Come Sunday

Duke Ellington, Mahalia Jackson

How big does a person have to grow, down in this part of the country, before he's going to stand up and say, "Let us stop treating men, women, and children with such cruelty just because they're colored?"

—Mahalia Jackson

In the second week of February, 1958, Duke Ellington brought the great gospel singer Mahalia Jackson into a Hollywood studio and recorded one of the masterpieces of the twentieth century, a somber yet elevating religious ballad called "Come Sunday." No doubt about that. The way Ellington and Jackson sounded together has yet to be equaled in the world of jazz, because we have not since had such a great jazz orchestra and we have not heard again a voice of such spiritual breadth and depth. Their meeting was a pinnacle for the music of New Orleans. The Crescent City is where Jackson was born, having left at sixteen for Chicago, where she would soon be noticed for singing with stirringly individuated passion, volume, and rhythm. We can always hear what was made of that New Orleans music at the hands of the peerless Ellington, whose art was so thoroughly shaped by the influences of Sidney Bechet, Louis Armstrong, King Oliver, and Jelly Roll Morton. But the music that Mahalia Jackson made with Duke Ellington was, above all else, created in recognition of a reckoning. It was created during a tumultuous moment in the history of this nation, at a time when a social wrong that should have been taken care of about eighty years earlier was no longer going to be accepted by those upon whom it had been imposed. It is in this distinct context that what those two superior artists brought off together should be understood. Such awareness neither increases nor decreases their artistry, but it surely deepens our understanding.

In 1958, America had not yet descended to the low place where it now resides, caught in commercialized sexual desperation and hungering for something of spiritual value that cannot be reduced to a spotted trend or packaged like dead sardines in oil. There was still serious religious music in that year, and Mahalia Jackson was its most shining symbol. Within her marvelous brown being, the entire heritage of the religious music from slavery and the spiritual music that came after bondage was given communicative residence of a special kind. She was a woman of large beauty and regal presence. Her voice was humbling because it was absolutely pure in its impersonality, which meant that it sounded unlike personal expression or autobiography or belief. She possessed the quality that all great religious singers must have—the ability to give the impression that they are not telling you what they believe or what happened to them somewhere in the world at some time, no, but what was always true in every time and in every place.

That was the source of the purity in her sound, and that purity was also an instrument of innovation because she and the composer Thomas A. Dorsey took the traditional spiritual—or plantation song of worship—and created an extension called gospel. With her huge and compelling voice, so accurate in pitch and so perfectly developed for the expression of nuance, the singer from New Orleans had, with a succession of recordings and public performances, made a world for her art and had remained beyond reproach. To hear her was to have a transcendent spiritual experience that was not beyond criticism but was surely beyond bloodless commentary because, in the world of God, people need to sing something or play something or just listen.

Jackson had built up quite a career by the time she met Ellington in the studio after arriving by train in Los Angeles at Union Station, which has a floor plan in the shape of a cross and an exterior that is a hybrid of Spanish Mission, Moorish, and art deco styles, clearly a stylistic mixture of old and new that now seems a first cousin of jazz and gospel music. She had appeared on concert stages across the nation and in Europe, had been heard and seen on radio and television, and had proven in person to be one of the most impressive performing artists on the face of the earth. Jackson had neither dreamed of nor expected any of that. Her wishes were spiritual, but the technology of her time had made it possible for her to sell millions of records and for her voice to be heard in far more homes and ears than she could ever have imagined. It had all been an unprecedented surprise.

By 1958, she was revered by her listeners for making unspoken conditions of feeling audible and exalting. The full-figured diva from New Orleans, who had done scullery work, picked plantation cotton, and studied

how to "do" Negro hair in Chicago, certainly was treated by the Negro Red Caps who carried her luggage and then the waiters and porters on the train from Chicago to Los Angeles with the special respect reserved for Negro nobility. She was one of those who had earned aristocratic status through their deeds and, therefore, had proven the truth of the democratic ideal. Her meals had to be given that special touch and her quarters made especially comfortable and each of her wishes attended to with the eloquent passion of *service*, as opposed to servitude. She may well have been asked for autographs and, however used to it, might have almost felt overwhelmed by the fuss they made of satisfying her every desire. But that was how people of her level of achievement were handled, and they, far more often than not, proved themselves true aristocrats by the grace with which they received the very best that someone could offer them.

