JAZZ GUITARIST JIMMY PONDER: A CASE STUDY OF CREATIVE PROCESSES AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC

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This study examines musical and social processes in American popular music through the creative life of Pittsburgh born jazz guitarist Jimmy Ponder. I contextualize Ponder's technical and conceptual approaches with a historical analysis of developments in jazz during the mid-20th century. In examining intersections between jazz and other popular forms of music during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, I aim to identify Ponder's "musical identity," which encapsulates the totality of his musical existence. In this study, I focus on relating musical sounds to social contexts and the processes that give these sound meaning. Musical identity, as a tool for examining the creative life of the jazz musician, is comprised of the individual's approach to their instrument(s), recording, band leading, performance, song interpretation, and improvisation. From these approaches develops a "voice" with which the musician creates meaningful musical experiences (authentic performances) as well as engages certain social realities in public contexts (affective collective listening).

Though I choose here to label Ponder as a "jazz" guitarist, a central goal of this paper is to demonstrate how his musical identity hinges on the discourse between jazz and other commercialized music that was born from the African-American social experience and cultivated on the "chitlin circuit." I address such genres within the African-American musical tradition as blues, R&B, soul-jazz, and fusion and explore how Ponder negotiated contemporary musical contexts, drawing forth various stylistic elements from which he formed his "voice."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

PREFACE

This study has grown from my struggles to continue developing as a musician. In jazz, as in all artistic undertakings, one looks to those who have come before as they move forward. Over the past five years Jimmy Ponder has provided greatly needed guidance in searching for my own creative voice. As a student and friend of Jimmy Ponder's, I have been struck by the conviction of his musical values and their relationship to all aspects of his life. I am deeply indebted to Ponder for sharing his artistic vision with such vehement dedication and will carry his lessons in all of my artistic endeavors. This study is my offering of appreciation for his teachings and lifelong dedication to the art of music. May he continue to serve the world community with his music for many years to come.

This paper would not have been possible without the guidance of my advisor Dr. Nathan Davis, who, through his deep knowledge of jazz as a performer and scholar, has helped to shape my academic approach to jazz. His dedication to "tell the truth" as it has been handed down by great jazz innovators is an inspiration in both my performance and university life. I am also indebted to Dr. Akin Euba, Dr. Andrew Weintraub, and Dr. Bell Yung who shaped my approach to the discipline of ethnomusicology and contributed diverse perspectives on the study of music.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, who have continually encouraged my exploration of music and the arts while inspiring me with their own work and creative explorations. I own them greatly for their support as I have developed as a musician and writer.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

My study will focus on guitarist Jimmy Ponder (1946-), who began his professional musical career in the mid-1960s when he left Pittsburgh to tour with jazz organist Charles Earland. Ponder relocated to Philadelphia and later Newark before returning to Pittsburgh in the early 1990s where he continues to live. In the greater New York area, Ponder recorded and worked extensively as a sideman as well as a bandleader. Known for his clean and full-bodied guitar sound, interpretive ability, melodic phrasing, and aggressive rhythmic approach, Ponder has been in high demand among both swing and R&B oriented jazz musicians. While his sensibility lies with the emotionally charged sounds of modern urban blues guitarists and singers he is equally adept at engaging the intellectuality of modern jazz. This study specifically examines his musical life, giving special attention to his approaches to technique[1], band leading, and improvisation, as well as examining the influences of R&B and blues on these approaches. From this analysis, I aim to elucidate how he has formed a personally meaningful musical "voice" and how this is realized in performance.

Ponder has drawn heavily from both R&B and "straight ahead" jazz in his musical approach. Though Ponder recorded extensively in the late 1960s, his experiences as a session leader did not begin until 1974. As a recording musician who readily crosses genres, Ponder's recorded output demonstrates the fluid boundaries that existed between jazz and other popular

1

forms of music. What enabled this, from a creative standpoint, was a shared aesthetic born from African-American social experiences. Both R&B and jazz (as Ponder experienced it in the 1950s and 60s) derive from the same sensibility and functioned to bring the same aesthetic experience to audiences. For this reason, jazz was indistinguishable as a social phenomenon from other forms of African-American popular music yet distinctive as a complex intellectual discipline.

This dual identity of jazz, as both a popular and high-art phenomenon, reflects racialized and class oriented understandings in the mid-twentieth century. Ponder views his approach to music as part of a larger African-American musical tradition in which jazz occupies the highest echelon. For Ponder, a strong sensibility to both the popular and high-art images of jazz are essential for creating a meaningful musical approach.[2] The negotiation of these seemingly polar images, while important to understanding Ponder's voice, is also central to larger discourses on authenticity in jazz, particularly as it was played in the mid-twentieth century.

From an economic standpoint, the force of the market drove the crossing of genres. Jazz in the 1970s is often portrayed as being in a state of crisis due to influences of popular music. Reactions against the introduction of new sensibilities into the jazz tradition were evident amongst musicians as well as jazz educators and historians in the following decades. Jimmy Heath, a musician born from the Be-bop era, lamented new directions, forged by innovators such as Miles Davis. As Heath notes, "Miles had led the pack for so long [musicians] didn't know how to stop following him, even if the music wasn't any good."[3] Critics, such as Stanley Crouch,

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[1] Technique here refers largely to the manipulation of the right hand in playing the guitar.
[2] In discussing the craft and perseverance needed to perform his music, Ponder often uses the terminology "black classical music," distinguishing jazz in terms of class and difficulty. In discussing what his music communicates to an audience, Ponder does not distinguish jazz from blues, R&B, or funk.
[3] Stanley Crouch, "On the Corner: The Sellout of Miles Davis" from *The All-American Race Game* (Random House, 1995).

mirrored these concerns, vividly condemning Miles Davis' explorations of free jazz and jazz-rock, which began in the late 1960s:

> Once given to exquisite dress, Davis now comes on the bandstand draped in the expensive bad taste of rock 'n' roll. He walks about the stage, touches foreheads with the saxophonist as they play a duet, bends over and remains in that ridiculous position for long stretches as he blows at the floor, invites his white female percussionist to come, midriff bare, down the ramp and do a jungle-movie dance as she accompanies herself with a talking drum, sticks out his tongue at his photographers, leads the din of electronic clichés with arm signals, and trumpets the many facets of his own force with amplification that blurts forth a sound so decadent that it can no longer disguise the shriveling of its maker's soul.[4]

Though Crouch's description addresses a performance from the late 1980s, the attack is directed towards the whole of the fusion movement. These criticisms of musicians and critiques alike reveal an ideological paradox in which jazz functions both as art and popular music. This dual identity of the idiom partially arises from the practice of jazz musicians drawing from the repertoires and sensibilities of contemporary entertainment music though relying to a greater degree on ideals of artistic integrity and innovation when forming musical identities. Jazz musicians who developed during the 1950s, 60s and 70s, often began in groups specializing in popular musical genres such as Rhythm and Blues, Rock and Roll, and Funk. For them, incorporating these styles where integral to the process of identity formation.

I look at identity formation in jazz as it is realized in the creation of a musical "voice." Developing a voice in jazz involves incorporating the techniques and concepts of recognized

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[4] Ibid.

innovators with the end result of creating a musical approach that reflects individual experiences. Creating a unique voice is a primary task for the musician and serves as a criterion for both musicians and audiences. Jazz exists, as does any musical sound, because audiences interpret meanings while listening. Meaning elicited in music realizes itself in ineffable emotions as well patterned social action. The musician's voice is the collective result of his or her physical and conceptual approach to an instrument as it has been shaped by social experiences. As a musician sensitive to a wide range of musical approaches, Ponder's voice provides insight into creative processes in jazz at the mid-century as well understandings of race and class as they relate to music.

This paper is divided into three sections: historical context, social context, and analysis of Ponder's technical and conceptual approaches. In the first section, "Jazz at the Mid-Century," I examine three genres of popular music born from African-American social experiences. I focus on Ponder's formative years during the mid-twentieth century giving special attention to R&B, "Soul" jazz, and fusion in order to connect social and creative trends to Ponder's musical approach.

In the following section, "Race and Music," I discuss social contexts shaped by segregation in the United States, drawing from personal interviews and the theories of scholars Radano, Omi, and Keil to explore how these contexts shaped Ponder's "voice." In the following two analytical sections, I examine Ponder's musical "voice," focusing on his approach to band leading as well his technical approach to the guitar. In addition to analyzing Ponder's conceptual and technical approaches used in performance, I look at Ponder's recording experiences and discuss how he has negotiated personal interests with those of recording labels to produce

4

artistically fulfilling products. A selected discography provides the bulk of Ponder's recorded

output as a leader and sideman.

2.0   HISTORICAL CONTEXT: JAZZ AT THE MID-CENTURY

Due to the influence of commercialized popular music as well as the innovations of artists such as Miles Davis and John Coltrane, jazz was an increasingly fractured and diversified phenomenon during the mid-century. In the context of New York based movements where creative approaches to improvising were being developed, jazz became an artist-centered statement of modern urban consciousness. In the inner city clubs of smaller mid-western and eastern cities, jazz remained a social phenomenon that provided entertainment, understandings of community, and inter-city dialogue for African-American communities. Juke boxes and radio stations created popular hits, which filtered into the repertoire of local groups. Balancing entertainment and artistic intellectualism, jazz musicians such as Jimmy Ponder drew from all contemporary music in performance. Regularly working musicians crossed genres using the language of jazz and shared African-American social experiences. Jazz existed as a medium through which new material and experiences were interpreted.

2.1   RHYTHM AND BLUES

The term "Rhythm and Blues" came about from commercial needs. First used by *Billboard* in 1949 in place of the label "race records," R&B became the industry standard for

record companies in encapsulating the range of musical styles "marketed primarily to African-Americans." This label remained prominent until 1969, when it was replaced by "soul."[5] As a mid-century genre within the United States, R&B occupies an ambiguous position between blues and jazz. For harmonic and melodic language, R&B drew from the standardized 12 bar blues as well as incorporating "jazz chords" (chords with 7th, 9th, 11th, and 13th added extensions). Later R&B artists Donny Hathaway and Stevie Wonder blended the driving, electric sound with extended song forms and complex harmonic progressions of 60s jazz while singing with the inflections of blues and gospel singers.

As a force in class identity within the African-American population, R&B became "an anathema to the Negro middle class" in that it hailed from the creative processes that resulted from the tragic social condition of slavery.[6] The distinction of rhythm and blues from jazz as artistically illegitimate, "popular," and "low class," continues to be upheld by jazz historians and musicians who rely on the creative exclusivity of jazz to distinguish it as a "raceless" discipline worthy of critical analyses. Scholar and musician David Ake critiques this stance, which divides "African-American musicking" along class and style lines:

> In this view, jazz must, by necessity, be that enjoyed by only a few navel-gazing, soul-tortured hipsters. Any music that did not exert these angst-ridden qualities, that inspired audiences to dance or romance or laugh, could be called race music, R&B, rock'n'roll, soul, pop, in fact almost anything but jazz.[7]

In his critique, Ake shows how various arenas of meaning exist for historical understandings of jazz. As an intellectual pursuit, it merits special attention from those musicians, composers, and

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[5] Howard Rye, "Rhythm and Blues," *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 16 May, 2006), http://www.grovemusic.com.
[6] LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), *Blues People* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963), 172.
[7] David Ake, *Jazz Cultures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 49.

scholars who strive to challenge and expand the harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic language of modern music. However, the sonic phenomena of jazz do not carry meaning apart from their encompassing social environments, in the case of this study, those environments shared by African-Americans in the mid-twentieth century.

