopea and T Square. Yet while many of Japan’s jazz artists display marvelous technical ability, few display any real originality.16

Yasumi Takashi, a jazz pianist who played in the University of Minnesota Jazz Band and currently works for the Japan—United States Education Commission, regards his own improvisations as nothing more than an assemblage of licks he has heard by American artists. He admits to a certain prejudice against Japanese jazz artists, claiming that they have mastered technique but express themselves poorly through improvisation. His prejudice against native artists was hardly unique, judging from the number of times even the most generous and cooperative of my informants laughed at the idea of an American historian studying jazz in Japan. They often asked why I would “go to the trouble” of coming to Japan to study jazz, when I’m from the “jazz homeland” (jazz no honba). Most insist that Japanese have contributed nothing to the music and therefore merit little attention, especially from an American. (Incidentally, the prejudice against nonblack, non-American musicians applies to European artists as well: as Jean-Philippe Andre noted in an 1989 exposé in France’s Jazz Magazine, even French musicians are the “wrong” ethnicity for Japanese jazz audiences.)17

However, an alleged failure to meet criteria of ethnic and personal authenticity as defined by Americans is only part of the Japanese jazz artist’s dilemma. Historically speaking, jazz performers and aficionados have also had to answer to another standard of authenticity: that of native Japanese culture itself. From the perspective of the social mainstream, jazz has always been and remains not only an alien culture but a paramount example of American cultural imperialism, which actively contributes to the erosion of indigenous social and aesthetic norms. Insofar as modern Japanese history is largely the tale of a struggle to locate and preserve the purity and integrity of a native culture that is imagined to be definable and uniform, people who found particular appeal in jazz music have struggled to define their identities according to (at least) two very different standards. For most of the twentieth century, in fact, jazz folk were singled out as inimical to the national project of nurturing and preserving Japan’s cultural “essence,” even if that essence was subject to constant reformulation as circumstances dictated.

Well before the crash modernization and “internationalization” programs and the assault by “intrusive” Western cultures and technologies in the last two centuries, Japanese struggled to define the parameters of “Japaneseness.” For centuries prolific and perceptive students of ideas and institutions from continental Asia, Europe, and the United States, Japanese have thus often fixated on identifying a native core essence. One contemporary manifestation of this tendency was the best-selling mass market and academic literature of the 1970s and 1980s known as “discourses on the Japanese” (Nihonjinron), which testified to the uniqueness and purity of an unchanging “Japanese culture.” Proponents argue that Japan’s geographical isolation engendered “unique” systems of social relations, cultural values, and aesthetic sensibilities. Japanese and Western scholars have reacted by demonstrating that “Japanese culture” is an artificially coherent and misleadingly monolithic category of relatively recent pedigree, contrived to suppress the very real differences, innovations, variations, complexities, and conflicts that have driven modern Japanese history. Yet even if it is a “phantasm,” the idea of “Japanese culture” has proven irresistible, durable, and compelling, as the popularity of Nihonjinron literature suggests.18 Its ideas are so commonplace as to have permeated respectable social scientific and even physiological scholarship: the pioneering sociologist of mass culture Katō Hidetoshi argues that “Japanese popular culture is unique, and its research methodology requires that special consideration be given to this singularity,” while Tsunoda Tadanobu describes functional differences between Japanese and “Western” brains in his best-selling treatise.19

When publicized abroad, Nihonjinron notions make Japanese look not only racist but ridiculous. But the premises of these ideas—that there is a genetically determined and therefore immutable, proprietary relationship between race and culture, and that cultures possess definable, pure, and uniform essences—pass for conventional wisdom virtually everywhere.
They most certainly inform the ideology of jazz as “black music.” Although several scholars have demonstrated that one of the legacies of imperialism is the inherent heterogeneous hybridity of all “cultures”—indeed, one can argue that such was the case well before imperialism—and that “cultures” have no identifiable essences that hold meaning for all individuals, the power of “race thinking” and of notions of definable cultural quintessence remain undisturbed. In both the Japanese and black American nationalist cases, such ideologies are constructed in response to political and economic marginalization (both real and imagined) and fears of cultural dilution or extinction (again, both real and imagined). Their veracity may be questionable in coldly rational terms, but their power is not. They are basic to identity formation and empowerment efforts. They are also pivotal to understanding the process by which omnipresent art forms such as jazz are transmitted, received, and evaluated. Still, as Edward Said has suggested, we need not accept this situation in perpetuity: “No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness, as if that was all human life was about.”