But at that time, there was trouble in the land. It had been building in the four years since Senator Joseph McCarthy had been brought down through the instrument of television by Edward R. Murrow and censured by the Senate. The abuse of power and the danger of lies in high places were made clear, and the sting of that public recognition of such abuse was national. McCarthy had been proven to be a demagogue. The senator from Wisconsin had sensed that the country was in the mood for demagoguery and he had made the most of it. McCarthy had lied, he had exaggerated, he had created the kind of public paranoia that almost always grants more power to those who say they are protecting society, and he did his best to make the committee gavel sound like the crack of doom. We can say from this distance that Senator McCarthy, in the wake of a world war against the very obvious evils of European totalitarianism, was in the process of bringing American democracy as close to that very evil as he possibly could—though we can never be sure whether or not McCarthy was fully aware of everything that he was doing when he claimed to know the location of Communist spies here, there, and everywhere. But the most important fact of the matter is that unchallenged lying in high places is antithetical to democracy and its effects are nothing less than evil. In the wake of the McCarthy years, and the understandable obsession with freedom of speech and censorship, something that was to reshape the entire United States had already jumped off.

That something had been renewing itself since the end of the Civil War and had most recently drawn an enormous amount of fresh wind from the 1954 Supreme Court decision *Brown v. The Board of Education*. Led by the remarkable Thurgood Marshall, an NAACP legal team had argued against school segregation before the nation's highest court and had won. So in that same year that McCarthy fell, the unchallenged consistency of the lying at the center of segregation and racism took a serious hit. Goliath was down on one knee. The destruction of segregation at large was the next job. Both those genteel whites and redneck crackers residing below the Mason-Dixon Line were about to learn that there were native-born citizens who had an interest in living in the United States and, thank you very much, having their constitutional rights as well. A new storm in the sky that would later be called the Civil Rights Movement was in motion.

By 1958, young men and women were shattering and battering and challenging Southern racist conventions at every opportunity. It was not so much that Negroes had *finally* had enough; they had *always* had enough. The bigoted white man had always been a serious pain. The only difference at that point was that communities that had been largely independent—usually with some version of their own schools, churches, and businesses—were making use of their secular and religious resources for organization, for support, and for the numbers necessary to have their way and tear the house of segregation down.

Duke Ellington, who was ever attentive to the troubles and triumphs of his people, had in mind what seems to have been a complexly supportive message to those who were in the midst of that Southern battle. It was a message in music that spoke with an understanding of slavery, of tenant farming, of exclusion, of segregation, and of the heroic gratitude for merely living that is at the center of the bittersweet joy of jazz and of Negro culture at large. Ellington had no doubt about whom he needed to project that spiritual missive, to nail its notes upon the air of the world. There was just the one. He and she had been talking about doing some music together for years, and now, when he reached her by phone, the answer was an unqualified yes (though she actually hoped her deeply admired Ellington would not try to take her out of her spiritual world). He gave her the dates and sent her some music with no words, just notes.

Ellington had decided to reach back to January of 1943 for the music that he would adapt for the recording. It was from his single piece of symphonic jazz, *Black, Brown and Beige*, which had premiered in New York at Carnegie Hall. Ellington called the piece "a tone parallel to the history of the American Negro." It was nearly an hour in length and traced the Negro from slavery through the end of the Civil War and then into the North. The long work contained extraordinary invention in melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic terms. There was protean, uplifting zest, as well as

sumptuous, romantic, and prayerful lyricism—every aspect counterpointed by the ambivalence that went with living in America and the unfinished business that was still at hand. Part of its singular charisma came from the way in which Ellington made use of all kinds of black American music, from field chants and marches to very urbane and seductive melodies. It was all personal, and every bar drew upon Ellington's massive compendium of remembered experience—his many gigs in small clubs where pistols might be drawn and fired; the greasy, after-hours piano battles where he learned his trade; the Harlem clubs owned by murderous gangsters; the uptown Negro days and nights of great parades, style, dancing, inimitable food, and brave, wistful dreams; the Savoy Ballroom, where his band took on the best of the day as they played for couples in love or looking for love or for some hot and sensuous affirmation barely concealed behind a silent mating call; and every college he worked in, black or white, from coast to coast, not to mention all of the private, the very private, and the very, very private parties. The music told a story that began in the plantation fields of the South and ended in a penthouse on Sugar Hill in Harlem, with plenty of Negro life between those extremes. It was the most ambitious jazz piece of its time and remains a formidable achievement. Yet, as he was to learn over and over, Ellington's work was beyond the ears of the critical establishment, which largely hated it and said, essentially, that the boy needed to stay in his own backyard and not attempt to go beyond his own talents or the depths of his idiom.