Within historical and racialized contexts, jazz and rhythm and blues share a principle of entertainment where systems of audience-performer interaction serve a central role in creative processes. Scholar and journalist Nelson George defines R&B in two realms, "one musical and one socioeconomic."[8] As a musical phenomenon in the 1940s and 50s, R&B was "a synthesis of black musical genres—gospel, big-band swing, blues—that, along with new technology, specifically the popularization of the electric bass, produced a propulsive, spirited brand of popular music."[9] As a socioeconomic phenomenon, R&B was "an integral part of…a black community forged by common political, economic, and geographic conditions."[10] At times, R&B was both "angst-ridden" and widely popular reflecting and influencing the shared experiences of a racilized community, one that existed and was defined in terms of its imposed minority status. During the mid-twentieth century, jazz and R&B shared this role as fundamental to African-American culture and creative identity.

Due to the various analytical stances taken towards jazz (as high-art, as popular music, as an individualistic intellectual pursuit, or as a movement within the African-American musical tradition), "critical opinion has never coalesced on whether rhythm and blues…is a genre of jazz or of blues, a hybrid of the two, or a separate musical idiom."[11] Part of the difficulty in delineating these genres is determining the function of their labeling. As commodities, as well as

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[8] Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues* (New York: Pantheon Book, 1988), xii.
[9] George, ibid.
[10] Ibid.

objects of critical study, the terms "jazz" and "R&B" exist in disparate worlds, distinguished by their marketing trends and musical structure. However, as cultural phenomenon arising from African-American social environments in the mid-century, they function to articulate many of the same ideals, centering on understandings of race, community, and cathartic release.

Writing in the mid-1960s, scholar Charles Keil delineates three broad genres in African-American music: "sacred music—spirituals, jubilees, and gospels; secular music—blues (country and urban) and most jazz before World War II; [and] "art" music or jazz since 1945."[12] This approach to categorizing a social group's musical activity is characteristic of contemporary anthropological analysis and serves the purpose of distinguishing creative actions in terms of how they functions in relation to the group as a whole. While the organization of a vast array of musical activity into broad categories has limited use, it does emphasize the interconnectedness of musical activity amongst African-Americans in the mid-century. In *Urban Blues*, Keil acknowledges that urban blues, as a genre and social phenomenon, cannot be effectively examined independently of other African-American genres. This dialogue between seemingly disparate musical activities is more than a passive cross-fertilization due to proximity. It is an inherent trait that perpetuates creative development. As Keil states, "This mutual malleability has been a constant factor—even a defining feature—in any Afro-American style both today and in the past."[13]

The hypothetical consequences of this statement are potentially damaging (though with a hint of redemption) for jazz studies. If the formative processes of the "golden era of jazz," of which the styles form the core of study in academic institutions, are informed by a range of

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[11] Rye.

[12] Charles Keil, *Urban Blues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966/1991), 32.

[13] Keil, 33.

seemingly unrelated musical realms such as European art music, African-American religious music, blues, doo-wop, and R&B, then any disregard of the interactions of these areas of "musicking" will greatly undermine the creative processes that form the core of jazz performance.

Keil's statement has implications for this study as well. As a case study of an individual African-American jazz artist's formation of a creative musical "voice" in the 1950s and 60s, one cannot ignore the formative impact of genres beyond "traditional" jazz. The space between jazz and rhythm and blues in the 1950s was occupied by a diverse range of artists such as Louis Jordon, Ray Charles, and B.B. King, all of whom commanded the expressive showmanship necessary to capture the attention of large audiences as well as elements of the rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic language of intellectually oriented jazz musicians. It was in this liminal realm of "musicking" that Jimmy Ponder formed his musical "voice" through which he continues to comment on his life experiences, his surrounding communities, and the aesthetic sensibilities of his choice musical styles: free-jazz, blues, funk, soul, and swing.

As a teen, Ponder began performing in doo-wop and R&B groups, but was exposed to jazz through radio stations and local jazz clubs such as the Crawford Grill and Hurricane. Ponder recalls listening to guitarists

> Django [Reinhardt], Bullo, his nephew,…oh man…so many guitar players...Les Paul. I was enamored with the sound…fascinated with the sound that the guitar could make. What I heard on WHAM out of Rochester. I would listen to that when I was supposed to be going to sleep, from eleven till four in the morning…sittin' up in that hot attic…but listenin' to that music and practicing what I could memorize. That filtered into what I was

involved in at the time, which was playin' background music for cover bands, top-40, and R&B groups.[14]

During the 1960s, Ponder's fluency in both popular African-American music as well as "classic" jazz made him an attractive sideman for those in the "soul-jazz" market. With experience as a "rhythm player," Ponder was well equipped to incorporate the "feel" of contemporary dance music into jazz contexts.

2.2   SOUL AND HAMMOND ORGAN JAZZ

The 1960s was a time of revolutionary movements concerned with African-American rights and identity. The ideals of these movements found their way into musical expressions though they were realized and interpreted in various ways. Changes in jazz were seen as a clear break from the mainstream. Musicians such as John Coltrane, Albert Ayler, Pharaoh Sanders, and Ornette Coleman dispensed with commonly accepted tonal and rhythmic frameworks as well as altering traditional instrumentation. This music is marked by the intensity and "purity" of emotional expression, unencumbered by convention though part of the jazz tradition. In jazz, these musical expressions tend to represent a necessary, almost inevitable development that both captured African-American experiences while opening the door to new conceptual developments in the music. Because of its intensity and sense of revolt, the avant-garde carries a connotation of authenticity in representing black cultural ideals.

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[14] Ponder, Ibid.

During the 1950s, a new generation of jazz musicians began creating music inspired by early blues and gospel music. Hard-bop, as it became known, contrasted with be-bop and the cool school in that its musicians generally favored simpler chord progressions and riff-oriented melodies as well as inflections characteristic of gospel and blues singing. This return to, or "re-evaluation" of blues and gospel was part of a larger movement amongst musicians celebrating African-American musical roots. The characteristics of this music reflected, in some general sense, the aesthetics of working class African-Americans and have since existed in opposition to what is viewed as the more intellectually inspired sounds of be-bop. Hard-bop, and later soul-jazz and "funky" jazz, developed from this aesthetic base, which, for the general population of African-American listeners, had not simply disappeared and been resurrected, but was rather part of a continuum reaching back generations. Artists such as Horace Silver, Cannonball Adderly, Stanley Turrentine, and Jimmy Smith expressed an aesthetic characteristic of African-American experiences without greatly revolutionizing the structure of the music. Like the avant-garde, this music is marked by the intensity of emotion and the expression of "soul."

As these musicians began to incorporate black popular music of the 1950s and 60s, the music became increasingly termed "soul" jazz. Soul jazz, like hard bop, was marked by a "return" to the blues. Whether a "return to the roots" of African-American music or the embodiment of an invented tradition, "soul" jazz reflected an aesthetic sensibility that contrasted with bebop and the avant-garde. Musicians who were influenced by rhythm and blues as well as gospel music approached jazz with an emphasis on "grooving two-steps, guttural back beats, [and] insistent melody lines drenched with blues notes."[15] This "simpler attitude" reflected a "return" in the sense that musicians were drawing from the blues tradition in the creation of a

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[15] Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 316.

new genre. They continued to provide danceable rhythms to audiences who in turn were conditioned to offer vocal and visual feedback though this quality had been ever present in other African-American musical forms.

"Soul" as applied to African-American music is a trans-genre experience that translates collective experience into artistic communication. "Soul" and "funk" became common labels symbolizing "earthiness" and the "emotional and spiritual depth of African-American culture" and "the gospel church."[16] Music associated with these genres was often seen as a step back from the developments of the previous decades. Performers were criticized when they returned to the "feel" and harmonic structures of the blues rather than espousing the intellectual developments of bebop. Leroi Jones notes that "the hard boppers sought to revitalize jazz, but they did not go far enough. Somehow they lost sight of the important ideas to be learned from bebop and substituted largeness of timbre and quasi-gospel influences for actual rhythmic and melodic diversity and freshness."[17] In the following decades, jazz that espoused these qualities faced being relegated to the branch of fusion jazz and hence delegitimated in relationship to artistically "pure" jazz.[18]

Scholar Ted Gioia attributes the emergence of soul jazz to the "burgeoning rhythm-and-blues movement of the late 1940s and 1950s…, the blues-drenched Kansas City and Texas tenor traditions," as well as "big band riffs, urban blues, call-and-response forms, and gospel music."[19] Commercial success with soul jazz began with Horace Silver's recording of "The Preacher" in

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[16] Barry Kernfeld, "Soul Jazz," *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz,* 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002).

[17] LeRoi Jones, *Blues People* (New York: William Morrow Company, 1963), 217.

[18] Scholar Nathan Davis notes that "soul" inspired jazz produced "a kind of 'ridgid' freedom that led to the free style of the 1960s." Implied in this statement is that the simpler harmonic and rhythmic structure allowed soloists to experiment to a greater degree. Nathan Davis, *Writings in Jazz* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Company, 2002), 212.

[19] Gioia, 321-22.

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1955.[20] Record sales convinced Blue Note founder Alfred Lion of the appeal of this "crossover sound," which led to the support and promotion of similar recordings in the following decade.

Central to "soul" or "funk" jazz was the use of the Hammond organ. The Hammond organ has strong ties to the black church and the blues. Its sound is massive, joining together elements of the choir, piano, and bass into one instrument. While more portable than the pipe organ, the Hammond organ is still notoriously difficult to transport. By the mid-1950s, the Hammond organ was a strong presence in African-American churches and closely associated with gospel music though it had been used in jazz as early as the late 1930s. The early models lacked the control over note attack that the post-1960 models had.[21] Glen Hardman and Milt Herth made early recordings on the Hammond organ, which demonstrate the limitations restrictions of the instrument.

A new age came for the Hammond organ with the introduction of the B-3 model in 1955 and the formation of Jimmy Smith's first organ-trio. Smith developed a walking bass foot-pedal technique and melded the virtuosity of bebop with the sensibilities of rhythm and blues and gospel music. Smith was quickly signed to Blue Note and incorporated into the new sub-genre of soul-jazz that the label was promoting. Smith and other organists such as Jack McDuff, Jimmy McGriff, John Patton, Lonnie Smith, and Larry Young cultivated the side of jazz influenced by church music and blues. The style is characterized by steady backbeats, hard swinging, and catchy riff-based melodies. With the exception of the modally oriented organist Lonnie Smith and Larry Young, the music represented a more traditional approach and sound rooted in the bluesy swing of Count Basie and the harmony of the Gospel tradition.

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[20] *Horace Silver and the Jazz Messengers* (Blue Note, 1955).
[21] Alyn Shipton, "The Electronic Organ," *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz,* 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002).