Jazz in Japan and “Japanese Jazz”

Over the past several years I have often been asked, “Does Japanese jazz sound different?” It is a question that innocently assumes not only the homogeneity of “Japanese jazz” but also the “naturalness” of non-American performers incorporating traditional indigenous musics into their jazz. Ethnomusicologist Timothy Taylor has remarked that non-Western musicians “face constant pressure from westerners to remain musically and otherwise premodern—that is, culturally ‘natural’—because of racism and western demands for authenticity.” Many Western critics complain of non-Western artists “selling out” their traditions, while applauding the “creative choices” exercised by artists such as Paul Simon or Peter Gabriel, who appropriate (and copyright) non-Western musics. In her research on contemporary fashion, sociologist Lise Skov notes a similar compulsion to categorize the work of Japanese fashion designers as examples of a “profound ‘Japaneseness.’” Designer Yamamoto Yōji at first embraced but later resisted the “orientalist” expectations of Western fashion mavens: “There is no nationality in my clothes. . . My clothes shouldn’t have any nation. But when I came to Paris I realized, and I was pushed to realize, that I am Japanese because I was told ‘You are here representing mode japonaise.’” In response to Kawakubo Rei’s challenging early-eighties designs, many European fashion critics tried to make sense of her work through reductive inferences about the influence of Zen aesthetics. But, Skov contends, Kawakubo’s “Comme des Garçons garments have rarely carried any overt allusions to either a particular culture or a specific historical situation. Kawakubo has tended to empty her clothes of any recognizable connotations.” While “certain forms of Japanese aesthetics” may influence aspects of Kawakubo’s work, Skov argues, it is necessary to prevent “the innovative and provocative features of her design from being reduced to mere reiterations of stereotypical aspects of ‘Japanese aesthetics.’” Other examples of the compulsion to locate contemporary art forms within a unitary trajectory of Japanese art and aesthetics are abundant, particularly in studies of cinema and anime. It matters little that Japanese filmmakers, painters, poets, and composers have drawn on multinational sources of inspiration to create work that they view as universal; they continue to be pigeonholed as quintessentially Japanese.

This compulsion appears in previous studies of jazz in Japan, although the authors rarely feel a similar compulsion to defend their assertions with evidence. (A typical example is Richard Ichirō Mayeda’s hedging statement, “Japanese jazz is jazz tinged with a Japanese flavor. I believe this is true, but it is difficult to prove without considerable technical detail that would be of little interest to the average reader.”) Elizabeth Sesler-Beckman’s thesis argues more forcefully for the existence of a distinctive Japanese variation of the jazz idiom (and presents comparative musicological evidence to “prove” her contention):

The Japanese musicians that emerged [between 1965 and 1970] were often playing a highly emotional and many times extreme music which did not, on the face of it, reflect such traditional Japanese values as love of order or quiet tranquility. Yet it is my hypothesis that this musical movement represents the highest form of Japanese expression and that it is, in fact, a powerful example of Japanese culture flowering through the form of American jazz. It is here that a national Japanese jazz style emerges, and it is here that Japanese musicians have found the juncture where imitation of old forms has become something truly new and innovative. Musicians such as Hino [Terumasa], Yamashita [Yosuke], Togashi [Masahiko], and Satoh [Masahiko] have successfully captured not just the trappings of traditional Japanese musical forms but the actual essence of what it is to be Japanese within their musical improvisations.

While shooting footage for his documentary film Tokyo Blues: Jazz and Blues in Japan, Craig McInturk told the Japan Times that “there are palpable differences in Japanese jazz.” “If jazz is an international language, every country
has its own dialect. In Japan some people leave more space in the music. You could call it the Zen approach to music, sort of like less is more.”24 (In consultations during the postproduction phase of McTurk’s film, I pointed out that Zen is a rigorous spiritual practice that is as alien and unnatural an approach to life to most Japanese as it is to most Americans. I had never met a jazz musician who had studied Zen, let alone self-consciously incorporated its aesthetic principles into performances. Furthermore, respect for space is nothing unique to any one country or philosophy, as the music of Thelonious Monk, Miles Davis, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, and Sun Ra attest.)