Ellington was deeply hurt by the rejection of his work and chose never to pursue the symphonic form again, even so imaginatively remade for his own purposes. *Black, Brown and Beige* was never performed in its entirety after that, though he presented excerpts from it in his concerts. Along with his shorter pieces, he continued to write long works—which he usually called "suites," whether they were or not—but none of *Black, Brown and Beige's* length or of its expanded ambition. Though Ellington's hero-worshipping supporters deny that his musical horizons were so stunted by his detractors, I don't think there can be any other explanation for his artistic behavior after that fateful night in January 1943.

Nearly four years after the Supreme Court's monumental decision of May 17, 1954, Ellington had conceived of something that was, as he knew, unexpected. Why not redo his extended work and focus its development on "Come Sunday," with Mahalia Jackson, delivering what would amount to a prayer in support of the movement that Ellington and Jackson and every member of his band had been a part of since their first day on earth? It could work. The band was in *very* good shape since it had fired up the Newport Jazz Festival in 1956 and shot Ellington back up to the top of his profession after a low time in the valley of the business. They had been strutting, usually without barbecue, roaring with fury when it was necessary, and laying it on with finesse when there was just no other way to do it. It wouldn't bother them—as if anything ever did. They had been around the world, had traveled by every possible means, had blown all kinds of stuff in everybody's faces—gangsters one night, society types the next, high school boys and girls falling in love the night after that. They had been to the mountain top and they had been treated like slop. You couldn't tell them anything.

You couldn't tell Duke Ellington anything, either. He had been through it all, experiencing elevation and humiliation, something that was hard to avoid if one traveled the entire United States, east to west, north to south. During the era of segregation, an entirely different pattern of travel arrangements had to be made, one in which people learned that separate but equal was surely separate but very rarely—if ever—equal. In Ellington's case, it was much the same as it was for all bands once they traveled by bus behind the Cotton Curtain and knew themselves to be where the enemy regime was in full power. When they could find no lodgings, they had to stay at the homes of local Negroes, who might well supply them with meals much better than one could get any place other than the finest hotels. Or they might find themselves in the local whorehouse, sleeping downstairs while Ellington spent the night upstairs, with the girls. The Negroes who attended their dances down South were separated by ropes or, as was often the case, waited until the white folks were done and then hit the floor. If there were no Southern dance halls, Ellington and his band would play tobacco barns, where country Negroes and their girls showed up, some nearly reverent, others stooped or made gangly by too much of that moonshine. Everything could be all right or it could be far from all right. Even in the 1950s, long after Ellington had been an internationally respected artist, trumpeter Clark Terry was told a harrowing story by other band members after he joined the organization. When the band was in Carbondale, Illinois, a gangster shot into the floor during a tirade that ended with his cutting Ellington's tie off just below the knot and demanding that he dance for him. The road could be wonderful, it could be awful. That was how it was and anybody who says anything different is lying.

So by the time Ellington got Mahalia Jackson in his musical circle, he had many things on his mind and there had been some horrific things happening

down South of late; they lay in the air like the sweet stench that follows battle and had to be in both Ellington's and Jackson's thoughts. For one, in the summer of 1955, Emmett Till, while visiting from Chicago, had been murdered in Mississippi for getting fresh with a white woman (what would that constitute now?). The casket at his funeral in Chicago was open, and his hideously unrecognizable corpse was viewed by thousands because Till's mother wanted the world to know what those rednecks had done to her boy. As for those gallant men who considered murder not too much but just enough to protect the soft pink purity of Southern womanhood, they sold the details of how they killed the boy to a magazine after their acquittal on September 23, 1955. That murder roared through black America, waking those who had slept through the malignant evils of racist violence and the toy courts of the South. Till's mother said of the tragedy: "Two months ago I had a nice apartment in Chicago. I had a good job. I had a son. When something happened to the Negroes in the South, I said, 'That's their business, not mine.' Now I know how wrong I was. The murder of my son has shown me that what happens to any of us, anywhere in the world, had better be the business of us all."

