The Aliveness of Jazz

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Abstract
What are the implications of the ephemeral nature of jazz performance for jazz as an art form? The ephemerality of jazz performance is commonly attributed to improvisation, which jazz theorist Lee B. Brown argues possesses an aesthetically unique property he calls 'presence.' While endorsing Brown's intuition, I argue that the metaphor of presence is unhelpful; a more illuminating metaphor is 'aliveness,' understood as coming into being in the moment. However, basing this property on solo improvisations is problematic, since whole performances of songs or compositions in jazz are generally and rightly regarded as improvised music; thus I expand the picture of improvisational playing in jazz to include the entire performance of a song or composition. I call a complete improvisatory performance of a piece or composition a performance artwork. I argue that the performance artwork in jazz possesses aliveness and is the central artwork in the jazz tradition.
Key Words
artworks; classical music; ephemerality; improvisation; jazz; musical performance; musical works; ontology

1. The art is ephemeral

In his book, *Considering Genius*, the eminent jazz critic Stanley Crouch notes an important feature of jazz: "In jazz, as in any performing art, the aesthetic existence of a statement arriving in the present is reserved only for those who were there; the rest, however wonderful, amounts to no more than leftovers."[1] All performances in any performance art form are ephemeral in that they are one-off events, uniquely defined by their spatial-temporal location and subtle differences of performance variables. But Crouch is suggesting something more, that the aesthetic *value* of the jazz performance is itself so ephemeral that it can only be experienced by those present. The focus of this thought is usually the ephemerality of improvisation, a feature that follows from contrasting its one-off, in-the-moment creation with the repeatable and predetermined musical structures of songs and classical musical works. The ephemerality of a jazz performance has also been noted by philosophers writing on jazz. Lee B. Brown, for example, notes, "I have not turned up any special problem about classifying improvisational music as autographic [i.e., as non-repeatable artworks] beyond the problem posed by its ephemerality."[2]

The prominence of a special ephemerality in theorizing about jazz reflects the special role that live performance plays in the jazz tradition.[3] It is not merely that a jazz performance is a unique event and in that sense is necessarily ephemeral; so is any performance of a Beethoven symphony. Rather, it is the thought that the distinctive value of a jazz performance lies in the ephemerality of the performance itself. The performance, not the song or composition performed, is the primary bearer of musical and aesthetic value in jazz. In this way, jazz contrasts with, for example, performances of classical music, where the attention of acculturated listeners is as much (if not more) directed toward the musical

work as it is interpreted and thus presented in the performance, as it is toward the unique nuances of the interpretation.[4]

The sense of a special ephemerality of jazz goes hand in hand with the typical ways that jazz performances are described. Jazz is regularly thought to have a special creation-in-the-moment character. For example, Ted Gioia describes Sonny Rollins' performances and recordings as "a celebration of improvisation . . . spontaneous flow of musical ideas . . . a Joycean stream of consciousness . . . unpredictable excursions."[5] Such description is typical, involving a cluster of ideas centering around freedom, flow, spontaneity, unpredictability, moment-to-moment musical creativity, especially in improvised solos, in short, music created before our ears.

At this point, friends of classical music might be tempted to object to the distinction I have drawn between the ephemerality of classical music and that of jazz performance. Aren't all musical performances, including those of classical music, ephemeral in that each has its particular nuances—choices of tempo, articulation, rubato, even the sound of particular performers' instruments?[6] Although a classical musical work will be instantiated in a standard performance, the way it is by performers in a particular concert will be subtly different from other performances of the same work by the same performers. The soloist in a concerto may be especially inspired that day or the acoustic reverberation of a hall may force a conductor to slow down the tempo of a passage. Hence, a performance of a classical music work is also ephemeral. However, this is not the same basis for ephemerality as exists for improvisatory music.

If we return to Crouch's comment, we can usefully extract from it two claims. One is the claim that what is artistically important about a jazz performance cannot be captured in a recording. This claim is wrong, indeed counter-intuitive, given the history of jazz. However, addressing skepticism about the adequacy of recording improvisation requires a separate investigation. The second claim, and our focus here, is that the performance is the central object of jazz as an art form. By the end of this investigation, I hope to show that this second claim is true.

A contrast will help. In a performance of a classical musical work, it is the musical work that is the primary object of appreciation. Undoubtedly, the way that the work is brought to life is important, but that way, however unusual, inventive, and engaged, is secondary and parasitic upon the musical work.[7] Whereas, as I will argue, in improvised performance it is the improvisation itself that is the artwork; the primary bearer of artistic and musical value in such a performance is not the song or composition performed but the music being improvised.