Organ jazz bridged the gap between acoustic and electronic jazz. The Hammond B-3 organ, while being fully electronic, had the presence of an acoustic instrument. This was made possible with the development of the Leslie speaker cabinet in the early 1940s. The sound is characterized by a heavy tremolo, which is produced by a "two-speed rotating curved reflector placed below a downward-facing loudspeaker, and by a rotating treble horn."[22] The spinning deflectors diffuse the sound from the speakers creating a stereophonic effect. With a foot pedal to control volume, stop knobs to control the sound density and quality, and multiple tremolo speeds, the organ is capable of a dynamic and expressive range comparable to a jazz big band.

Organ groups are most often kept to a small format with drums, guitar, and saxophone. Club owners preferred this format because it was cheaper than large ensembles yet it provided the energy and volume of a big band. To "fill the house" with sound and create the right feel, each instrument plays a specific role. The role of the drummer is supportive in that he or she must "lock in" with the organist's bass line, which is played with either the left hand or foot pedals. Bass lines are generally less exploratory because they are not played by a separate individual. This gives the music a cyclical quality, reminiscent of West African aesthetics, and sets a standard for a "groove" oriented foundation. The saxophone provides a powerful solo voice and often doubles melodies played by the organist's right hand. The guitar fulfills both supportive and lead roles, playing "riff" oriented chord patterns behind melodies and solos while also being a key solo voice.

Ponder's early performance experiences with Hammond organ masters Charles Earland, Jimmy McGriff, Jack McDuff, Lonnie Smith, Larry Young and John Patton formed a strong sensitivity to thematic improvisation and accompaniment. The funky grooves and blues based

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[22] Shipton.

songs of these organ groups made the interpretation of Rock and Roll and funk material a natural creative progression. However, the commercial interests of such jazz record labels as ABC Impulse would conflict with the creative interests of the artists.

2.3   FUSION JAZZ

The continuous incorporation of repertoire and stylistic traits from other genres has presented various identity shifts in jazz. The infusion of commercial or popular styles during the 1970s introduced repertoire and stylistic approaches perceived as incongruent with the tradition. "Fusion," as a general musical trend in the late 1960s and 1970s, was the "…merging of jazz and (non-jazz) popular music aesthetics and practices."[23] Distinguished by the incorporation of instruments and sensibilities from rock & roll and funk, fusion jazz was in some instances an ideological movement aimed at artistically developing the music and in others a response to cultural aesthetics and economic pressures.[24] Kevin Fellezs presents fusion jazz as resulting from a conscious effort by musicians to maintain contemporary legitimacy in the jazz tradition by joining "what seemed like disparate and distinctive musical worlds."[25] However, because of associations with commercialism, this period is often seen as jazz's dark age, in which the music lost touch with essential identifying elements. It was not until the 1980s, when there was a

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[23] Kevin Fellezs, *Between Rock and a Jazz Place: Intercultural Interchange in Fusion Musicking* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Cruz, 2004), 1.
[24] Here, I use "ideology" to refer to "the general process of the production of meanings and ideas," which in the context of fusion jazz denotes musical activity driven by ideals of creative purity. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) 55.
[25] Fellezs, 1.

renewed emphasis on the use of acoustic instruments, a traditional "swing" feel, and "standard" repertoire, that jazz regained a sense of authenticity based on a "return to its roots."

Identifying and placing fusion within the historical framework of jazz requires the negotiation of these conflicting images. The music finds itself represented both as "an attempt by young musicians to re-invest cultural vigor into a musical idiom they viewed as growing increasingly moribund and culturally irrelevant" and a movement led by economically motivated individuals with superficial understandings of the tradition.[26] At the end of the decade Leonard Feather asked prominent contemporary jazz musicians to reflect on the changes that had occurred.[27] Positive responses generally acknowledged the wider recognition and appreciation of jazz as a legitimate art form with a rich tradition worthy of both scholarly and popular attention. Pianist Bill Evans noted that jazz had in some ways "come of age" allowing the younger generation of listeners to reflect on and appreciate the musical tradition.[28] Drummer Elvin Jones noted an increased acceptance of "jazz as an art form of genuine value" and the increase in jazz festivals.[29] The "coming of age" of jazz would also explain the profusion of festivals where large audiences were presented with diverse jazz programs. As a "mature" art form, various artists could more easily be presented together under the rubric of jazz.

While the fusion of elements from other popular music expanded the audience and expressive vocabulary of jazz, these developments are also widely criticized for diluting the tradition of jazz. As pianist Herbie Hancock states, fusion "helped us reach a broader public and rid jazz of the stigma of not being commercial" though "it became difficult for musicians to play

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[26] Ibid., 4.
[27] Leonard Feather, *Passion for Jazz* (New York: Horizon Press, 1980), 204.
[28] Feather, 205.
[29] Ibid.

pure jazz" and "club work fell off while fusion music drew people to concerts."[30] Musicians who were not versed in the tradition of jazz were also presented as jazz musicians because they could play "crossover" music.[31] Also, musicians who had developed within the jazz tradition were often encouraged by record companies to manipulate their sound and repertoire in hopes of selling more records. Feather quotes Evans as saying that jazz musicians were increasingly pressured "to reach for sales by formula" often by under qualified producers.[32] Commercial motivations, widely apparent in the recorded output of the period, have created powerful images of artistic ineptitude.

Authenticity in music is a collection of associations and understandings that arise from the discourse between listeners. In jazz, authenticity is measured through the artist's actual or perceived purity of intention, which the musician demonstrates through his or her willingness to "serve the music" above material gain.[33] However, jazz is a commercial endeavor in which the musician provides a commodity. When one is paid to fulfill a commercially motivated vision, especially one that conflicts with the artist's ideals, it is interpreted as "selling out" or sacrificing the music. As Theodor Adorno rightly notes, popular music is intimately tied to modern industrialized societies. However, he argues that within this system, with its tendencies towards standardization and commodification, "nothing really new is allowed to intrude, nothing but calculated effects that add some spice to the ever-sameness without imperiling it."[34] The jazz musician enjoys a unique position within modern industrialized society as one who works within a capitalist framework, though maintains their creative independence through their "voice."

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[30] Ibid., 206.
[31] The process of crossing over refers to changes that bring music to new audiences, namely marketing to different racial groups and introducing new stylistic approaches.
[32] Ibid.
[33] "Serving the music" may better be defined as eschewing showmanship for innovation.
[34] Theodor Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, New York: Seabury Press (1962), 26.

Examples of formulaic programming are readily available in Ponder's recorded output, which features songs by the Beatles, Michael Jackson, and Stevie Wonder alongside those by Thelonious Monk, John Coltrane, and Billy Strayhorn. Whether the musician perceives or approaches their musical experience in more commercially motivated situations differently depends on their ability make the music their own. The question may be raised of whether processes and emotions fundamentally change when a musician from the jazz tradition plays an arrangement of a Beatles or Michael Jackson song for a commercial recording. Jazz musicians have always drawn from popular culture, shaping familiar melodies into personal statements and assigning new meanings to old sounds. The challenge for jazz musicians to recreate the song so that it reflects their personal "voice."

Tradition within jazz, through innovative interpreters, has come to be identified with a standardized repertoire. This repertoire is largely comprised of songs from the blues tradition, American popular-songs as adapted by jazz musicians, and original compositions that draw from a wide range of genres. The solidification of the jazz repertoire, through the production of various "fake books" marketed to jazz musicians as well as recordings that celebrate the tradition of these songs, has shifted emphasis from the processes of interpretation that have established these songs as "standards" and towards the songs themselves. It is the processes of interpretation, self-expression, and unique presentation that make a musical event part of the jazz tradition.

Identifying tradition in jazz, as it existed in the fusion era, is difficult because of the increasingly wide range of innovators who represent a disparate collection of social experiences and draw from a wide range of genres. Dessen notes the immense social developments during the

mid-twentieth century and the fracturing affect these had on the concept of jazz.[35] Where issues of race, gender, and class had always found a stage for discourse in jazz, the 1960s saw these issues split the music along more clearly identifiable ideological boundaries. The music continued to provide a medium through which meaning was conveyed, though these meanings became increasingly exclusionary. Reflecting these diverse social discourses, "musicians in the United States were faced with an increasingly broad set of choices as to how to position themselves within or against the very concept of jazz itself."[36] As ideologies grew stronger and more fractured, the "fragile consensus"[37] or conceptual unity of jazz "seemed to have been shredded beyond repair."[38] While jazz during the first half of the twentieth century was far from being ideologically unified, its path increasingly converged with diverse and politically oriented milieus during the mid-century, which had a diversifying affect.

With the institutionalization of jazz and the subsequent need for a coherent historical picture, much of the conflicts and stylistic developments of the late 1960s and 1970s were bypassed for earlier jazz styles. Fusion jazz has also been portrayed as a musician's response to the "inaccessibility" of the avant-garde. So strong is the image of "authentic" artistic intention in the emotionally and intellectually driven sounds of avant-garde innovators (John Coltrane, Albert Ayler, Eric Dolphy, and Pharoah Sanders) that any return to accessibility would seem like a regressive movement. Ronald Radano notes that

By reaching beyond the music's conventional limits, musicians (and their supposed institutions) hoped to win back an audience that had been displaced by the free movement. While sympathetic to free music's willingness to challenge even the most

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[35] Michael Dessen, *Decolonizing Art Music: Scenes from the Late Twentieth-Century United States* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Sandiego, 2003).
[36] Dessen, 2.
[37] Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997), 5.

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basic aesthetic tenets, the new generation of musicians sought to satisfy those aims while also working within accessible musical conventions.[39]

The return to "accessible musical conventions" with fusion presents a problem for jazz historians because it conflicts with the evolutionary path where genres rise and fall in an orderly fashion. When musical activities fail to fit this progression or reverse the dominant order, they are subsequently left out of the picture. Stuart Nicholson encapsulates the historical perception of fusion jazz as follows:

> This was the decade when jazz and rock got into bed and produced an illegitimate child called fusion, a creature every self-respecting jazz critic loves to hate. In fact, during the conservative 1980s and '90s it became distinctly fashionable to stop the clock in 1969, when electric jazz was ushered in by Miles Davis, start it again in 1982 with the arrival of that latter-day model of acoustic rectitude Wynton Marsalis, and pretend the fusion of jazz and rock never happened—not least because Marsalis, the highest profile jazz musician of recent times, saw things that way.[40]

The conflict between fusion and "traditional" jazz, as it was realized in the early twentieth century, is one of aesthetics rather than ideology. It is not so much that, for critics of fusion, new approaches in instrumentation, harmony, and presentation threatened "tradition" but rather that fundamentally different aesthetic processes were taking place that had no relation to previous activities of musicians such as Louis Armstrong, Coleman Hawkins, Billie Holiday, and Thelonious Monk.

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[38] Dessen 3.

[39] Ronald Radano, "Jazz Since 1960," in *The Cambridge History of American* Music, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 458.

[40] Stuart Nicholson, "The Song of the Body Electric," in *Future Jazz*, ed. Yuval Taylor (Chicago, A Cappella Books, 2002), 43.

The "fusion" or "cross-over" period of jazz has provided fertile ground for discourse on the topics of race, tradition, authenticity, and identity in jazz. As a musician who developed during the 1960s, Jimmy Ponder has both a strong appreciation of "traditional" jazz as well as the popular music of the mid-century. While Ponder distinguishes genres such as jazz, funk, rhythm and blues, and blues when identifying innovative artists, his musical sensibility is born from and focused towards playing, in his words, "black music." Jazz, as produced and consumed by any ethnic group, is but one musical experience that expresses an African-American aesthetic. It may be easy for commercial reasons to demark musical genres such as jazz, soul, rhythm and blues, and funk, but boundaries are often fluid in social practice. During the mid-century, musicians were communicating similar aesthetic experiences and though they were increasingly mixing genres, they maintained close ties with the African-American aesthetic experience.