While a handful of Japanese jazz artists indeed have elected to “Japanize” jazz, most others understandably resent the assumption that this is the only legitimate creative avenue open to them. Pianist Kikuchi Masabumi (“Pooh”) indignantly recalled an encounter in the sixties with saxophone colossus Sonny Rollins, who reportedly lectured, “Because you all are Orientals your mission is to tie Oriental music to jazz.”25 As an artist whose authentic jazz credentials were above reproach (and who spent a great deal of time studying traditional Japanese religion and art), Rollins must have felt he was in a position to suggest directions for potential Japanese exploration. Failure to follow such sage advice put at risk the acknowledgment of Japanese artists by one of the masters. But Rollins is not alone in his preconceptions. While watching a live performance of percussion-heavy Afro-Cuban music in Chicago, a colleague once asked me if Japanese performed music in such a style. When I told him about talented percussionists I had seen—Yahiro Tomohiro and Senba Kiyohiko, and the world-famous Japanese salsa band Orquesta de la Luz—he shook his head. “They shouldn’t do that. They’ve got their own wonderful traditions.”

Paradoxically, those very “wonderful traditions” have been looked upon as the source of both Japanese failures and successes in the jazz idiom. For instance, traditional modes of transmission/education and of social organization within Japanese artistic communities are often said to contribute to a lack of spontaneity, creative assertiveness, and imaginative exploration. On the other hand, some of the Japanese jazz artists who have received the most international praise are those who conspicuously draw on their heritage to incorporate textures and aesthetic principles associated with traditional Japan, thereby creating what many have imagined to be a recognizable “national dialect.”

The persistent illusion that Japan is a “nation of imitators,” psychologically incapable of originality and socialized to devalue creativity, is a stereotype that far too many Japanese believe themselves, one which hardly does justice to the artistic legacies of Murasaki Shikibu, Chikamatsu Monzaemon, Kurosawa Akira, Sesshū, Kawabata Yasunari, Bashō, and Akiyoshi Toshiko. It is, in fact, a stereotype of relatively recent pedigree, rooted in the Japanese state’s persistent efforts since the mid-nineteenth century to achieve parity with the Western nations by studying and following their examples. The “imitator” stereotype remains powerful today: it is at the heart of frictions between Japan and the United States over technology transfers, and underlies calls for national education reform. It also explains why Japan’s most accomplished and popular jazz artists are identified as “the Japanese version” of someone else—“Japan’s Satchmo” (Namie Fumio), “Japan’s Sonny Rollins” (Miyazawa Akira), and “Japan’s Gene Krupa” (George Kawaguchi).26

The “nation of imitators” is an offensive stereotype, but it is rooted in some very real historical and social realities: the consensual value of conformity in Japan; the education system’s willful failure to encourage critical thinking; the historical legacy of centuries of “cultural borrowing”; and the primacy of the “school” (isome) in Japan’s artistic and musical tradition. “The West believes in the personality,” musicologist Eta Harich-Schneider has written, “The East believes in the school. A work of art is evaluated in the West by its degree of independence and originality; in the East as a perfect specimen of a type.” To achieve the aesthetic ideal of “a perfect specimen of a type,” music education (including the popular Suzuki violin method) has for centuries focused on mastery of “form” (kata), which theoretically leads to the pupil’s understanding of the internal principles. Christine Yano argues that kata continues to be relevant in karaoke singing: “It is a frankly mimetic activity . . . [giving rise to a kind of] individualism which is highly patterned, relying upon the fixedness of the form more than the originality of expression. A karaoke singer in Japan is not singing as Hideo Tanaka (pseudonym) but rather as Hideo-Tanaka-in-the-form-of-Kitajima-Saburo (well-known enka singer).” Patterned “kata of music, text, gesture . . . makes the expression culturally safe and understandable.”27 According to this line of argument, the process by which “new or imported forms of mass culture often acquire a dō, or specific way,”28 explains the historical tendency for some Japanese jazz artists to strongly identify with the style of a particular American master, to the extent of even embracing a reputation as the “Japanese version” of that master. While some artists attribute these labels to simple-minded and even hostile critics—pianist Sugino Kichirō complains that “they’re always calling some Japanese musician the ‘Japanese Coltrane’ or the ‘Japanese Miles Davis.’” They won’t let the young people who are creating original music have any credit for it”—keyboardist Satō Masahiko concedes that there was a time in the late fifties and early sixties when Japanese musicians meeting for the first time asked one an-
other. “By the way, who are you imitating?”’” Sugita Kuniko, a language teacher who played saxophone in a modern jazz combo at Waseda University, told me about how her bandmates staunchly identified themselves as disciples either of Sonny Rollins or of John Coltrane, debating the saxophonists’ relative merits ad nauseam.