2. Standard musical work performance

The opposite of improvisation in music is when musical choices are predetermined, with the predetermined choices guiding the performers' choices. In a tradition in which musical works exist, such as in Western classical music in the modern era, the defining elements of a musical work are specified in a score. And these, along with conventional norms of performance, determine what the musician is to play. Thus, although it is far from the only example, mainstream classical music provides a clear example of a tradition of work performances that contrasts with improvisatory musical performance.[8] As such, I will take it as our main contrast to jazz improvisation.

Call the property that differentiates improvisation from work performance, 'A'. Brown calls this quality presence; below, I argue for thinking of A as aliveness. And, while Brown focuses on obvious improvisations in jazz performances, I argue below that A applies in many cases to the entire jazz performance of a composition or song, not just to obvious solo improvisations. The guiding assumption, which I share with Brown, is that the music of a jazz performance appears to exist in a different way or form than the music of a classical music performance. This is often true even for big band performances from sheet music and charts (see section 6, below). As Brown puts it, "one's intuition is that work-performances and improvisations really are different in kind."[9] These are two different types of listening experience.

3. Presence and aliveness

I begin by reviewing the discussion of presence, which Brown ascribed to improvisation. Brown introduced the term 'presence' this way:

> I observed earlier that improvisational and autographic art both feature a kind of directness. However, there is a difference in this respect between the two. I shall term the kind of directness that typifies improvised music *presence*. Compare the following: (a) A condition of one's informed response to The Tempest is that one takes its lines and colors as being applied x-ly as one watches. (b) A condition of one's informed response to an improvisation is that one takes its sounds as being created spontaneously as one listens. . . The point is that whatever modal conditions are relevant to our understanding of The Tempest, they obviously do not dictate that we are supposed to watch the painting being made. In spite of their relevance to an informed response to the work, they are not constitutive of the work. However, (b) seems exactly right. With improvisations, we are supposed to understand the music we hear as being created before our very ears.[10]

Although Brown's general claim is about improvisational art, his focus is improvisational music and more specifically jazz: "Jazz improvisations are our local paradigm, so I shall often key my discussion to them."[11] His claim is that improvisational music has a property that nonimprovisational music performance does not. I believe that his claim is insightful when properly analyzed, but without further analysis it is not clear what property the term "presence" targets.

Although I have taken classical music as the prime example of nonimprovised music,[12] any music that is fully scored with no improvisational sections and performed according to the norms of classical music practice is an example—I will label such a performance a 'musical work performance.'[13]

Brown's focus on what he labeled presence is an important insight into the musical experience of jazz. But we need a clearer explanation of what presence is and what gives rise to it. Unfortunately, Brown's discussion does not adequately explain it. If we keep in mind that presence is a property of live improvisation but not of live nonimprovised music, its main literal meaning, the state of being present, does not point to any obvious difference between the two types of music making. Closer, perhaps, is the sense of presence that points to *the impressive manner or appearance of a person*, as in the great presence that a charismatic actor might seem to have. But it is not clear how this moves us any closer to understanding the difference between improvised and nonimprovised music, for example, between a jazz soloist and a flamboyant pianist playing the Rachmaninoff 3rd Piano

Concerto, or between the passage of improvised music and the passage of Rachmaninoff's concerto.

Brown suggests anchoring our understanding of presence in directness. "The directness of our experience of improvised music seems to parallel that of our experience of painting" and "I shall term the kind of directness that typifies improvised music presence."[14] Presence, then, is a way that an art object appears to a perceiver. To say the art object has presence is to say that it appears to a perceiver in some way directly. But what is the implied contrast; what art appears to be indirect or appears indirectly? Brown chooses the autographic art of painting as somehow direct: "When we gaze upon *The Tempest* of Giorgione, we are gazing upon the very object that Giorgione has made."[15] However, it is the contrast between work performances and improvisational music performances that is the relevant target here. However lively a performance of a classical music work is—for example, Beethoven's "Harp" quartet—it will not have presence, will not have directness, according to Brown. But will the "Harp" performance seem *indirect*? Surely not. The performance of the work appears directly to our senses. Both the musical work and its performance seem to be present, to be directly before us. So, it seems that directness is not any more helpful than the metaphor of presence.