It was the business of the music that Duke Ellington intended to make with Mahalia Jackson but he had to figure out a way to elegantly walk over the eggshells of her extreme religious beliefs and her refusal to ever sing any blues. She was adamant about that. That is where Ellington's genius for adjustment came in. He was still smarting from the critics' rejection of *Black, Brown and Beige* when he premiered it fifteen years earlier, but he had figured out a way to ram at least some of it down their throats and make them like it. Most importantly, he had figured out how to create a piece of music focused on the American Negro that would culminate in the appearance of Mahalia Jackson. It would be his statement on racial matters and on the inevitability of victory over segregation.

What he had in mind was not propaganda but a fully artistic statement about things as they actually were at the time. But in order to make the music work for Mahalia Jackson, and to keep her from feeling aesthetically abused, he had to streamline his marvelous composition so that it did not take in that much of the city or tell too much of the tale of the people on Sugar Hill—not *everything*, anyway. In the original concluding section, a waltz eventually gave way to a slow, symbolic coupling that would not do at this time. Ellington would keep only the heraldic opening movement, with slight adjustments, and shape it into three parts, or tracks, that formed an overall ABA structure, the first introducing or alluding to all of the themes but focusing on the South; the second introducing the contrast between religious gravity and blues; the third introducing a picture of the Negro in the world of Harlem, where such an astonishing culture of limitless style and groove had been created. What Ellington now conceived of as the first part was perfect, because it told the story of slavery and was also possessed of a feeling of determination and of struggle, both emotions undergirded by a melancholic longing and a high-mindedness. In the second track, we hear the first of the two themes that Jackson will sing, "Come Sunday," contrasted with some rowdy blues. With track three, an extraordinary variation on the first track, Ellington set up the New Orleans priestess with a big, proud, mocking fanfare of roaring, stomping city music, which was also vitally urbane, meditative, even lonely, yet maintained awareness of its spiritual roots (represented, again, by the trombone statement of "Come Sunday" near the end of the track). It was symbolic of how much things had changed as Southern Negroes, formerly sure-enough hicks, became city dwellers well adjusted to the pace of their environment and ready for more opportunities to present themselves. The work song, the spiritual, and the blues—separately, in counterpoint, or intertwined—went the furthest and the deepest. They were all there. That was side one.

In the days of the long-playing record, with about twenty minutes on each side, Ellington decided to make the first side instrumental and the second side, opening with "Come Sunday," two vocals separated by a violin feature for Ray Nance. It was a shrewd decision, because those who had no use for jazz or who had no use for such sophisticated jazz composition could just turn the record over, looking for their Mahalia, and be knocked to their knees. Now the original fifty-seven-minute work had been trimmed to thirty-six minutes and was, for all practical purposes, a different piece of music with vastly different ends in mind. With no pronouncements, Ellington wanted the world to hear how deep his commitment was to Negro history and culture. He also wanted everyone to know how strongly he felt about racial justice and how deeply he believed in the necessary support of God.

Writer Patricia Willard, who was then doing public relations for Ellington and had been given the assignment of making sure that everything was all right with his guest singer, recalls that Ellington and Jackson had suites across the hall from each other at the Watkins Hotel near Adams and Western Avenue. Some of the band may have been at the Watkins Hotel and others might have been scattered around Los Angeles because, as Willard remembers, "[t]hey may not have been welcome in

Hollywood just yet. They soon would be but, at that time, they may not have been." Willard also recalls that Jackson did not take her assignment lightly. "Mahalia was in such awe of Duke Ellington. She was nervous because this man was one of her idols and she wanted to be good enough. She was very humble."

The session took place at Radio Recording Studios in Hollywood. Mahalia Jackson knew her music when she arrived in Los Angeles and was to learn the lyrics either before going to the studio or at the session itself. Ellington made her the star of the sessions that she attended so that she would focus only on what she was going to do and he would use his musicians solely in an accompanying or obbligato role. He would record the other material after she was done. She didn't need to hear the other music; all she needed was to give her soul over to the notes that were there for her to fill up with the light that was in her voice.

"The thing about 'Come Sunday,'" says Wynton Marsalis, "is that it brings together a lot of different American music. It alludes to many different forms, first the pentatonic sound of the Spiritual and the fiddle ballad, then the I-IV progression that is central to the blues, then the movement to the relative minor, which was done a lot in fiddle tunes as well as American popular songs. The use of the augmented V chord, which is always evocative of the blues, and when it precedes a dominant II chord, connects us to the sound of 'Mood Indigo.' It also has, in the final turnaround, the type of triadic inversions that we find in almost all Afro-American church music. And the AABA form is the classic form of the American popular song. So what it all adds up to is a summary of a number of American things, including that allusion to Ellington himself, to 'Mood Indigo.' But then, why should he leave himself out? There's nothing more American than Duke Ellington."