Several people whom I interviewed insisted that something strongly akin to the old iemoto system governs social practices in the jazz community. As with other occupations in premodern Japan, artistry was an inherited trade. The iemoto system consists of real and fictive kinship relations between masters and hereditary or “adopted” disciples who trace their “lineage” to the founder or head of the iemoto. Examples of arts, trades, and crafts governed by this system include ikebana (flower arranging), tea ceremony, gangsters, martial arts, painting, calligraphy, music, theater, archery, incense burning, mathematics, and dancing. Traditionally the iemoto master’s authority in setting standards for style, content, and behavior is unquestioned. Disciples are not free to reinterpret a style that is assumed to have achieved inner perfection; rather they master established techniques through “unconscious imitation” through slow, secretive oral lessons that heighten the “superiority and mystery” of the master’s authority. The disciple begins as an apprentice, then is accredited as a member of a fictive family. The disciple even assumes a new name (go), using the school’s name as a surname and the root of the master’s name in the personal name. With this name is conferred the prestige of the master’s school, and the disciple owes unflinching loyalty and service to it, in exchange for professional promotion by the master. Disciples are ranked by years of accreditation, skill, and closeness to the master. They are not to compete among themselves but rather engage in mutual aid throughout their professional careers.

I have no evidence to suggest that Japan’s jazz community has ever been anywhere near this formal in structure, but there clearly are band apprenticeships and hierarchies of musicians and aficionados based on age, ability, and experience. Some have found them to be so formal and powerful as to be suffocating. Hinata Toshifumi, a keyboardist and enormously successful composer of television and film music, claimed that the dominance of this “apprentice system” (coupled with a general feeling that nonblacks cannot play jazz authentically anyway) was behind his decision to get out of jazz. After an intense education at Boston’s competitive Berklee school, he returned to Japan and found it hard to gig without connections to certain prominent individuals. There are ramifications to ignoring the etiquette of iemoto-like relations: jazz writer Segawa Masahisa described the immensely popular pianist Onishi Junko as a “rebel” who often gets in trouble for her lack of backstage manners, consistently failing to make the obligatory deferential greetings to older musicians. Finally, two alums of Waseda University jazz bands, Sugita Kuniko and Anzai Takeshi, describe an environment in which the hierarchical relationships between upperclassmen (senpai) and underclassmen (kōhai), and between students and “old boys” (OB kai, band alumni) were basic. Anzai was the head (gakuchō) of the accomplished Waseda High Society Orchestra when I met him in 1994. At rehearsal, he was accorded much respect and many bows from his bandmates, but the actual running of the rehearsal was delegated to another student. None of the band members are music majors; there is no faculty advisor and no formal class in jazz theory or pedagogy. Rather, High Society is a club entirely run by extremely self-motivated students. The veterans take responsibility for initiating the newcomers in the intricacies of improvisation, arranging, jazz history, and aesthetics. But as with iemoto, the maintenance of High Society’s international reputation so as not to let the “old boys” down is of paramount importance. A grueling practice regimen (at the expense of schoolwork, naturally) ensures the preservation of the tradition. (As of 1994, High Society had toured the United States five times and performed in India, China, and Sweden.)