To better characterize 'presence,' it will be useful to review the relevant facts about the music and the relevant responses of the listener to improvisation. Improvisation is, as Brown says, in the category of actions: "an improvisation [is] a certain kind of ephemeral process, namely, an action."[16] Tobyn Demarco has argued that it is a species of the act of selecting.[17] Brown adds, "An improvisation consists neither of disembodied sounds nor of an activity abstracted from the sounds. It consists of the whole activity of creating a sound-sequence in the course of playing it."[18] We can add that the improvisatory sound-sequence is understood, and in jazz usually judged, in the context of the ongoing performance, with unimaginative improvisations heard as weak or uninteresting. Musical improvisation is like a witty remark; improvised in the moment, it can be clever, funny or just fall flat.

The listener's implicit assumption that a passage of music is improvised grounds an appropriate appreciative stance in the listener. Such an attitude is warranted based on the context—we are in a jazz club or listening to a recording by a familiar jazz musician—and equally on how it sounds. The listener to improvisation adopts a cognitive framework that structures a way of listening, an implicit set of beliefs and expectations informing the appropriate listening stance. The cognitive framework that structures hearing a musical passage *as* improvised thus requires having a sense of what is predetermined, usually by the song or composition performed. If there is no sense of predetermined themes in what a player is playing, as in free jazz, then the music will all be heard as improvised throughout. Which is not to say that in free jazz or other totally improvised performances passages are not related to preceding or synchronic improvised music contained in the performance. It is worth noting, however, that what material is conventionally predetermined and what, by contrast, is therefore improvised will vary with the musical genre and culture.[19] In any case, being improvised is a property of the music being performed as determined by cultural and musical context.

Presence, on the other hand, is a way the music *appears* to the listener and accordingly must be perceived by the listener as improvised, not just believing but *experiencing* it as improvised, as created right then and there. This experience is not exotic; it is a common

way to hear music, as common as improvisation is in all kinds of music. For Brown, the appropriate appreciative stance, which he calls "informed response," "involves a distinctive kind of registry of performance activity,"[20] which he illustrates as taking a special interest in improvisation as a sort of problem-solving exercise: "I wonder if the player can sustain the level . . . I worry about how he will address the problem. When he pulls the fat out of the fire, I applaud."[21] However, this may over-intellectualize many improvisations, making them sound calculated.[22] The more general characterization is that an improviser is thinking about and through the music. As Nat Hentoff said about Paul Desmond, "we could hear in his playing a mind moving with 'eerie swiftness' as he spun out his remarkably consistent lines . . . we attend to the way Desmond keeps his music on track even though he is creating as he plays."[23] In general, we hear improvised music as having some sort of fit—satisfying, awkward, brilliant, unimaginative, and so on—within the musical context, even though it is spontaneously created. I suggest that we take our cue from Brown's final characterization of presence, "The sense that a unique, unscripted, event is taking place as I listen gives an improvisatory performance a sense of moment. . . Being there at the right time, I have a special sense of that music's *birth*, as I listen."[24] The allusion to the music of an improvisation being born points to the best metaphor for improvised jazz: The music is alive in the sense of continuously *being brought into existence* by the intentional actions of the musicians as we are listening. Brown associates this with "a feeling of indeterminacy."[25] But indeterminacy may not be the central concept, at least for jazz. Under the influence of John Cage, in music theorizing indeterminacy has come to signify a method for *choosing* what to play, or strictly, of not choosing but being guided by a randomizing protocol. This not-thinking produces a unique musical event, but it is the opposite of what jazz players are doing and so the response of the listener to Cagean improvisation will not be as it would be to a jazz improvisation. Moreover, indeterminate events are completely unpredictable, which is not true of most improvisations in any genre of music outside of the avant-garde. Associating presence with indeterminacy and that with unpredictability unfortunately leads Brown to reject jazz recordings, because repeated hearing should kill the literal surprise and hence the presence that makes a jazz performance artwork special. More plausibly, an improvisation elicits a sense of freedom and possibility that is palpable to the listener because the preceding and concurrent musical material does not dictate the sounds that the improviser spontaneously makes. Although an improvisation in jazz is relevant to the music around it and to the player's artistic style, these do not determine the specific notes played in the way that precomposed classical music determines the notes to be played.