3.0   SOCIAL CONTEXT: RACE AND MUSIC

While there is a tendency towards essentialism when discussing racial groups, one can address aesthetic experiences as they exist within a historical and geographic context. Though jazz has been an international phenomenon since the early twentieth century, it has functioned differently for various groups self-identified along racial, geographical, and class lines. Addressing jazz in an African-American context, Baskerville notes that

> Jazz, like other forms of black music, communicates to its black audience in a kind of musical language. The music communicates, it expresses the black experience in America through its emotional nature. Through its collective improvisation, the music symbolizes black unity, while, at the same time, it breaks the rules of traditional Western music and becomes a music of liberation.[41]

While I agree that jazz in a mid-century African-American social context communicates ideas associated with "black experiences" and perpetuates understandings of collectivity, I expand on its function as "liberation" within the context of this paper. In a working class African-American context, what Ponder experienced as the "chitlin circuit," jazz was not seen as an overt political or nationalist movement but rather liberation for both listeners and performers from the abstract burdens of emotional repression and modern urban living. From these collective needs developed cultural aesthetics, or norms of interaction in performance environments that both reflected and

shaped understandings of social existence. For Ponder, these experiences as an African-American and understandings of larger dynamics of race relations within the United States remain central to his musical identity and understanding his "voice." In any performance context, Ponder maintains a creative approach developed in the "chitlin circuit" where audience expectations interacted with musician artistry to produce collective creativity.

3.1   RACE AND IDEOLOGY

In discussing race and music, one must first move from biologically to socially and historically deterministic understandings of race. From this point we can discuss race as it is embodied in shared social experiences. Michael Omi and Howard Winant discuss the process of "racialization" rather than race as a determinant of identity formation and the creation of social structures. As an analytical tool

> Racialization is an ideological process, an historically specific one. Racial ideology is constructed from pre-existing conceptual (or, if one prefers, "discursive") elements and emerges from struggles of competing political projects and ideas seeking to articulate similar elements differently.[42]

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[41] John Baskerville, *The Impact of Modern Black Nationalist Ideology and Cultural Revitalization on American Jazz Music of the 1960s and 1970s* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1997), 70.

[42] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul Inc., 1989): 64.

Modern understandings of race arise from colonial conceptualizations of difference formed to maintain power structures and propel the economic development of the Americas and Western Europe. As Omi and Winant emphasize, American conceptions of race have specific historical origins that are related to ideology, not presumed inherent traits of a given social group.

Ronald Radano and Phillip Bohlman relate ideological forces to the formation of race as well. Shared experiences and value systems form what they call the "racial imagination" or "shifting matrix of ideological constructions of difference associated with body type and color that have emerged as part of the discourse network of modernity."[43] At the heart of the relationship between "racial imagination" and musical meaning is the structuralist precept of binary oppositions, whereas identities are created and maintained through understandings of what they are not. In other words, the creation of Self arises from understandings of what the individual perceives as characteristic of the Other. In this theoretical framework, African-American music is created from competing understandings of difference, not a preexisting African essence. Rather than something born of a single perspective of "blackness", "black music's difference grows from…self and other, reflecting the relational circumstances of interracial experience."[44] The advantage of this theoretical perspective for this study is that it relates Ponder's individualized musical identity to the racialized contexts of America in the mid-twentieth century and not an essentialized tradition of black music.

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[43] Ronald Radano and Philip Bohlman, ed. *Music and the Racial Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 5.
[44] Ronald Radano, *Lying Up a Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). 8.

This binary relationship, enacted as a social dialogue between black and white, derives from certain "metaphysics of ownership" in the realm of musical sound.[45] Radano and Bohlman note two means through which music creates conceptual ownership and images of Self:

> The first is more often than not achieved through the attribution of linguistic properties to music; that is, to hear in music communication, signification, and meaning. The second derives from the technologies of music's production, which further control its distinguishing characteristic of selfness.[46]

Music creates meaning through the communication of ideas that relay a certain social experience. These experiences derive from the "racial imagination" in that collective experiences develop from common understandings. What ultimately enables music to communicate is the existence of shared experiences. It is the listener's ability to derive meaning that creates an understanding of Self apart from the Other.

Ideas may also be communicated through the physical determinants or "technologies" of music. Instruments, performers, listeners, venues, and recordings are objects in the physical realm of music making that convey notions of meaning, belonging, and Self. "Technologies" of music cannot exist apart from what they communicate. Music does not exist in notation or recordings but in the shared understandings of their meaning. Radano and Bohlman state "by possessing the objects containing music, one acquires the power to own and control the ways in which music bounds the group for which it has meaning."[47] Jazz in the mid-twentieth century was still largely a segregated phenomenon. African American owned clubs in largely African-American neighborhoods were the only venues available to many for live music. Because these

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[45] Radano and Bohlman, p.6.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.

venues were located within the communities to which they catered, there existed a strong sense of cultural ownership and understanding around which norms of performance developed.

3.2   THE CHITLIN CIRCUIT

One cannot discuss jazz as a product of the African-American social experience without addressing the venues in which it was performed. Nightclubs and other community venues that catered to largely African-American audiences and where music served as a central attraction were often referred to as the "chitlin circuit." The "chitlin circuit," a string of performance venues and restaurant-bars throughout Mid-Western, Eastern and Southern United States that catered to largely African-American audiences, was a focus for African-American social activity and provided a stage for performer and audience interaction. The chitlin circuit provided musicians with a system of feedback born from African-American cultural aesthetics. In any venue that caters to a largely uniform social demographic, there exists a system of values that affect musicians.

The chitlin circuit is a colloquial term used largely by musicians in reference to small restaurants or nightclubs located in African American sections of cities and which featured entertainment. It is interchangeable with the terms "gut-bucket" and "buckets-of-blood." For audience members, club owners, and musicians familiar with the term, it brings about images of smoky rooms filled with well-dressed men and women, some sitting in intimate booths, some as tables cluttered with drinks and food, others at the bar, all who came to socialize and, more importantly, experience musicians demonstrating their abilities and devotion to their craft.

Chitlin circuit is more than a term to identify black owned and patronized clubs. It is a synecdoche that conveys images of working-class African-American life. "Chitlin," or chitterlings, are the small intestines of the pig, which were carefully prepared and served in many of these venues. The food is closely tied to African-American social experiences in that it is a remnant of slavery life where choice cuts of meat were rarely available. The term "chitlin" carries visceral associations with America's racially repressive history as well as the ability of African Americans to improvise a meaningful existence within such conditions. Nelson Harrison, a Pittsburgh trombonist who began playing as a teenager in the 1950s, notes that, because of segregation,

> Whenever there was a social affair it [was] either all white or all black so black people created their own societies. The chitlin circuit was all the black clubs. Every city had its black society and its black clubs and the society went from the rich people down to the poor people; all black. So when the doctor's fraternities would have an affair at the William Penn Hotel they were segregated. They had the American Medical Association and blacks couldn't get in that so they formed the *National* Medical Association. American Dental Association…the *National* Dental Association was black. American Accountant Association…the *National* Accountant Association was black because we couldn't get into the white group. They wouldn't let blacks into the musician's union so they chartered local 471 in 1908. The local 60 is older but we couldn't get in there.[48]

As a collection of institutions, the chitlin circuit provided both economic support as well as a creative outlet for segregated communities. Physically, the chitlin circuit was mostly comprised of small, one-room, "neighborhood" bars that featured both local and touring

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[48] Nelson Harrison, personal interview (March 7, 2006).

musicians. Musicians, who in their travels conveyed contact information to one another, maintained connections between these venues. Because musicians were regularly touring, these venues served as points of informal contact where individuals could network and sustain their craft. Organist Gene Ludwig recalls

> I got a chance to work in these rooms in Pittsburgh and a lot of the traveling bands that came in from other cities would hang out and they'd take the news back to these other locations…like the 100 Club in Cleveland, Hank Marr was playing there and mentioned my name to the owner. So the owner called me and said, "Hank speaks very highly of you. Could you come to Cleveland for a stretch?"[49]

Harrison recalls similar experiences networking on the circuit:

> There were guys that would come into town that would like to mix with the locals and play and we'd have jam sessions. You never knew who'd show up. I remember Jimmy McGriff came in with Rudy Johnson, who was with Ray Charles. We went up to the Wendi Club in the Hill District on Ledley Street off of Bedford and had a jam session. "Hey man, you play pretty good, give me your number." Then somebody would call you from New York, "Hey man, I heard about you." You couldn't talk your way into it. They would have to hear you.[50]

Audiences and club owners were no less important for the maintenance of these venues as important focal points of social activity. Audiences valued live entertainment as an important aspect of urban life. They demanded that meaningful and cathartic social experiences included an interactive environment between musicians and listeners. While audience attendance increased the viability of club owning, club owners were often able to maintain performance venues with

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[49] Gene Ludwig, personal interview (March 8, 2006).

other sources of income. Also, club owners were able to support music that reflected personal ideals that served to support images of community.

Drummer Roger Humphries notes, "you can't play music to people who have deaf ears and aren't enjoying it from their stomachs."[51] Sounds become music when audiences share the musician's expectations of the music as well as the abilities to communicate those expectations to the performer. In the Hurricane,[52] audiences expected groups to "just swing. It didn't matter what you played as long as it was swinging. If you didn't swing, you wouldn't last."[53] The layout of clubs such as the Hurricane and Crawford Grill facilitated the communication between performers and audiences by installing raised stages and rap-around bars. Jukeboxes familiarized patrons with new recordings, artists, and song repertoires. Patrons, though untrained as musicians, developed conventions of attitude, dress style, food preferences and vocalization that communicated their desires to the musicians. In the 1950s and 60s, Pittsburgh's steel industry was still strong, providing an abundance of work. Particularly on the weekends, working class individuals sought a release from the rigors of the work-week, family problems, and limited social mobility. For many, socializing through music served this purpose.

A "language" developed from audience expectations that helped guide the musicians. Harrison recalls how crowds at the Crawford Grill communicated to inexperienced performers:

> Groups would come in there that weren't ready and they'd finish playin' a tune and there'd be total silence. The looks on [the listener's] faces would say, "Are you going to play something or what?" I remember one young group came in there. [The band leader] was a good trombone player but he brought this group of young guys that he was trainin'

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[50] Harrison, ibid.
[51] Roger Humphries, personal interview (March 9, 2006).

into the Crawford Grill. They played two numbers and nobody clapped so for the next number they played, I clapped to give them some feedback cause they were scared to death. I was the only one in there clappin' so the next number they played was a little better. Then about two people clapped…then they played a little better. By the time they were done with the set they played something really good and the people were responding. It's an interactional thing.[54]

While crowds could be "cold" when the band did not meet their expectations, they would contribute feedback so to create the right environment for socializing. Though musicians were expected to know the common repertoire, improvise, and master their instrument, this served the purpose of interacting. The musician's technique was not an ends in and of itself. Audiences did not want songs presented, but rather reproduced through a cycle of feedback. As Harrison notes, the most important objective for the musician is

To reach inside the person that is listening to you and make them feel something. You don't play notes at them and you certainly don't sit up there and read something. If you have to read something then get the hell off the bandstand. Why don't you know the music? I remember walking in the [Crawford] Grill one time in the '90s and there were some cats standin' up there playin' "All Blues" and they had a music stand in front of them. I walked in there and said "No you don't", and I took the music stand down and I looked at them and said "Now, say something to me or stop playin'." If you can't play "All Blues" up there then get the hell off the stage. It's not what the music is. You have to reach and move me. It's not about finding the notes and playing the chord changes.