I do not wish to dismiss lightly the residual influence of katas and iemoto in contemporary Japanese aesthetic practice, but modern transformations of aesthetic and social mores limit their value in understanding jazz culture in Japan. Such systems are neither peculiar to Japan nor antithetical to practices in the jazz world. Harich-Schneider’s East-West formulation in particular understates the fact that Western aesthetic practice (if not theory) often rewards formula or technical virtuosity at the expense of artistic “originality” or “soul.” “Originality” and “soul” themselves are problematic and difficult to judge. As George Clinton’s lamooping song “What is Soul?” suggests, the aesthetic virtue of “soul” can just as easily be used to perpetuate comical stereotypes of black Americans as to extoll their artistic achievements. Moreover, what some listeners regard as “original” may be little more than the manipulation of old tricks in new ways. The process of extemporaneous performance has been demystified by cross-cultural studies, which demonstrate that structure, formulae, and extensive preparation are as basic to improvisation as to composition. Even the most “original” of jazz artists betray the influence of somebody in their own work, and all “original” jazz artists are recognizable for melodic and rhythmic signatures on which they fall back at every performance. Every serious student of the music begins by listening to, transcribing, analyzing, and replicating the improvised solos of the masters. This is and has always been basic to jazz education, whether formal or informal.

Furthermore, the differences between iemoto and the jazz world’s aes-
thet and social hierarchies are more of degree than of kind. As the music has developed over time, jazz has subdivided into stylistic schools or sects, founded by a few exceptional musicians whom all other musicians within the style revere. Apprenticeships with name bands, such as Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers or Betty Carter's trio, confer legitimacy in much the same way that Japanese ismoto do. All young jazz artists are expected to demonstrate familiarity with and master the musical lessons of Parker, Ellington, Monk, and a few select others; to achieve credibility in the contemporary jazz scene, it is said, one must "deal with the Duke." Mastery of the now-mainstream language of bebop—the ability to "play changes"—is considered essential before a musician can legitimately explore alternative avenues of expression. (Ornette Coleman's refusal or inability to "play changes" makes him suspect to many aficionados, some forty years after he burst on the scene.) In reality, this is not much less constraining than the traditional music training regimen in Japan: in both cases, there are masters, there are students, there are established curricula and practice procedures, and there are expectations of individual achievement within those boundaries. Jazz musicians, no more or less than musicians in other traditions, face the paradox of appearing to be in "the tradition" while still doing their "own thing." It is thus indefensible to argue that the Japanese have a peculiar penchant for identifying a "perfect" way of doing things; conducive to the development of flawless technique and formula rather than to individual expression and novelty. Tom Pierson, a pianist and composer who abandoned New York City for the safer streets of Tokyo in 1991, turns the stereotype of the "imitative" Japanese on its head in his critique of the neoconservative Young Lions ("kittens," in his words): he calls Wynton Marsalis "a Japanese jazzman, in the worst sense of the word."

If "Japanese tradition" is of limited value in explaining the alleged "defects" in jazz performed by Japanese, might it account for its successes? There are those who would say yes, some of whom were quoted earlier. Japanese jazz artists who have incorporated instruments, repertoire, and textures from indigenous traditional music have certainly garnered attention that might otherwise have eluded them. But "Japanese jazz" (a term I use here exclusively to denote the concept of a national style of jazz peculiar to Japan) is more than a cynical concession to audience demands for exoticism. Historically speaking, the idea of a singular Japanese national style of jazz was constructed as an authenticating strategy to assuage the various dilemmas the Japanese jazz community has faced. Japan as a nation has invested considerable effort in the cultivation of a distinctive national cultural identity, and this effort finds expression no less in the jazz community than in other artistic communities and subcultures. The Japanese jazz community has historically regarded itself as a distinctive entity within the jazz world, an island nation unto itself, and has framed its identity in a way that is consonant with ideologies of the ethnic and cultural exceptionalism of the Japanese nation. This sense of separation from the jazz "mainstream" (which runs, of course, in the United States) is physically manifested and thus normalized in the record store bins, where albums by Japanese artists are invariably clustered together at the end of the jazz section, and in distinct readers' and critics' polls for Japanese and non-Japanese artists (with virtually no crossover of Japanese into the "regular" polls). The jazz community often speaks of "Japanese jazz" as a coherent whole, with specific objectives, shared shortcomings, and developmental strategies that echo the rhetoric of national development employed by government and industry. Through the idea of a national style, Japanese jazz artists have attempted to resolve the following quandaries: what are the expressive possibilities of an "American" art in a non-American culture? Does a performer surrender his or her national or ethnic identity when performing jazz? Or is it possible to express that identity through the "American" art of jazz? If so, does such expression constitute a unique national style? Can such a national style be considered authentic jazz?