Stephen Davies accepts Brown's term 'presence' for the special character of improvisatory music and adds another term, 'immediacy': "when people improvise, it is the immediacy and presence displayed in what they do that attracts us."[26] However, there is a potential ambiguity to immediacy: what is it that is immediate, the musical notes or, in some sense, their causal creation? Although immediacy points in the right direction, it does not describe what it is that is immediate. I propose that as a property of the music, 'aliveness' is a better way to describe this property because it highlights the listener's perceptual sense that the music is being born moment by moment, created by the actions of the players. How does aliveness affect the listener's attention? Music that is being improvised calls attention to itself because it is not just a sequence of notes pointing to a song or work, as in

classical music. Nor is it a contextless sequence of notes or a sequence produced by a randomizing algorithm. It is a sequence of musical actions by the players choosing those notes. The sequence is being born in the moment by the musicians' choices; hence their intentions and musical personalities are inextricable components of the music. Listeners who hear the music as improvised do not and should not separate the notes from the performer; hence the music feels alive. In contrast, consider a street artist making a chalk copy of Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* on the pavement of an Italian piazza. This too is a process of bringing an image into being, but the essential choices have already been made by Vermeer. This is analogous to the performance of a precomposed musical work. Accordingly, because a jazz improvisatory passage consists of the players' actions of creating the sequence, it is usually the center of attention in relation to the song, chord sequence, or overarching structure that it recalls. Whereas in a classical musical performance, the musical work being performed in a passage is the primary object of appreciation.

This suggests another way to interpret the intuition underlying the idea of presence. If we think of a musical work performance as creating a token of the abstract entity that is the musical work, which exists independently of particular performances, that work is both present (that is, as a token) and not present (as that which is tokened); the musical work transcends the present musical performance. By contrast, the music of an improvisation is fully present. Even if it is based on a familiar song or standard, it is not intended to be a straight, uninflected token of the basic structure of the song or standard because it is an intentional one-off musical sound sequence being created as we listen.

Aliveness, in the sense of being brought into existence by the performers' creative choices and actions, is not the same as the liveness of a live musical work performance. Musicians performing a musical work intentionally are pouring their bodily, mental, and emotional energy into the notes they are playing. What they produce will be a unique in-the-moment product of their attempt to reproduce and illuminate the musical work, perhaps even to put their own stamp and style onto the interpretation of the work. Even if they are not aiming to produce an interpretation of the work, they are publicly exhibiting their skill and necessarily taking chances (of misplaying the score). By contrast, improvising players are in a process of choosing the music and taking chances in so doing. Improvisation gains its life from the process of being created in the moment by the players' actions.

4. Spontaneity, improvisation, and aliveness

Is there a connection between improvisatory choices and the sense of aliveness in such music? A common idea is that spontaneity of the playing is the basis for such a perception. In this section I clarify the nature of the spontaneity in improvisation.

David Davies gives an account of jazz improvisation in *Philosophy of the Performing Arts*. He defends the "consensus view that spontaneity is the core of improvisation,"[27] or, as he also puts it, "spontaneity is the essence of improvisation."[28] Similarly, DeMarco notes that the "property often associated with improvisation is spontaneity, which could be imagined more or less immediately, a certain ephemeral quality."[29]

However, outside of musical contexts not all improvisation consists of spontaneous actions and not all spontaneous actions (for example, impulse buying) amount to improvisation.

Among improvisations, we can roughly distinguish two categories: (1) *Goal-directed* cases, for example, a cooking challenge to make a dish requiring unusual ingredients—although not planned in detail ahead of time, it would not be continuously spontaneous once a plan of action was decided, and (2) *Temporal improvisations*, those that involve steps, each of which occurring in time is improvised, with the sequence itself being the point.

To say that each step in an ideal (fully improvised) musical improvisation occurs spontaneously is not to say several things, such as that the musical note played is a surprise to the player, nor that the player plays the note unintentionally. No, each sound produced in the sequence is an intentional action. However, in the ideal case, there is no prior intention to make particular sound sequence x; although x is created spontaneously, it is also being created at that moment intentionally.[30] Moreover, it is not causeless. It is intentionally caused by the player: the player's awareness of the preceding musical context, the player's style (programmed into the player's central nervous system), and a spontaneous choice by the player all play a role. The spontaneous choice, although related to the musical context, is what makes that sound a creation of the moment. The difference between that and a note in a nonimprovised solo in a performance of a typical musical work is that the player's choice of the sound in the latter case is primarily predetermined; it is part of a larger predetermined musical structure. The listener's awareness of such a note is primarily directed to the note as an element of the larger musical work being performed, not as in improvisatory music to the immediate note as it relates to the improvisatory context, which includes the previous and contemporaneous notes as well as the over-arching song or chart.