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[52] The Hurricane was a black owned jazz club that operated in Pittsburgh's Hill District under Ferdinand Dunlap from the late 1930s until the late 1960s.
[53] Ludwig, ibid.

That's meaningless. That place was a spirit house. A church. People came there to get

fed. That music enabled you to go out there and face life. When times were the hardest,

you could go get healed with the music and you could face anything.[55]

Bassist and guitarist Dan Wasson encountered similar "training" in the 1980s at black

owned neighborhood bars. Though he grew up playing and listening to rock and roll, Wasson

was drawn to "African American culture" and the inherent system of feedback that guided the

music:

When I started working, we might be "playin' a slow blues. The crowd played it, not me.

They could sense that I wasn't sure what to do. I might rip some Jimi Hendrix and they

would say, "Take your time…O.K…do a little bit…Now hold up." It was like they were

teachin' me to drive. They were so responsive and very supportive. It was like you got to

talk this guy flying a plane, we got to talk him down, it's got to be done so lets help him

do it. It wasn't so much, "let's be nice" as it was "we got to get our shit off" so let's walk

him through this so he can get us to where we got to go. It is what is needed. Everybody

needs that. I would say that demographic knows that they need it and knows techniques

to make sure that they can get it.[56]

Theories of the "jazz community" have isolated musicians from audiences and venues in

which they interact, treating the "community" as a contained unit, viable in and of itself. Robert

Stebbins notes that the community constitutes "a complete system of social interaction; that is, a

set of social groups sufficient to solve for a plurality of individuals all the problems of collective

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[54] Harrison, ibid.

[55] Harrison, ibid.

[56] Dan Wasson, personal interview (March 6, 2006).

life falling in the compass of a normal year and in the compass of a normal life."[57] When applied to understanding the "jazz community," status hierarchies in social and work relations become apparent. Rules exist to determine a musician's skill or the desirability of a performance. For Stebbins, jazz musicians hold value systems that form from interactions with other musicians. In his model, most jobs taken by jazz musicians serve to maintain economic viability. Exceptions include the "jazz concert which is generally the most thrilling for musicians because the audience's attention is not distracted by liquor and conversation" and "jam session," where musicians are permitted "to play anything they like."[58] This image of an autonomous ideology held by jazz musicians can be traced to earlier sociological studies. In Allen Merriam and Raymond Mack's 1960 study defines the "jazz community" in terms of self imposed differentiations of musician and listener:

> While the jazz community is characterized by a number of distinct behavior patterns, almost without exception these tend to cluster around one central theme – the isolation of the group from society at large, an isolation which is at once psychological, social, and physical.[59]

Music, as it exists in this model, is meaningful as a means of communication between performers. A dangerous implication of this assumption is that meanings, as they are associated with sounds, fundamentally differ between listeners and performers and that sound is passively received by audiences.

In contrast to this approach, sociologist and jazz scholar Howard Becker examines a wide spectrum of social action when describing creative processes. For Becker, "producing art works

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[57] Robert Stebbins, "A Theory of the Jazz Community," *the Sociological Quarterly* 9/3 (Summer, 1968): 318.
[58] Stebbins, 322.
[59] Allen Merriam and Raymond Mack, "The Jazz Community," *Social Forces* 38 (March 1960): 211.

requires elaborate modes of cooperation among specialized personnel" including producers of the materials and tools of art, educators, developers of convention, and knowledgeable audiences.[60] To understand how music was created and how it functioned on the chitlin circuit, one must also take this approach. Meaningful music on the chitlin circuit depended on shared understandings between audiences and performers. Physical and conceptual boundaries were broken down in the small informal venues that comprised the chitlin circuit, which facilitated the development of the cultural aesthetic:

> In the black culture, the musicians were part of the community. [As an audience member], you would always interact with them and hang with them. We used to come in and play the Grill and have parties afterwards and they'd all go out to somebody's house and we'd have a party. I remember sitting in a little restaurant on Herron Ave. at four in the morning having ice cream with Horace Silver in 1964 when he came in. We interacted with all the cats. This now, discriminating the musicians from the audience, that's not part of the culture. You don't build the music that way because the musician wants to play to the people. They don't want to play to some empty place to some robots out there, then you leave the auditorium and they go back to the hotel room and they never get to know 'Did you like the music or something?' And now people don't say 'HEY! Yea, Play!' People are afraid to do that now. Where did that come from? That's not part of the culture and what made this music great. What made the music great were the audiences that knew whether you were playin' or not. If you weren't playin' then

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[60] Howard Becker, "Art as Collective Action," *American Sociological Review* 39 (December 1974): 770.

they'd be looking at you and if you were playin' they'd be shoutin' at you. That's what made you play.[61]

The skill of active listening is at the core of the cultural aesthetics of the chitlin circuit. Audience members were, to use Becker's terminology, "specialized personnel" who understood when and how to respond to the musicians who in turn knew how to react. These interactions reaffirmed understandings of needs, which were embodied in feelings of liberation from the institutions of racism and modern urban social stratification. "After-hours" clubs broke the time restraints of legal operating hours for clubs enabling the prolongation of the communal catharsis.

If your audience leaves the club before you're packed up then you didn't play well, but if they're still hangin' around wantin' more…that's why the after-hours clubs are so important. After you play a great job, how are you going to go home and go to sleep. You've got to come down gradually and go somewhere else and stretch out and play. The people who have a rush hearin' you play, they got to go somewhere and hear some more. The after-hours clubs were boomin' because it wasn't just about the job. You would play three jobs on a Saturday, then go to an after-hours club and play until daylight. You didn't get tired of playin'.[62]

It was in this environment of continual feedback that musicians maintained a high level of performance ability or "chops." One has only to listen to recordings of Jack McDuff with Red Holloway, George Benson, and Joe Dukes, or Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers to hear the incredible level of technical virtuosity that musician's commanded. With a wide-reaching network of communication maintained by regularly touring musicians, the atmosphere for musical innovation was highly charged. As audiences have faded, musicians have had to

[61] Harrison, ibid.

maintain their level of playing with private practice and rehearsals. Demanding audiences and regular performance schedules have become a novelty for most jazz musicians. However, the cultural aesthetics described have survived in various formats as jazz has continued on its course of adopting aspects of contemporary popular music.

When comparing audience expectations across the globe, bassist Scott Lee emphasizes the difference between interests in style and interests in interaction. In Germany, there is a tendency to appreciate the avant-garde; "the outer the music is the more they're going to dig it." In Japan, audiences expect the music to "be a little more traditional." On the "chitlin circuit" in Newark, New Jersey, "every tune you are trying to get there where there is a communicative interplay between the audience and the band. The participation of both…there is something going on that makes it much stronger than if it were not occurring. You know when you have their attention."[63] Audiences expected a certain emotional commitment and sound from the musicians that reflected a familiar social experience. This is embodied in the "vibe" or "feel" of the music more than the repertoire or instrumentation of the performance. For the musicians to connect to the audience, they had to first embody the emotive experience expected from the audience. As Lee notes "quite honestly it had to feel good. If it felt good then people were into it."

In sonic terms, the right "feel" was realized when the musicians clearly established a common rhythmic concept. Melodic and harmonic excursions would not create the right "feel" without a unified understanding of rhythmic phrasing. In a "straight ahead" or swing tune, this would involve the bassist and drummer treating the variable spaces between quarter notes the

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[62] Ibid.
[63] Scott Lee, personal interview (January 3, 2006).

same. In a funk or backbeat tune, the bassist would focus on mimicking the drummer's repeating bass drum pattern.

Beyond being technically proficient, the musicians were expected to challenge themselves artistically, but in a way that brought the listener a meaningful experience. The African-American cultural experience is the guiding force for these expectations and created a widely different performance experience for the musicians. Lee notes that in "chitlin circuit" clubs, "You have to be there to play or they tune you out. They want to hear something. If you are white they may demand more." This environment conditioned the musicians to value interaction and cultural dialogue over technical complexity and theoretical understanding. These performance experiences existed in opposition to those where the audience did not understand or communicate a need for the musicians to feel the rewards of challenging themselves. In opposition to performances on the "chitlin circuit" were "society gigs" or shows for crowds that demanded very little in terms of musician/audience communication. Lee states that with Ponder "we played a whole lot of stuff for clubs in Manhattan [but] I never dug those gigs in terms of the response. It was always better playing in Jersey…."

Ponder began playing on the chitlin circuit in Pittsburgh in the 1960s after which he toured throughout eastern U.S. cities. In these performances, Ponder developed his approach to improvising, interpreting songs, technique, leading groups, entertaining audiences, and continually challenging himself as an artist. I aim to examine Ponder's musical voice in terms of his chord choices, treatment of melodies, and performance practices. However, for these musical aspects to have artistic relevance, they must be understood in relationship to the aesthetics of the chitlin circuit. These aesthetics consist of social rules and norms of behavior that allow Ponder to

engage as well as communicate his identity as an artist. The legitimacy of his creative experiences depend largely on the conviction with which he reiterates these aesthetics.

4.0   ANALYSIS: PONDER'S "VOICE"

Musical sound does not exist independent of intended and received meaning. In jazz, a musicians "voice" or musical identity encompasses more than the sound resulting from a given technical approach. It also includes that individual's perspectives formed from social existence as well as their approach to producing sounds that engage emotions and norms of behavior. Sound that does not allow those in a performance, whether performer or observing participant, to address aspects of social life valued as important ceases to function as an impetus for socializing and hence becomes non-music.

On a macro level, the voice connects the individual to creative trends or genres. Similar to the process described by scholar John Chernoff in which music enables individuals to "mediate their involvement within a community," the individual engages, through their voice, a larger creative discourse.[64] On the micro level, the voice is a marker of an artist's individuality within a system of norms. Meaningful performances are realized from the uniqueness of the performer's life experiences and abilities to publicly engage them. In the case of this study, Ponder's voice functions both to connect him to abstract concepts such as the blues, modern jazz, the chitlin circuit, and urban African-American life as well as distinguish him as an individual whose interpretations of these concepts distinguish him as an innovator.

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[64] John Chernoff. *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979): 154.

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4.1 AUTHENTICITY AND THE CREATION OF "VOICE" IN JAZZ

Authenticity in jazz is not an objective reality but rather a process through which meaning is created and communicated. Central to the process of creating authenticity in jazz is the development of a "voice" or personalized approach to the music. The "voice" connects the musician's individual experiences to a continuum of values and models congruent with their social context. Jazz musicians create authenticity in sound by infusing personal outlooks into music, which functions as part of a tradition. Musicians who are seen as "having something to say" are able to move beyond the technique of the music by connecting it to their social existence. A musician's "voice" is distinguished in their approach to both musical (timbre, tone, rhythm, harmony, and melody) and social (lifestyle, appearance, and personality) realms.