Creating a "Japanese jazz" is just one of several authenticating strategies I have identified in my research. It is clear that the strategic paradigms used by performers and aficionados to authenticate jazz in Japan have been variegated and rooted in the demands of particular historical moments. These paradigms inevitably resound in the music of particular eras. Recordings from the decades immediately following the world wars indicate that musicians were listening closely to and attempting to replicate the feats of America's jazz giants. But recordings from the years of the Pacific War or from the late 1950s onward demonstrate a willingness to tinker with jazz, to "indigenize" it, and even to forge a distinctive national style. Clearly the authenticating strategies and aesthetic imperatives shifted with historical developments, particularly those that involved Japan's self-conceptions and political and cultural relationship with the United States. In the 1930s enterprising jazzmen sought authenticity in the seedy "jazz frontier" of Shanghai; in the 1950s they mingled conspicuously with black American croon and shot heroin backstage; and in the 1980s their quest led them to Boston's Berklee School of Music (where Japanese comprise some 10 percent of the student body) and apprenticeships in American bands. But a national style promised to be the most effective strategy, in that it would resolve all aspects of the authenticity complex: it would demonstrate Japanese creativity and
personal authenticity, reverse the jazz community's alienation from the native cultural mainstream, and render moot comparisons to an ethnic standard of authenticity established in America.

All too well aware of the value of individual creativity in jazz, many Japanese artists naturally have not been uncomfortable as "the Japanese version" of their American heroes. Veteran saxophonist Oda Satoru admits that he was bothered when he was billed as "Japen's Lester Young" at a performance in Ireland, but sighs that it was the most convenient way to "label" him for an audience unfamiliar with his work. He was much more pleased when another European festival described his music as "Asian jazz" in its promotions. One solution to the discomfort of being recognized as the kagemusha ("double") of an American jazz giant has been to transform the perceived ethnic "disadvantage" into a vehicle for an allegedly unique Japanese expression within the jazz idiotm, something that would distinguish the music of Japanese artists from that of Americans. The result, it was argued, would be an inimitable national style of jazz that would express the "Japanese essence," a music that would be recognizably Japanese and constitute a unique contribution to the collective jazz oeuvre.

The desire to assert a Japanese national identity through music was by no means unique to jazz. In fact, proponents of a national style of jazz could and did look for musical and philosophical inspiration from a number of classical composers, such as Takemitsu Tōru (1930–1996), Miki Minoru, Yuasa Jōji, and Akutagawa Yasushi, who were groping toward similar goals. Hillary Tann describes this effort as a "search for a voice within a universal musical language" and an important motivating force in contemporary Japanese music. Judith Ann Herd depicts a "neonationalist" tradition whose stated goal was the establishment of "an independent voice" free from "European cultural imperialism." As I describe in Chapters 4 and 6, similar movements to liberate Japanese artists from their obsession with American models distinguish the late thirties and early forties and the late sixties in Japan's jazz history.

There are those within Japan's jazz community who may invoke the "universal language" metaphor—the idea that jazz is a music unique in its capacity to speak to and for all peoples—yet who still feel that Japanese are the "wrong" ethnicity to perform authentic jazz. Ironically, the same racialist premises can be and have been invoked to assert the creation of a jazz that only ethnic Japanese could create, which "foreigners cannot imitate." The late Yui Shoichi, a prominent jazz critic who expounded at great length on the subject of a national style, highlighted the ambiguity in a statement quoted by Sesler-Beckman: "Jazz has gone from a national [American] nu-

sic to an international music and now is both national and international. Japanese jazz was born in the sixties and represents a uniquely Japanese expression. We are now in some ways more spiritual and more technically advanced than Westerners.

Jazz is an international music in that all nations have jazz; but, as Yui explained elsewhere, each country has developed its own distinctive national tradition and sound, and therefore jazz constitutes a form of national expression and a mark of national difference. (In his Jazz in Black and White, Charley Gerard demonstrates a similar comfort with this ambiguity when he states that "Jazz is somehow able to be both an African-American ethnic music and a universal music at the same time, both an expression of universal artistry and ethnicity.") In later years Yui would refer to this conceptualization as "jazz nationalism."