Musical improvisation is thus not simple impulsive spontaneity. It is also a sequence of intentional actions that are reactions to the musical context and to the developing performance artwork. These reactive actions, based on the player's knowledge, skill, and in the case of many jazz players artistic persona, produce a sound sequence that could have been otherwise,[31] yet is shaped by the surrounding musical material and the resources and expression of the musicians. Although basic structural features of a jazz improvisation such as the harmonic scope and rhythm can often be anticipated, and thus the musical result feels an appropriate fit, jazz improvisation is experienced as spontaneous action throughout in its musically relevant details. To hear music as improvised, then, is to hear it as a sequence of spontaneous musical actions intended to relate to the musical context. An improvisation is thus infused with living energy as it is being created by the player in the moment.

5. What music has aliveness?

The contrast between improvisational and nonimprovisational music is necessarily fuzzy. This raises the question of which musical performances constitute improvisational music and thus should be heard as possessing aliveness. Let's begin with the clear case of improvised solos.

Which musical performances count as improvised music? If Mitsuko Uchida plays the Beethoven cadenza in Mozart's 20th piano concerto, neither the cadenza by itself nor the whole performance is an improvised musical artifact. This is also true if Geza Anda plays his own cadenza, for in both cases the cadenza was previously composed. But what if Gabriela Montero improvises a cadenza in a performance of the concerto? Surely, we would

not regard the whole concerto performance as improvised music. So, the whole performance would fail to have 'presence' except for the cadenza.
So, it might seem that according to Brown's claim we should say the same thing about a solo in an otherwise well-practiced and frequently performed song by a big band, such as one structured with a head followed by several solos and ended with the final chorus. A swing era example is "Take the A Train" in its original 1941 RCA recording without lyrics, which became the Duke Ellington Orchestra's theme song. After the initial chorus in AABA form (52"), Ray Nance played a famous 32-bar solo before the next chorus. Every time the band played their signature tune, they would play the familiar song according to the familiar chart with an improvised trumpet solo following the first chorus. If aliveness is the product of improvising, then it appears to follow that only a part of such a musical performance has it, since much of the performance is not strictly improvised, however exciting it otherwise is.

Consider a non-dance band example: "Blue Rondo à la Turk" with its tricky 9/8 time for the first 1'40" [32] followed by Paul Desmond's solo over a very different beat, a bluesy 4/4 which occurs at 1' 50," during which Brubeck chimes in three times with the Turkish rhythm underneath the main 4/4, until 3'54," when Brubeck, staying with the blues beat, solos himself, and so on, until they trade Desmond's bluesy themes back and forth with Brubeck's Turkish rhythm finally repeating the chorus at the end. As exciting as the Turkish rhythm theme is, an account that solely attributes presence to solo improvisations might seem to imply that much of a performance of "Blue Rondo à la Turk" does not have presence, perhaps any more than a performance of Mozart's 20th piano concerto. Arguably, however, it is more plausible to regard the whole performance as improvised and hence as having aliveness because the improvised solos peppered throughout give such a sense to the whole. (See more on this below.)
Of course, in the jazz tradition performances frequently diverge from any simple template of improvised solos interspersed in the middle of music that is not purely improvised. For example, "Potato Head Blues" starts with a collective improvisation by Armstrong and Johnny Dodds. Also, there are totally improvised performances by individuals not guided by any precomposed material (for example, Anthony Braxton, Keith Jarrett, Cecil Taylor) and such by multiple players together. More common is the case of off-and-on improvising throughout the performance of a familiar tune; for example, Sonny Rollins' famous "All the Things You Are," in which right from the beginning he improvises on elements of the song.[33] There is also the case of a player improvising a recognizable song from the beginning to the end of the performance, as in Gary Burton's solo version of Jobim's "Chega De Saudade."[34] But, in contrast, also common are big band performances conventionally structured to give several players a chance to solo. To allow the soloists to take turns and to hold a large group together there is usually a chart that specifies enough of the structure of performance to provide group cohesion and a teleological sense of development. Finally, there are countless small groups jointly improvising familiar songs from the beginning or improvising on their own material.
I will call any wholly improvisational performance of a composition or song a 'performance artwork.' Gary Burton's "Chega De Saudade" is one sort of example, but below I will argue that there are many other less explicit examples. A performance artwork, in contrast to a jam session, typically has an explicit beginning and end defined by the intentions of the

players, as, for example, when a contemporary small group plays original pieces. The performance artwork in jazz is not itself a musical work in the standard sense of an abstract object intended for multiple performances.[35] Whether recorded or simply performed live, it is a musical *artwork* created by the performing jazz musicians; it is intended as a one-off. It is a primary aesthetic focus, whereas the composition performed, if there is one, functions as a structure or map to elicit improvised realizations and reactions. The listener's goal is usually not simply to hear "Epistrophy" but to hear "Epistrophy" as Lee Konitz is improvising on it on occasion X. The pleasures of "Epistrophy" are the result of the way it elicits whole improvisatory performances in which its characteristically quirky themes shine through.