The "voice" shapes how musicians evaluate one another and leads to the creation of sub-groups within the jazz genre. Musicians in these sub-groups, such as swing, fusion, or bebop, have different value systems that shape the music though they all center on individuals who they collectively appreciate as having created a convincing "voice." Examples of authoritative voices are those of John Coltrane or Miles Davis, who while largely unmatched as innovative composers and improvisers, are equally distinguished by their social existences. The most reiterated of these being Coltrane's embrace of a universalistic spiritualism and Miles Davis' elusive personality and propensity for stylistic change. Failing to create a voice does not preclude playing jazz. Rather, it an important criterion that identifies innovators to audiences and musicians.

For this study, I address the problematic concept of authenticity in musical expression by relating Ponder's technical approach to the social contexts from which they developed. By taking this approach I hope to reify authenticity (a term steeped in subjective connotations) by treating

it as something created from communal efforts to reflect on and reaffirm shared values. For Ponder, performance involves creating a dialogue between himself and the listener. At the core of this dialogue are the values that create understandings of authenticity, which in turn enables individuals to engage these values. In this manner, music, in the context of the chitlin circuit, is a medium that allows individuals to create value systems that enable social cohesion. An authentic musical action is that which enables those involved in the creative action, whether as producers or participants, to engage those values through which they understand the performance.

Patrick Burke notes that authenticity in jazz has become largely dependent on the performer fulfilling a recognizable role as the "pure artist":

> Images of jazz as a pure, seemingly unrestrained form of self-expression have persisted for decades, even as many of us have begun to question whether there really can be a unified, true self to express. In a world where selves are divided among and mediated by conflicting cultural practices and discursive systems, including ideas of race, gender and class, jazz appears to be one realm in which the self is tenacious and triumphant, a bastion of modern self-discovery in a fragmented and centerless postmodern world.[65]

It is this ideal of "purity" in purpose that musicians and listeners construct in order for jazz to communicate and become meaningful in social environments. In this sense, authenticity in jazz is in the artist's ability to fully subscribe to the notion of artistic purity and to communicate that idea to a receptive listener. That the listener and creator must both believe in this ideal "says more about [the listeners] desires for coherence and transcendence than it does about the music itself."[66]

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[65] Patrick Burke, *"Come in and Hear the Truth": Jazz, Race, and Authenticity on Manhattan's 52nd Street, 1930-1950* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003), 2.
[66] Burke, 12.

41

Those who are inexperienced yet technically proficient often use that technique as an end in itself rather than as a means for creating "authentic" music. Scott Lee, a long time bassist with Ponder, notes that jazz musicians generally move through a period of technically oriented playing to a point where they "appreciate space and not playing" and that this often "doesn't come out until later in life."[67] Lee sees the task of creating an original "voice" from other "voices" as a paramount undertaking of the jazz musician:

> The guys who spend all their time copping other people's voices and they never find their own voice…they can be very accomplished musicians but for me I don't get the same thing from it. Guys who try to copy Coltrane, Wayne Shorter, or Miles…It's an admirable thing to do in your learning…the fact is that everyone is an assortment of their musical history or who they've listened to, but the bottom line is: when does that morph into your own particular sound and individual story? You have to see what it is that you bring to the musical scene and what you bring to your instrument and how serious you are about trying to learn your instrument and creating your own voice and what contribution that has to make to the music. If you do that then you are fulfilling your responsibility to the music. Otherwise you are just another competent musician.[68]

Lee's emphasis on the *process* of "voice" development illustrates the close relationship between social experience, technical mastery, and creative interpretation. Jazz musicians look to innovators, or those who have distinct "voices," for the raw materials with which they develop a technical and conceptual approach. This approach reflects the musician's own sensibilities, yet carries preexisting associations and meanings. As Ponder notes, "It was Scott Lee who was really

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[67] Scott Lee, personal interview (January 3, 2006).

instrumental in turning my focus away from super technique. He said, 'I love workin' with you and I don't want to cut my throat but you're playin' a lot of shit [complex ideas] and it ain't that you're playin' a lot of music'."[69] Here, Ponder emphasizes the importance of realizing technique as a means for maintaining an aesthetic musical environment rather than an exercise in virtuosity. This awareness forms the basis for Ponder's aesthetic outlook, which has guided his approach to his instrument as well as to performance.

4.2   THE AESTHETICS OF SOUL JAZZ

On a macro level, Jimmy Ponder's "voice" reflects a sensibility to a wide range of musical traditions. Ponder's early listening experiences involved jazz programming on such stations as Rochester's WHAM and Pittsburgh's WAMO, which exposed him to a diverse array of jazz guitarists such as Tal Farlow, Wes Montgomery, Kenny Burrell, Grant Green, and Django Reinhardt. As a teen, Ponder began playing in the Pittsburgh area with various doo-wop and R&B groups but was drawn to seek out venues where "straight ahead" jazz was performed. Because doo-wop, R&B, and jazz were performed on the same tour circuit, there were ample opportunities to experience artists featured on regional radio programs. By his mid-teens, Ponder was regularly performing and expanding his playing sensibilities by sitting in with jazz players. Ponder recalls an evening where

> We were on our way to some township and somebody had told me that there was a jazz group at this club and on the way I begged, "Man, please y'all, stop." So we stopped for a

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[68] Ibid.

[69] Jimmy Ponder, personal interview (June 7, 2006).

hot minute for the end of their matinee. There was a guitar player named Thornell Swartz and I had to touch his beautiful guitar. It was the first time I had put my hands on a hollow box; a real jazz guitar. I asked the owner of the club, "Would you ask Mr. McGriff if I could play?" and he went up there and asked and Jimmy had me come up. I was so tiny that I sat on the edge of the organ stool.[70]

The common "language" that allowed Ponder to sit in was the blues. As a song form, the twelve bar blues is relatively simple and widely familiar due to its use in popular music. As a sensibility or conceptual approach, the blues is intimately tied to African-American religious music, which has contributed to all popular African-American musical forms.

Ponder's "voice" and aesthetic sensibility is heavily informed by blues, doo-wop, and R&B as it was played by "soul" jazz organists. In 1965, Jimmy Ponder left Pittsburgh to work with Philadelphia based organist Charles Earland who he had met at the Hurricane in Pittsburgh's Hill District. Because Pittsburgh was a stop on the "chitlin circuit," local nightclubs were sites of informal auditioning:

Charles Earland came through Pittsburgh, it was 1963. He came to The Hurricane with the Charles Earland trio. And the guitar player was asleep on the job and I had gotten a copy of his latest 45 entitled "Daily Dozen" and I learned the guitar solo backwards and forwards. And Birdie Dunlap, who was at the time the owner of The Hurricane, she allowed me to play and I sat in and I played that song to death for Charles Earland. And I told him "My mother is not gonna let me go out of town until I get my diploma." So 2 years later, he came back. He said "Are you ready to go?" and I said "Yes, indeed."[71]

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[70] Jimmy Ponder, personal interview (February 11, 2006).

[71] Tim Berens, Interview with Jimmy Ponder, http://timberens.com/interviews/ponder.htm Originally published in the March, 1995 issue of the newsletter of the Cincinnati Jazz Guitar Society.

This opportunity exposed Ponder to extended work with the same band. In this context the musicians involved must learn new repertoire, standards for performing, and approaches to performing in a steady group. Being a sideman, Ponder had to adapt to Earland's musical approach and concepts.

Earland was originally a saxophonist who worked with various musicians in Philadelphia before joining Jimmy McGriff's group. Philadelphia was the home to many jazz and blues organists who inspired Earland to take up the instrument. As Ponder notes, Earland "was working with Jimmy McGriff [as a saxophone player] and I think Jimmy got sick on the gig one night and Charlie did a few things and pulled the gig through and just stuck with the Hammond B-3."

Ponder stayed with Earland for "two to three years" during which time he was based in Philadelphia. Tours would take the group to Boston, New Haven, and Atlanta.[72] With small budgets, touring on the "chitlin circuit" involved many challenges beyond music making. The musicians were responsible for loading and unloading equipment, which included the four to five hundred pound Hammond B-3 organ. At one point, Ponder, who weighed less than one hundred and thirty pounds, was unable to play for several performances because of an injured back. Responsibility for providing transportation for the equipment and musicians often fell on Earland. With a homemade trailer, the musicians were able to travel in one vehicle. Ponder notes that

> More than a few times the door [of the trailer] would blow off and our luggage would fly
> out on the highway. Man, you talking about paying some dues. Back then he [Charles
> Earland] had a Ford Thunderbird and once in a while he would hire a horn player, so now

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[72] Jimmy Ponder, Personal Interview, 12/26/05.

you had him, his old lady, Bobby, and the horn player and I had to sit on the glove compartment from Philly to Atlanta and back. Oh yea, two or three times. But I was so young it didn't bother me.[73]

While touring was difficult and often minimally profitable, it served to sustain a network between music venues and musicians. The musicians drew from these experiences playing for new audiences and the variety of bands maintained a diverse atmosphere in the venues. Regular tour stops across the Mid-West, East, and South kept the music developing in relationship to receptive audience. Unlike dissemination through recordings where the audience is presented with a finished product, live performance provides an environment where the performance is shaped by audience feedback.

Ponder left Earland's group after personality conflicts led to an incident in Atlanta, Georgia. Shortly afterwards Earland recorded his first album for the label Prestige, *Black Talk* (1969). The album won Earland widespread attention and airplay and featured the hit tune "More Today than Yesterday" performed by the Spiral Staircases. Ponder recollects that, "Once he recorded "More Today than Yesterday,"…it was a big hit for a jazz piece and especially for an organ player. He was selling more stuff than Jimmy Smith, Jimmy McGriff, anybody put together just off of "More Today than Yesterday." This was a true "cross-over" hit where a vocal song with wide recognition was adapted to an instrumental format and arranged so that musicians could improvise over the chord changes.

It was a common enough practice, for improvising musicians had always borrowed and interpreted composition from other repertoires. Examining ragtime pianist Scott Joplin "ragging" classical pieces or saxophonist John Coltrane playing extended modal improvisations over the

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[73] Ponder, Ibid.

Broadway musical piece "My Favorite Things," reveals a long tradition of applying one musical language to other forms. In 1965, guitarist Wes Montgomery was persuaded by Verve producer Creed Taylor to record the hit "Goin' Out of My Head" by "Little Anthony and the Imperials." The recording received a Grammy and made Montgomery a commercial success. Questions of artistic integrity enter when the musician and, to a greater extent, recording companies face to gain economically. With such a strong link between an artist's recorded output and their musical identity, there is often a backlash against artists who record material that is deemed outside of their artistic vision. "Selling out" is the critic's term for sacrificing one's musical ideals for money. Jazz has always been a difficult art, requiring a lifetime of dedication, but it has come to represent, through institutionalization, the ideals of high-art. Musicians are expected to sacrifice everything for their vision and resist attempts to commodify their music. Yet musicians must also make a living and face that fact every day.