What do Japanese consider to be jazz? There are about as many definitions as there are jazz musicians and fans in Japan. For some, Japanese jazz represents the fusion of the improvisatory, harmonic, and rhythmic elements of jazz with native pentatonic scales, folk melodies, or instrumentation. Such musical experimentation first occurred in the mid-to-late 1930s, but has continued sporadically throughout the decades. One of the most successful representatives of this approach is the bamboo flute (shakuhachi) master Yamamoto Hōzan, who has almost single-handedly brought a new timbre to the tonal palette of jazz. Many proponents of a national style have pointed to Yamamoto as the ultimate example of an original artist who expresses "the Japanese heart" in a way that foreigners could not hope to emulate. But traditional Japanese music, such as court music (gagaku) and folk songs (min'yō) are no more related to ethnicity than are jazz or Western classical music. Japanese jazz musicians have repeatedly confessed that mastering the vocabularies of indigenous musics did not come naturally to them, but rather required considerable effort, in spite of their supposed ethnic "advantage." Moreover, a number of non-Japanese—from John Coltrane, Tony Scott, and Charlie Mariano, to Herbie Mann, John Kaizan Neptune, John Zorn, and Jamaaladeen Tacuma—have successfully incorporated Japanese folk melodies and instrumentation into their music. If "Japanese jazz" is no more than a musical fusion, it hardly constitutes an inimitable national style that comes naturally to Japanese and is impossible for foreigners to replicate.

Yet the fusion of traditional Japanese musics with jazz strikes many proponents of a national style as too gimmicky and does not begin to do justice to their concept of "Japanese jazz." For them, there is something much more intangible, even mystical, that distinguishes jazz performed by Japanese artists: a Japanese artist playing Tin Pan Alley tunes on the Western
piano unconsciously expresses his or her ethnic identity as much as an improvised koto player does, they say. As cited in Chapter 6, Yui Shōichi and percussionist Togashi Masahiko, among others, have highlighted the importance of “space” (ma), the relatively long, pregnant intervals between notes, as a distinctive feature of Japanese jazz. When challenged with the rebuttal that Thelonious Monk, Miles Davis, and many other non-Japanese artists have accorded a great deal of respect to space in their music, they respond that the Japanese “sense of space” is unique because it is spontaneous and “unconscious” rather than calculated for effect.

Aside from space, there are supposedly other ephemeral characteristics that make Japanese jazz distinctive. Saxophonist Oda Satoru has coined the term “yellow jazz” to connote an as-yet undeveloped style, using what he calls Asian techniques, sounds, scales, and spirit, which Japanese and other Asians “have in their blood” and should develop further. Another conceptualization comes from stereo dealer Sugiura Shūichi and his wife Hitomi, activist jazz fans who reside in Okayama outside of Nagoya. The Suguras insist that when they listen to a jazz performance they can identify the ethnicity of the performer. (I am often asked if I ever tested them, and while it was tempting, I came to the conclusion that proving or disproving their “ethnic listening” skills would serve no purpose.) For them, Japanese jazz is moodier and less energetic than American jazz. They believe that Japanese are basically a sad people (this from some of the most cheerful people I know) and that the sadness reflected in song forms such as enka colors their jazz. Through the common language of jazz, the Suguras say, Americans and Japanese express themselves in ways that are determined by their respective backgrounds and that will be understood by their respective audiences. Shūichi used colors to illustrate his conception: jazz is red, Japanese culture is white, and Japanese jazz is pink.

It should be acknowledged that Japanese jazz as a coherent national style is not a concept accepted by most jazz aficionados, but even those who scoff at the idea feel that jazz as played by Japanese is subtly different, usually with the added implication that it is ultimately inferior to the American product. Sugiura Shūichi asserts that Japanese do not have the physical power to play jazz like Americans so they must play their own way. Segawa Masahisa contends that the “inferior” physique, lack of power, and lung capacity of Japanese accounts for the lack of any “powerful” trumpeters in Japan’s jazz pantheon. But the problems do not end at the front line: “Japanese rhythm sections are often much weaker,” pianist Imada Masaru has said. “Japanese are very tight, but Americans are more relaxed, more jazzy.” Saxophonist Inagaki Jirō cites experiences playing with Bud Shank and Lionel Hampton in which he and other Japanese musicians, operating on what he calls “Japanese time,” played their parts too early compared with their American counterparts. Inagaki’s son Masayuki adds that the Japanese rhythmic sense is impaired: they cannot play behind the beat or the chord for fear of “messing up.” Elsewhere Inagaki is quoted as saying, “Japanese just can’t match the quality of the American players. They can read music well, and pick up on concepts quickly. But the individual musicians don’t devote themselves to their instruments and their music like the Americans do. We’ve produced a few top players in this country…. But I don’t think we’ll ever catch up.”