In these terms, we can spell out the question of which components of a musical performance have presence. Does a passage which contains some improvisatory playing but also some nonimprovised musical playing inherit presence from the improvisation? The same question applies to the entire performance of a jazz composition or song: Does it inherit or have overall presence if it contains some improvisations or improvisatory passages, while also containing much nonimprovised music? Since the answer to the second question, at least for typical classical music is "no," how is jazz different?

In sum, a problem with our account so far is that elements of many typical jazz performances are not strictly improvised in the way that foregrounded solos are. To be sure, many performances by small groups or individual players are explicitly and continuously improvisations. But to be plausible, the special quality of jazz that the aliveness account attempts to point to should be applicable to *most* jazz performances without abandoning its basis in improvisatory playing. What therefore needs to be defended is the claim that most jazz performances produce performance artworks.

6. Jazz improvisation expanded

Without concern for whether whole performances are strictly improvised, jazz performances are routinely described simply as improvisational music. The performance of a large group with a complex chart produces a performance artwork as much as a performance by a small group such as a jazz trio or quartet. The whole live performance of "Blue Rondo," for example, is improvisatory. Or so I will argue.

The explanation is that there is much more to the experience of a living in-the-moment music in a jazz performance than is accounted for simply by foregrounded improvisations. Typically, there is more improvisation happening than a reductive scheme of solo improvisations placed within nonimprovised music has so far implied. This accounts for why the whole jazz performance, not only foregrounded solos, has aliveness and also why a performance of a classical musical work even with improvised cadenzas is not alive in this sense.

In jazz groups of various sizes there are two ubiquitous sites of improvising, shading into each other, which I will call 'background' and 'foundational improvising.' Background improvisation happens when a second player simultaneously improvises in the background of a foregrounded solo although of course there are also many examples of simultaneous equally foregrounded improvisations.[36] This case shades into foundational improvising, where a background player selects from a more restricted set of options such as rhythm section players have who need to keep the beat and support the rhythm. Surely,

as Demarco argues, “there are, and ought to be, different degrees of improvisation. Those degrees can be determined by many kinds of properties (e.g., . . . contingencies of performance).”[37] Accordingly, the background choices of the rhythm section players, for example, the bass player’s spontaneous choices of ostinato patterns and embellishments while also supporting the meter and rhythm are never the same from performance to performance, thus alive.[38]

Besides individual foreground, background, and foundational improvisations, there is the pervasiveness of genuine dialogues and multiple interactions between players in group jazz. Taking a further step, Hagberg persuasively argues that “group jazz improvisation at the highest levels can achieve a kind of cooperative creativity that rises above the sum total of the contributions of the individuals . . . [H]ere it emerges that qualities of the improvised performance are not reducible to individuated intentional content, and the notion of the plural subject provides both an analysis of it and the language for it.”[39] This is illustrated by his analysis of the beginning of the Getz group performance, “What is evident, through all of this . . . is that the sax would not do what it is doing without the piano doing what it is doing, which is simultaneously cooperating with the bass in a way that makes what the drums are doing in reply exactly right. This is shared intentional content; it is not reducible to any single member.”[40] So, while improvising, players listening to each other effect a group-improvised direction. Thus, the aliveness of such a group performance artwork is analogous to that of an individual solo improvisation.

What of big bands, which are structured by a chart or arrangement they are playing? When a performance of a song or jazz piece consists of one featured soloist after another sequentially improvising, this is plausibly a case of quantity turning into quality; the improvised solos become a central focus of the performance and hence create a performance artwork. In the swing era, big band performances had three goals: produce the familiar song, produce a swing beat (that is, elicit dance impulses), and finally a series of improvised solos. Because the latter were central to a given performance, they make the performance artwork unique and of-the-moment even though the overall structure is predetermined. For modern big bands, the centrality of improvised playing, singly and by group, makes a performance unique and alive even if also extensively scored.

In sum, the whole performance of a song or composition in jazz is experienced as music created in the moment, and jazz performance artworks, whether performances of familiar songs, jazz standards or original compositions, are rightly regarded simply as improvised music.