4.3   PONDER AS BAND LEADER

On the micro level, Ponder has developed a distinctive approach to his performance practices. In addition to performing extensively as a sideman, Ponder has also led his own groups. As a recording bandleader, Ponder has worked with a wide range of group formats. On the club circuit, Ponder generally chose the smaller, more intimate trio group format. Most often this would include a drummer and bassist though occasionally an organist would take the place of the bassist. If the performance space was larger, seating more than two hundred people, Ponder would often add a pianist to allow himself "more freedom." If the club was smaller, then he might only hire a bassist or perform solo.

47

As a bandleader, Ponder's responsibilities include choosing repertoire, spontaneously arranging the songs and organizing them into coherent hour-long sets, paying the band, and most importantly maintaining a high level of energy amongst the musicians. A bandleader must challenge and inspire the other musicians so to maintain a sense of discovery and motion. A good bandleader can "carry" the band in that they have a deep knowledge of each instrument's capacity and know how to elicit desired results from the musicians. As a bandleader, the guitarist faces additional difficulties in leading small groups because of the social stigma of the instrument. In contrast to the piano, the guitarist has struggled to rid the instrument of its social stigma and role as a purely supportive instrument. In small groups, Ponder took on this challenge by developing a technique that allowed him to recreate the aesthetic experience of keyboard-centered groups.

Organizing and effectively leading a group also includes programming. During the set, the leader faces a myriad of decisions concerning song introductions, endings, tempos, feels, and order. For Ponder, these aspects are rarely worked out in advance. This introduces an element of uncertainty that heightens the experience of both the musicians and audience but requires a focused leader who has these aspects worked out and can communicate clearly with the other musicians. For Lee, Jimmy always made sure that

> The set had a good flow to it. He would know when to play something up [fast tempo], when to mix up the time feel…tempo changes. It seemed effortless…sometimes the leader has to think about what comes next. I don't think Jimmy thought about it. It's the presentation of the music and, what, are you going to do four medium groove tunes in Bb in a row? …that's not going to make it. You have to think about the variety and what you're presenting and keep their interest. He always just seemed to have a sense about

that and I never remembered talking about it on the gig, he just had a good sense of the

flow of a set.[74]

To maintain a good "flow" to the set, Ponder developed a general template built around a personalized repertoire, which he could modify according to the venue and audience. A set generally begins with a medium tempo blues to set the tone of the performance and get the musicians "locked in." Following songs with provide a blend of feels (Latin jazz, ballad, up-tempo swing, funk) and dynamic levels so to create a sense of dramatic development and maintain the audience's interests.

For an attentive audience, well-organized song introductions and endings are also essential for an effective performance. As a sideman, Lee valued that Ponder

Would give you just enough of the melody in an intro so you would know where the time

was. A lot of guys do that without being familiar [with the other musicians]…they don't

tell you the name of the tune or the key…Jimmy wasn't about that. First of all, he wanted

to present the best music and if you're trying to stump somebody on the bandstand then

the music is going to come off wrong.[75]

Being a leader involves making the direction of the music clear to the other musicians. When each musician is expecting something different or not expecting anything at all, then the music suffers. This is what separates the sideman from the bandleader. The sideman must be receptive enough to react effectively to a bandleader and the bandleader must communicate well-formed ideas. Lee states

When a leader is scattered and not thinking about what he's choosing to play and the

order of things, I think that is communicated to an audience. People read between the

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[74] Lee, Ibid.

lines and sense what is going on up there. They know when an intro has people confused, they know when an ending is muffed and peters out. And Jimmy, he would always take care of the ending of a tune. I hate when leaders let a tune fall apart at the end, and you know the crowd knows. Jimmy would always save an ending and we would land on our feet. That's being a leader. Musically you have to communicate where we are going here. You can rely on the guy to not fall apart or loose the focus of something. As a sideman, that's what you want. It's the difference between looking forward to a gig and thinking that you have to suffer through something. Whether I'm excited about a gig depends on things like that, if someone is strong on the bandstand then I will take the gig for less money.[76]

Though Ponder creates an interactive environment where momentary decisions are quickly executed, he does so with certain conventions. As a master solo performer, Ponder can signal any or all of the supporting members of the ensemble to stop playing without struggling to fill the extra space. In smaller groups, he can also control the form and length of songs, instantly rearranging songs to extend or drop sections, change styles, or harmonic progressions. For song endings, Ponder tests his sidemen by setting up complicated rhythmic vamps, which he will quickly resolve at an unexpected point. In these environments, supporting musicians concentrate harder because they must rise to the same creative challenges that Ponder poses to himself. The excitement and suspense is communicated to the audience who witnesses the collective creative process unfold in ways unexpected by even the performers themselves.

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[75] Ibid.
[76] Scott Lee, personal interview (January 3, 2006).

4.4   PONDER'S TECHNIQUE

In duo (bass and guitar) and trio (bass, drums, and guitar) ensembles, Ponder took on the role of the organ in that he was responsible for providing the harmonic and melodic material while controlling dynamics and the rhythmic feel. In most small format jazz ensembles, the leader balances harmonic and melodic material so to complement the drummer and bassist. The pianist generally manipulates harmony with the left hand and melody with the right while for the guitarist, the left hand must do both. Concerning right hand technique, the jazz guitarist is faced with a number of choices: to one use a plectrum, which aids single line melodies and strumming, individual fingers, which enables counterpoint, or as Montgomery did, the fleshy part of the thumb, which facilitates the use of block chords but is hard to control at faster tempos.

Each technique affects how the song is arranged and what "school" of jazz the musician is identified with. Those who mostly use a plectrum to pick the strings, such as Pat Metheny or George Benson, are generally more agile in filling space with long melodies. Finger style guitarists, such as Charlie Byrd or Bruce Dunlap, are able to incorporate counterpoint though this technique does not lend itself to the swing feel characteristic of blues and jazz organ trios. The thumb technique, as developed by Wes Montgomery, is more difficult to employ with the same dexterity of the pick though it thickens the sound of single melodies and provides a smoother contact surface with which to rhythmically attack chords and octaves.

As Ponder expanded his playing experiences with such jazz artists as Charles Earland, and Lonnie Smith, and came into contact with other touring guitarists, he incorporated techniques and concepts characteristic to "straight ahead" jazz into his rhythm and blues inflected approach. The most prominent example of the manifestation of values in technique in Ponder's approach is his use of his thumb rather than a pick to strike the strings. This technique,

as developed by Wes Montgomery, created one of the most distinctive models for jazz guitarists. Because his mastery was so complete, he established a monopoly on this approach, making any similar approach seem appear a copy. His most prominent contributions was the use of his thumb, which thickened the tone of the instrument, his octave doubling of melody notes and improvised lines, the use of block chords to support single lines, and his aggressive rhythmic approach where he would add quick syncopated figures to octave and chord patterns. Many jazz guitarists have incorporated or adapted at least one of these approaches though few have taken them on so completely as Jimmy Ponder.

While Ponder is most often associated with Montgomery, he has never taken verbatim his melodic or harmonic ideas. Rather he notes that it was the sound, sensibility for dynamics, and "attack" that inspired him to play without a pick:

> I didn't study Wes. That sets me apart from cats…that really studied all [his] chord forms. I didn't know any of his chord forms. None of his [melodic] passages. I listened to his shit and said, "Damn!" When I saw him play, I said two "Damns!" That was enough. That set me into a place where…this it what I want to do…with that same feeling and beautiful sound. But don't touch [his ideas]. That's sacred. That belongs to that man. The mold is broken. It's not to be emulated.[77]

Where most institutionalized jazz performance training focuses on transcription of masters, Ponder shows how one can incorporate the musical personality of an individual into a musical voice. Rather than interpreting Montgomery's improvisation Ponder sought to capture "The spirit of it. How he approached [the music] with a certain tenacity…a certain attack."[78]

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[77] Jimmy Ponder, Personal Interview (June 7, 2006).
[78] Ponder, ibid.

Conceptually, the use of the thumb connects Ponder with the instrument by removing the synthetic medium (plectrum) from between himself and the strings. By placing the thumb on the strings and remaining fingers on the top of the guitar, Ponder is able to bring himself "closer" to the sound of the instrument and experience the emotive rather than technical aspects of guitar playing. Jazz columnists and reviewers most often comment on the emotive qualities of Ponder's sound and interpretive approach noting his "smooth, bright, soulfully penetrating tone," "crystal-clear and whistle-clean" playing style, and "exquisitely shaped and shaded" melodies.[79]

Physically, the use of the thumb leads to different approaches in improvisation. With the pick, the guitarist is more likely to create melody-oriented improvisations with more emphasis on the density of the notes. The thumb, because of the difficulties it poses for alternate picking and speed, leads the guitarist to play less notes but to support them with octave doubling, harmonization, and rhythmic figures. This switch sacrifices speed for tone and contour as well as enabling the production of a "singing" quality characteristic of blues singing.

The late 1960s was a transitional period where Ponder would interchange the pick and his thumb, according to the demands of the song. Examples of Ponder switching between both of these two approaches can be found on his early recordings as a sideman. In his 1968 recording sessions with organist John Patton, Ponder moves between the "voice" of the pick, as molded by guitarists such as Grant Green, Kenny Burrell, and Tal Farlow, and the "voice" of the thumb, as created by Wes Montgomery.[80] On "Dirty Fingers" (fig. 1), a medium tempo song, Ponder uses a pick for sharper attack and articulation with fewer syncopated ideas. Alternate picking also leads to "double-time" or sixteenth note patterns characteristic of saxophone improvisations. Ponder begins his solo on "Dirty Fingers" creating a call (m.2-3) and response (m.4-5) cycle from which

[79] Larry Birnbaum, "Profile: Jimmy Ponder," in *Guitar Player* (October 1992): 31.

he quickly moves into a series of aggressive, sixteenth note descending and ascending phrases. His tone is markedly thinner giving the melodic lines an uneven feel. Overall, Ponder maintains the momentum of the improvisation by juxtaposing eighth and sixteenth note patterns that loosely outline a Bb minor pentatonic scale. With the pick, Ponder sounds less like an organist in both his phrasing and tone, taking on the melodically oriented roll of contemporary guitarists.

On "Minor Swing" (fig. 2), Ponder uses his thumb for a softer attack and warmer tone. During his solo, he forgoes "double-time" melodies, creating tension and interest by harmonizing the melodic lines first with block chords and then with octaves. This approach enables Ponder to share the supportive role of the drummer and organist, which ultimately leads to more control over the direction of the solo. Ponder begins the solo with wandering single lines, exploiting the sound of glissandos, hammer-ons, and pull-offs to create a saxophonistic approach. Fig. 2 shows the second stage of Ponder's solo where he increases the rhythmic and harmonic density by using block chords and octave. This style of improvising would become characteristic of Ponder's voice. Conceptually, Ponder uses this approach to share the roles of the instrumentalists and hence integrate more fully into the ensemble.

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[80] John Patton. *Mosaic Select: John Patton*. 1968.

Figure 1 Solo Excerpt from "Dirty Fingers."