Finally, there are those who believe that the very idea of a national style is inimical to the individualistic aesthetic principles of jazz, if not outright ridiculous. Avant-garde saxophonist and Stir Up! bandleader Hayasaka Sachi is one of many who regard jazz as a music in which individual creativity is the only determining factor and national or ethnic origin have no bearing. Pianist and Mix Dynamite leader Itabashi Fumio believes that “Itabashi jazz,” not “Japanese jazz,” should always be his first concern. Then there is Isono Tero (“Terry”), a drummer,HI, critic, former club owner, and former vinyl employee, who scoffs at the very idea of “Japanese jazz.” It’s all American music, he says, adding, “Japanese have no originality.” I asked Isono what he would say to musicians like Satō Masahiko and Togashi Masahiko, who at one point in their careers made the creation of Japanese jazz their missions. He offered the following words of advice: “It’s impossible. It’s unnecessary. Just quit it.”

Three decades after the last major push for a national jazz voice, one must conclude that this particular authenticating strategy has failed to convince the average aficionado, as have all other authenticating strategies. A 1989 piece in Japan Update portrayed a jazz scene that was uncommonly harsh for native artists:

Ironically, it’s Japan’s love of this American idiom that drives most young musicians away from their own dreams. The music, too many in Hayasaka [Sachi]’s potential young audience, just doesn’t seem “authentic” unless it’s played by Americans. The craze is for performers from the U.S., who therefore naturally demand the highest prices they can get—much more, “sometimes ten times as much,” than most could command in their own country—and thereby drain the coffers of performance and recording fees that might go to Japanese musicians.

... The paucity of jobs and money fosters a strange irony in which young Japanese musicians leave the richest jazz market in the world—Japan—to find work and to study in America, home of the musicians who are making all the money.
... Why play for pennies, standing before audiences who think that in Japanese jazz, they're hearing only second-best imitations? Because they love it."

Indeed, if I have hammered home the idea that Japanese are convinced of their own inauthenticity, it must be conceded that they have continued to play this music. I know of some performers for whom the authenticity complex has proven artistically and professionally crippling, but for the vast majority of players its power cannot match their love for the art and their determination to understand it, feel it, and express themselves through it. It might even be argued that in some cases the authenticity complex has given them more incentive to pour their whole selves into the creative process, to peer deeper into themselves and into their imaginations than they might have otherwise. Inagaki's contention that individual musicians in Japan "don't devote themselves to their instruments and their music like the Americans do," is rather unfair, for those Japanese who have succeeded artistically and commercially could not have overcome the psychological, racial, and commercial obstacles described above without such devotion. "When I started it was the utmost compliment if you were told that you sounded exactly like an American jazz musician," trumpeter Hino Terumasa maintains in Craig McTurk's documentary Tokyo Blues, "But nowadays, if you're told that you sound like someone else, it's a criticism."

In the interest of challenging these widespread assumptions about cultural authenticity, I present the experiences of Japan's jazz artists and aficionados with the intention of asking the reader to consider the possibility that Japanese too might be "blues people"—in Baraka's sense of folk who not only play music but live it. In the 1960s Japanese made the case that there must be an indigenous musical analogue to the blues because both Japanese and people of African ancestry shared a history of oppression by whites. But that is far too simple and problematic an equation, and is not what I mean by my suggestion. If blues-based music is, as Baraka, Cornel West, and others insist, an outlook or "mode of being" as much as an expressive idiom, then one can make a case for Japanese who identify strongly with such music. In Tokyo Blues pianist Yamashita Yosuke characterizes jazz as a "kind of gift for people living in the twentieth century." "As I got involved in jazz I gradually realized that jazz has the greatest possibility as a musical expression. . . . The greatest thing about jazz is that every musician can play in his own style with improvisation. When I realized this essential fact. . . . I could play with various musicians of different fields only if their music has a sense of improvisation." People like Hino and Yamashita defied significant social pressure and outright suppression to formu-