7. Locating jazz

The aliveness account posits a property of jazz performances that by implication many other genres of musical performance do not regularly possess. Yet, features such as solo improvisations are common in some forms of popular music such as rock and bluegrass. Are such performances significantly different from jazz in regard to the property of aliveness? No, if the improvisations significantly change the resulting performance.

The argument so far implies that an improvised passage in any type of music—rock, classical, or folk—has a feeling of aliveness during its occurrence provided that it is perceived as improvised. But what sets jazz performance apart from most classical and many popular music performances is the aliveness of the whole performance of a

composition. Performance artworks are the norm and, as it were, the telos of jazz performance. The implicit goal is to make something different of every song or composition.

It follows that it is possible for performance artworks to exist in many other musical genres and accordingly to possess aliveness. Whenever a performance is significantly unscripted, evolving, and expressive in the way most jazz performances are, it has aliveness. For example, this account applies to Indian classical music performances of ragas; each performance of a raga is a performance artwork. Another example might be electric 12-bar blues instrumental performances in which the focus is primarily on the virtuoso blues guitarist's solos, while the simple blues song is only of subordinate significance, a framework for solos. The same is true in rock performances when the song is not the primary interest, but the improvisatory playing is.[41] In classical music, a Gabriela Montero's improvisation on *Für Elise* at a specific performance is a performance artwork. A very different example would be an entirely improvised musical performance by contemporary avant-garde players, with no meter, no rhythm, and no repetitive structure. This, too, would be a performance artwork possessing aliveness, although lacking many features typically characteristic of a jazz performance such as rhythmic entrainment of the listener and individual improvisations within a thematic and rhythmic framework. Together all these features of typical jazz performances combine to produce performance artworks that have an aliveness that contrasts both with classical music performances and much popular music.

8. Conclusion

I have argued that (1) improvised music has the perceptual property of aliveness and (2) that most jazz performances involve the creation of a performance artwork that sounds alive in the sense that it is experienced as being created by the players in the moment by putting personal expression and energy into their spontaneous actions, All music is in-the-moment, but improvised music comes out of the creative expression and choices of the players. This gives the music a unique quality that completely precomposed music, if perceived as such, does not have.

I have also noted that other musical traditions such as Indian classical music also produce improvised, hence alive, performance artworks. In contrast, a complete performance of a musical work in the classical tradition does not have the perceptual property of aliveness, even if it contains a few improvised passages.

The burden of aliveness in jazz is borne by improvisation. Although not all of a jazz performance is fully improvised, what sets jazz apart is the pervasiveness of degrees of improvisatory playing in each performance and the centrality of improvisations in almost all performances, as, for example, every player taking a solo in a small group or in the dance band era each frontline soloist taking a solo. I have also argued that although spontaneous, jazz improvisations are nonetheless reactive intentional actions creating improvisatory music moment by moment.

Finally, I propose that performance artworks are the answer to the question raised at the beginning of our investigation of ephemerality: Does jazz have a history of artworks that we can now hear and appreciate if it consists only of ephemeral performances? The answer

is that the performance artwork is the central artwork in jazz.[42] Recordings preserve and display this history. And because recordings of jazz performances allow us to hear these performance works, they are foundational to jazz history; they allow us to hear these artworks again.[43]

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Endnotes
[1] Stanley Crouch, *Considering Genius* (Basic Civitas Books, 2006), 297.
[2] Lee B. Brown, "Musical Works, Improvisation, and the Principle of Continuity," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 54, 4 (1996): 356.
[3] What is said about live jazz performance applies to studio takes of jazz, as long as they involve improvisation.
[4] See Bence Nanay, "Musical Twofoldness," *The Monist* 95, 4 (2012): 606–623.
[5] Ted Gioia, *History of Jazz* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 309f.
[6] Diana Raffman, "Toward a Cognitive Theory of Ineffability," *The Review of Metaphysics*, 41, 4 (1988): 685-706.
[7] This is not to deny that improvisation was important in the musical practices of Mozart, Bach, Beethoven and many performers well into the Romantic Age. See endnote 12.
[8] References to classical music only apply to the mainstream tradition. If John Cage's pieces such as *4'33"* and other totally indeterminate pieces are considered musical works, then they are clearly an entirely different sort of work. What I say below places performances of such pieces in the same category as jazz performance artworks.
[9] Brown, "Musical Works, Improvisation, and the Principle of Continuity," 359.
[10] *Ibid*., 356.
[11] *Ibid*., 353.
[12] The extent of improvisation in the classical music tradition before 1800 such as Bach's improvisations at the court of Frederick the Great, improvised da capo arias in Baroque opera, or improvised ornamentation in Baroque music, and so on is well documented. Moreover, individual performers in the nineteenth century continued to offer