Though the words have been dismissed as banal, even by so great a writer as Ralph Ellison, I have to disagree with all detractors because, from the very opening, it all becomes clear what Ellington had in his thoughts and there is hardly a more straightforward way to say what he wanted to say. This deeply private man enjoyed the freedom of being absolutely explicit. He also knew that if there was anyone on the earth who could give the meaning the majesty with which he felt it, he now had that person in the studio, standing there in all her heavy down-home beauty. The melancholic gentility on her face was characteristic of those who knew both the universal weights of life and the specific burdens of color, but that knowledge had been given an added strength by the blessing that is the capacity for the expression of unlimited purity. It was the disarming authority that Mahalia Jackson gave him in spades as she made even clearer the obvious emotion Ellington had put in his lyrics.

Lord, dear Lord of love
God almighty
God above
Please look down
And see my people through

Lord, dear Lord of love
God almighty
God above
Please look down
And see my people through

Knowing the troubles and the dangers facing the Negro people, whether in political situations or not, Ellington was offering a prayer that these people, who had been so abused on every level, who had been disappointed so often, be looked out for, taken care of, and gotten through what was surely the bloody and sacrificial road that lay ahead.

Next there was a cosmic sense of order and recognition of the fact that always stood up above all others: No matter how much darkness there was, no matter how black and unlit the night might be, all of it would pass, and light, of every sort, was a forthcoming *fact*. The great Jackson, as much aware of that fact as Ellington himself, let those words and notes loose with so much confidence that they needed no overstatement to achieve a convincing state. The idea is a simple one, but the way she sings the words that are the nouns and what she does with the adjectives and the verbs creates the wonder and the inevitability that only our most special singers have within their power.

I believe the sun and moon
Will shine up in the sky
When the day is gray I know it's clouds passing by

Out there in the struggle that is not about color but is about the nature of living, discord and turmoil arrive and lie like rings of thorns inside the mind that needs those thorns removed and their wounds, if not healed, at

least attended to with what results in the experience of that stranger called comfort. The Negro, even when it was illegal, learned that there was a God who lived somewhere above all that the world had to offer or used to oppress, above bondage or sheer bad luck, and that He could be met on Sunday, with nothing more than belief, which was the ticket that allowed entrance into something called peace. If no other day, Sunday was there, waiting. With her expansive and intimate lyricism, Jackson again makes each word, each image, and each state that is referred to, both earthly and unbound, some mixture of opposites made true by the clarity of her emotion.

He'll give peace and comfort
To every troubled mind
Come Sunday, O come Sunday
That's the day

The fatigue that arrives with abuse is always the servant of defeatist feeling. The tiredness that is experienced as the weight of all wrong seems never to lighten, the blows that strike the soul arrive as if from a tireless machine, and the universe appears, for all purposes, to have become an infinite and deaf ear, capable of hearing nothing—not whining or wishing or praying. A man as private as Ellington, who said his prayers every night and who must have often felt nearly overwhelmed by the complex of artistic personalities, deadlines, and the treacherous dictates of show business, had learned to lean up against something that was as invincible as it was invisible, as quirky as all get-out but, finally, right there when it was needed. At Newport, just eighteen months earlier, the great spirit of God, appearing in the flesh as a blonde overtaken by the swing of his band and the searing blues tenor saxophone of Paul Gonsalves, had pulled Ellington up from the dregs into which his career had fallen. Incapable of sitting still, this all-American sandy-haired heifer jumped up and started dancing with so much liberated soul that she sparked the crowd to near-hysteria and gave Ellington's career another wind strong enough for the bandleader to capture the cover of *Time* magazine. So Ellington knew—yes, he did—that there was always that resource out there, effortless and infinite, capable of reversing fortune or defining it. That was as true to him as the facts of spring and should be understood together. Jackson, who had lived for so many years in the world of prayer, which could take place anywhere and at any time, and who also looked upon life as a great gift beyond all suffering and all want, again connects two things that seem outside of logic with the lyric power of her diction, her time, and the control of her voice's timbre.