improvisations [John Rink, *Chopin and Improvisation* (Princeton University Press, 2017)], as do some classically trained performers today.
[13] I use "musical work" to refer to a composed musical structure that is intended to be multiply instantiated in possible performances; thus, a musical work is an allographic artwork. For example, a Beethoven piano sonata, an Ellington big band piece, a popular song are all musical works. By contrast, an improvisation is autographic; it can be notated and copied, but it is not generally intended to be performed by others. This is why Mostly Other People Do the Killing's note-for-note copy of *Kind of Blue* is simply puzzling.
[14] Brown, "Musical Works, Improvisation, and the Principle of Continuity," 355.
[15] *Ibid*.
[16] *Ibid*., 361.
[17] Tobyn DeMarco, *The Metaphysics of Improvisation* (CUNY Ph.D. dissertation, 2012), Part II: 133-316.
[18] Brown, "Musical Works, Improvisation, and the Principle of Continuity," 357.
[19] For example, classical Indian vocalist Amit Chaudhuri says of performing ragas, "you can identify the raga from a particular arrangement of notes that have to do with the way they're ascending and descending . . . You cannot introduce notes which aren't there in the raga, but you can slow it down. You can evade presenting the delineation immediately. That evasion is partly where the imagination and the creativity lie" (Amil Chaudhuri, "The Sound of Music, and Indian Ragas, too," *The New York Times*, April 4, 2021, 12).
[20] Brown, "Musical Works, Improvisation, and the Principle of Continuity," 364.
[21] Brown, "Musical Works, Improvisation, and the Principle of Continuity," 365.
[22] We should differentiate explicit problem-solving from the intellectual framework of the embedding composition and surrounding music that is active in the player's awareness while improvising. Such an improvised action is intellectually informed.
[23] Brown, "Musical Works, Improvisation, and the Principle of Continuity," 365.
[24] *Ibid*.
[25] *Ibid*.
[26] Stephen Davies, *Musical works and Performances,* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 14.
[27] David Davies, *Philosophy of the Performing Arts* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 152.
[28] *Ibid*., 153.
[29] DeMarco, *The Metaphysics of Improvisation*, 219.
[30] This is intention in action. On the distinction between prior intention and intention in action, see John R. Searle, "The Intentionality of Intention and Action," *Cognitive Science,* 4, 1 (1980): 47-70.
[31] "We should consider the playing in terms of the opportunities produced and taken by the musicians" [Stephen Davies, *Musical works and Performances* (Oxford University Press 2001),17]. The next sound could have been otherwise.
[32] I base these times on the version released on *Time Out* (Columbia, 1959). The outtake of "Blue Rondo" released in 2020 has different solos and is longer, illustrating the in-the-moment music making of jazz *even in the studio*.
[33] *A Night at the Village Vanguard* (Blue Note, 1957).
[34] "Chega De Saudade (No More Blues)," from *Take Another Look: A career retrospective* (Mack Avenue, 2018).
[35] Stephen Davies, *Musical works and Performances*.

[36] For example, the interaction between Chick Corea Anthony Braxton and Dave Holland on *Circle 1: Circle Live in Germany Concert*.
[37] DeMarco, *The Metaphysics of Improvisation*, 54.
[38] Garry L. Hagberg gives an example of foundational improvising from the beginning of a Stan Getz Quartet live performance of "Green Dolphin Street": "the piano showing an immediate comprehension of [the previous improvised melody] . . . plays chords (*with improvised voicings*) that contain pitches corresponding to what we would hear in the melody were it being played 'straight'" [Garry Hagberg, "The ensemble as plural subject: jazz improvisation, collective intention and group agency," in *Distributed Creativity: Collaboration and Improvisation in Contemporary Music*, eds. Eric F. Clarke and Mark Doffman (Oxford University Press, 2017), 306, my emphasis].
[39] *Ibid*., 300.
[40] *Ibid*., 307.
[41] A salient example is Prince's dominating performance of "While My Guitar Gently Weeps," in George Harrison Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony 2004.
[42] Jazz compositions (for example, "Round Midnight") are also important artworks, but in jazz they are intended to be the basis for producing performance works. In that sense they are secondary to the performances they inspire. In addition, performance artworks are not necessarily more valuable musically or aesthetically than individual solos. The duel between Dexter Gordon and Gene Ammons on Billy Eckstine Orchestra's "Blowing My Blues Away" (1944) might be the most valuable part of the performance.