Often we'll feel weary but He knows our every care
Go to Him in secret He will bear your every prayer
Lilies of the valley they neither toil nor spin
And flowers bloom and spring time birdies sing

The importance of *knowing* that one can be heard by the highest of high authorities has to be repeated, because that is a central message of the song. If all else has been exhausted and has exhausted you in the process, you may have to get down on your knees in private, or in the secrecy of your mind, and ask for what you truly need. Jackson reiterates that with an empathetic sincerity, the sound of having been there, too, giving the words *secret* and *prayer* a feeling of safety as well as a lilting tenderness in the way she lifts up off the note and pushes in more depth at the same time.

Often we'll feel weary but He knows our every care
Go to Him in secret He will bear your every prayer

Finally, Ellington is talking about the South, where the Negro worked from "can't see in the morning to can't see at night." Those sore muscles, those calluses, that aching back, those tired feet meant almost nothing when Sunday arrived and it was possible to dream into the face of God, to think about a future different from the hard present. Something like transcendence could happen then and give the kind of strength not only to get through a difficult life but to support those who would risk their lives trying to change things from the way they were to another way altogether. Jackson, having known what it felt like to pick plantation cotton during the week and to feel liberated on Sunday, sings the final words with the illuminated recognition that is not a flight from the world, as so many would have it, but a stepping into a deeper understanding of the meaning of freedom.

Up from dawn 'til sunset
Man work hard all day
Come Sunday, O come Sunday
That's the day

She then hums a chorus, the language gone and the music delivered with a voice that is beyond words but that amplifies all of the feelings that they were written to express. At this point, Jackson becomes the mother of us all, those hums arriving on Sunday morning accompanying the smells of breakfast in preparation; she becomes the mother at the bedside of the sick; she reminds us, through her ascendant tenderness, of the reverential empathy that underlies all of the dreams and the facts of civilization. There it was. Ellington had had his way and had made a masterpiece with the aid of an artist of unparalleled quality, one of the geniuses of feeling that America has been so lucky to produce. Her second song, "The Twenty-Third Psalm," is also a masterpiece, and it perfectly concludes the recording with a foreboding solemnity that constitutes tragic recognition of great danger yet assumes ultimate salvation. But we will not discuss that right now. We will end by letting Jimmy Woode, who played bass on the date, tell us about the effect Jackson had. "At one point, Duke decided to turn out the lights and have Mahalia sing 'Come Sunday' a cappella. Now, as you know, the band at the time was full of alcoholics, knuckleheads, dope shooters, kleptomaniacs, gamblers, and just about any kind of person you would meet in a band. They were all there. These men had been through it and they had been around. They were, you might say, rough customers. So we're all standing or sitting in the dark listening to that wonderful and incomparable sound of Mahalia Jackson, who was just singing her heart out. Beautiful beyond belief. And don't you know that when those lights came back on, there was not a man among that wild bunch who did not have a very, very obvious tear in his eye."

2004

The Presence Is Always the Point

Within five years of having arrived in New York from California in September 1975, I had the good luck of being able to assess the Manhattan jazz scene from three perspectives—as a drummer; as the booker of a jazz club, the Tin Palace on the Bowery; and as a writer of jazz criticism for the *Village Voice*. When I got to town, Duke Ellington had been dead for over a year, Louis Armstrong had been gone for five, and jazz itself was widely rumored to be on its way out, but the music that had evolved in so many directions during the lives of those two greatest of all jazz musicians. It had such vitality and presence that thinking back to how it was in those days now seems almost a dream of the way it should have been.

There were still so many fine players of so many different instruments that they created an enormous fugue of individual personalities, interpretations, techniques, and tonal colors. Though they were sometimes demoralized by the position that jazz had been forced into by a largely disinterested media and the notion that actual jazz playing had become a thing of the past, these artists pushed their music into the face of the present with the kind of transcendent coherence that not only improved the quality of their art but bettered the world through what they gave to and inspired in other human beings.

These were, as McCoy Tyner says, "special people." At this point, so many of them are gone that one could start asking if it had all been a dream, a collective wish agreed upon and supported by doctored photographs and unreal images delivered through film and television. Hardly. As with so many of the miracles of American life, those men and women did walk this earth, did take to bandstands and stand at bars and joke in dressing rooms and talk on the telephone and have rehearsals and travel the world, providing the human presence of jazz.

If you were in New York and were able to see and hear jazz for yourself, birth, affirmation, reaffirmation, decline, and death were right there to be had as experiences that would never leave your sensibility. If you lived at 2