Minor Swing

Solo recorded by Jimmy Ponder
Mosaic Select: John Patton, Mosaic, 1968

Figure 2 Solo Excerpt from "Minor Swing"

4.5   PURE MELODIES, OCTAVE DOUBLING, AND BLOCK CHORD VOICING

Ponder's approach in the intimate and exposed trio and duo format involves a careful balancing of "pure melodies," octaves, and block chords. "Pure melodies" include interpretations of composed melodies (such as "Body and Soul") and improvised lines over predetermined chord changes (such as the 12 bar blues). Octaves are single line melodies doubled an octave below. Block chords are melodies harmonized with two or more notes with the lowest interval generally being a fifth or seventh. Ponder uses the "pure melody" to express his most "vocal" musical traits. These include the heavy vibrato, note-bending, and glissandos characteristic of blues singing. Vibrato on the guitar, while creating a vocal effect, also aids to sustain the pitch. Pitches played with little vibrato on the guitar quickly loose volume and presence, requiring more notes to fill space.

On the title track of his album *To Reach a Dream* (fig. 3), Ponder uses his melodic "voice" to execute the first sixteen measures of the melody.[81] Pitch bending and vibrato become tools for shaping the spacious melody as well as reaching listeners attuned to the vocal style found in African-American religious music, the blues, soul music, and funk. Ponder takes full advantage of the instrument's singing quality by executing short response phrases in its upper register and drawing out low notes as long as possible. In the A section of "To Reach a Dream," Ponder ends each phrase with varying degrees of rubato, filling sonic space with the minimal amount of notes.

For the "bridge" (measures 17-24) of the melody, Ponder switches from purely melodic material to octaves and in doing so introduces a new "voice" characterized by the attack of the

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[81] Jimmy Ponder, *To Reach a Dream*, Muse (1989).

note and the thickness of the line. For most jazz guitarists, melodic material makes up a bulk of their musical activity. This is partially due to the guitar's role in jazz big bands as either a rhythm or lead instrument. While guitarists can easily switch between these two roles of "comping" and soloing, few were able to join the two simultaneously with a comparable presence to keyboard instruments. Montgomery's and later Ponder's use of octaves and block chords provided a solution for this dilemma.[82] Doubling the melody at the octave does not greatly hinder the guitarist while playing more spacious melodies and greatly thickens the sound. One does not have to harmonize the melody when playing octaves and hence does not worry as much about clashing with the bassist. Octaves also provide a sharp contrast with "pure melodies" in that one cannot execute them with as wide a vibrato or bend their pitch. Octaves are characteristically less vocal but provide a better medium in which to execute rhythmic ideas.

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[82] This is not to say that it was the only solution for balancing harmonic and melodic material on the guitar. It was however the most effective in simultaneously capturing the swing feel and sonic density of early jazz organ music.
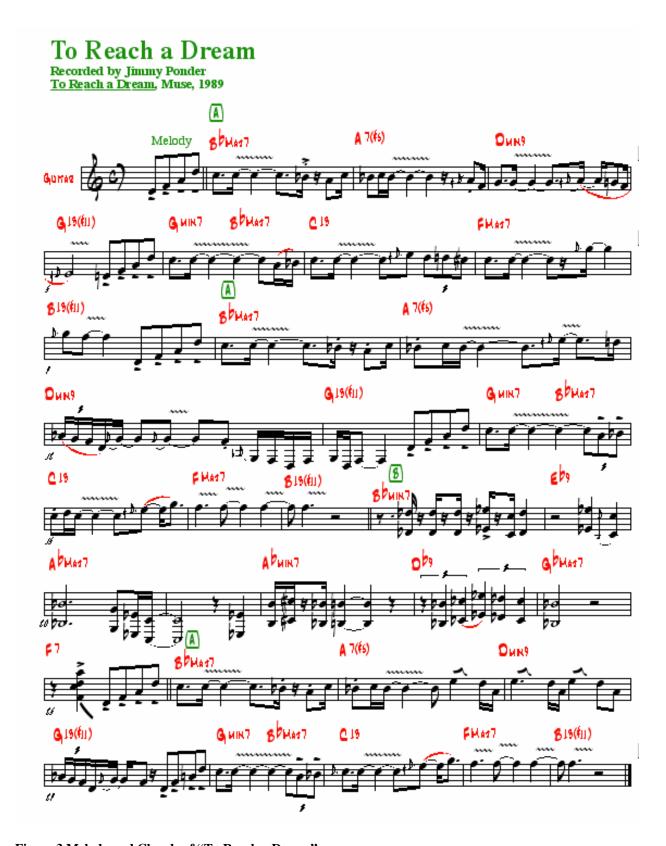
Figure 3 Melody and Chords of "To Reach a Dream"

59

In the context of the organ trio, Ponder does not use block chords to the same degree as "pure melodies" and octaves when playing melodies. However, in trios and duo ensembles, block chords become essential for creating a similar musical aesthetic. Block chords provide harmonic thickness but require a great deal of technique and creativity. When improvising with block chords, Ponder first envisions a melody under which he builds chords. The chords relate to the basic harmonic progression of the song though they depend a great deal of chord substitutions and alternate chord progression. For composed melodies, the process is the same though the melody is somewhat pre-determined. Fig. 4 shows the first eight measures of the melody from the song "Cherokee" as a single line and again as harmonized by Ponder.[83] The voicings cover a wide pitch range though require little stretching in the left hand. This allows for greater mobility and easier shifting. Block chords, as they are used by pianists and big band arrangers, generally include the first, third, fifth, and seventh note of the chord in closed voicing. Because closed voicings are very difficult to play on the guitar, guitarists prefer "drop two" and "drop three" voicings. These block chords generally have a third, fifth, or seventh as the lowest interval creating a strong sonic foundation and clearly establishing the harmonic framework.

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[83] This harmonization was learned during a private lesson.

Figure 4 Block Chord Harmonization of "Cherokee"

Ponder uses these techniques to create a certain group sound when playing with smaller ensembles. Scott Lee notes Ponder's attention to the blend of the instruments. Together, the acoustic bass and guitar "hooked up so well that it became like the sound of the organ. It was a bigger sound than just two people. It was a bigger sound than when I would hear other guitar and bass duos."[84] As Lee states it, Ponder distinguished himself as an accomplished performer by developing "technique in service of the music."[85] While technique in jazz often refers to the musician's ability to string eighth note melodies together at high tempos, Lee uses it in this context to refer to Ponder's ability to effectively orchestrate the available instruments.

This distinction between technique as an end in itself and technique as a means to meaningful interaction is central to the artistic struggle of the jazz musician. Berliner notes that among accomplished musicians "common arguments surround two potential spoilers of invention: the performance of inappropriate material, generally, and the flaunting of technical

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[84] Scott Lee, personal interview (January 3, 2006).
[85] Ibid.

61

ability specifically."[86] While a great deal of technical ability is needed to perform music in the jazz repertoire, the technique ultimately functions to enable the musician to communicate personal experiences and emotions, not the rigors of practice. For the guitarist in a small ensemble, the greatest challenge is to guide and interact with the other musicians while balancing melodic and harmonic material. A good guitarist may play well over top of what the bassist and drummer provide. A more accomplished guitarist will also support the rhythm section. Lee addresses Ponder's abilities to provide more than a lead voice:

> If I were to play a duo or trio with him…and then played with another guitar player it always sounded so naked with the other guitar player and thin compared to Jimmy. When you played with Jimmy it felt like you were playing with a whole band and there was never any feeling that there was anything missing. And you go play with another guitar player and you realize Jimmy was really playing so much that made it so easy because his sound was so full and complete. I got so accustomed to hearing that nice, rich sound.

For Ponder, a mature guitarist is marked by the ability to balance pure melodies, octaves, and block chords in a steady dialogue. In small group settings, this dialogue takes place between musicians while in solo performance the creative dialogue must be carried on by the individual.

4.6   SOLO PERFORMANCE

Solo guitar performance continues to be the most challenging format for jazz guitarists. In this performance setting, the demands of the ensemble fall on the shoulders of the individual. The guitarist must simultaneously create and harmonize a melody, interact with that melody in

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[86] Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 409.

call and response patterns, and maintain a rhythmic framework in which all of the elements are held together. One is expected to improvise in a way that does not sacrifice the sonic framework created by harmony and rhythm. However, the guitarist cannot fill each role (bass, drums, piano, and saxophone for instance) completely requiring them to choose the most essential elements of the jazz ensemble so the listener can "fill in the rest."

Because of the difficulty of playing solo, few jazz guitarists have incorporated this approach into their musical identity, though the lack of historical precedent for solo guitar is also a factor. The stylistic approach to guitar in early jazz developed from the supportive role of the banjo as it was used in ragtime and Dixieland ensembles. Before instrument amplification was available, the banjo proved a useful string instrument for cutting through the dense layers of wind and rhythm instruments. Such banjo players as Will Johnson and Bud Scott (King Oliver Orchestra), Charlie Dixon (Fletcher Henderson), Freddy Guy (Duke Ellington), Lew Black (New Orleans Rhythm Kings), and Johnny St. Cyr (Louis Armstrong) provided the driving "four-to-the-bar" accompaniment pattern that "threaded the rhythm section together but added little or nothing of durable solo value."[87] Many banjo players began doubling on guitar because of the improved blend with the double bass, which was increasingly replacing the tuba. Guitarist Eddie Lang played an important role in developing the guitar as a lead voice in jazz. As Leonard Feather notes, "Lang not only expanded the harmonic horizon, but also developed a single-string solo technique that was a decade ahead of its time, for not until 1939, with the advent of Charlie Christian and the electric amplifier, did the guitar step permanently out of the shadows of the rhythm section."[88]

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[87] Leonard Feather, "The Guitar in Jazz" in *The Guitar in Jazz: an Anthology*, ed. James Sallis (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 2.
[88] Feather, 3.

In the late 1950s, Wes Montgomery began developing a style that firmly established the guitar as a legitimate solo voice. He joined chords and melodies in an effortless manner, creating thick harmonies characteristic of the piano while maintaining the fluidity of the single melody line. Montgomery balanced rhythm, melody and harmony in a way that seemed to make the rhythm section appear superfluous. Other notable musicians who have created a solo voice for the guitar include Oscar Moore, mCarl Kress, Joe Pass, Ralph Towner, and Pat Metheny. All of these musicians developed a technique that allowed them to bring out different aspects of an ensemble sound.

Ponder's approach to solo playing is defined by a strong rhythmic approach and an ability to quickly harmonize melodies using block chords. Harmonizing melodies requires knowledge of the song's basic harmonic structure as well as substitutions that will work within that structure. In the basic jazz-blues form, the harmonic structure is as follows:

KEY of Bb

m.1 Bb7 / / /   m.2 Eb7 / / /   m.3 Bb7 / / /   m.4 Bb7 / / /

m.5 Eb7 / / /   m.6 Eb7 / / /   m.7 Bb7 / / /   m.8 G7 / / /

m.9 Cmi7 / / / m.10 F7 / / /   m.11 Bb7 / G7 /   m.12 Cmi7 / F7 /

Melodies in the blues tend to work in a "call and response" pattern with measures 1-4 and 5-8 providing the "call" and measures 9-12 providing the "response." A sense of movement is maintained by shifting the harmony under the repeated melodic material. Ponder's recording of "J.P." (fig. 5) an original blues in Bb, follows this formula of "call and response" with an emphasis on the rhythmic aspects of the melody. Measures 1-8 juxtaposes a short "riff" against low octaves while measures 5-8 provide a sharp contrast with a syncopated up-beat pattern that quickly cycles through ii-V progressions in the keys of Db, C, B, and Bb.

J.P.

Recorded by Jimmy Ponder
<u>Alone</u>, HighNote, 2000

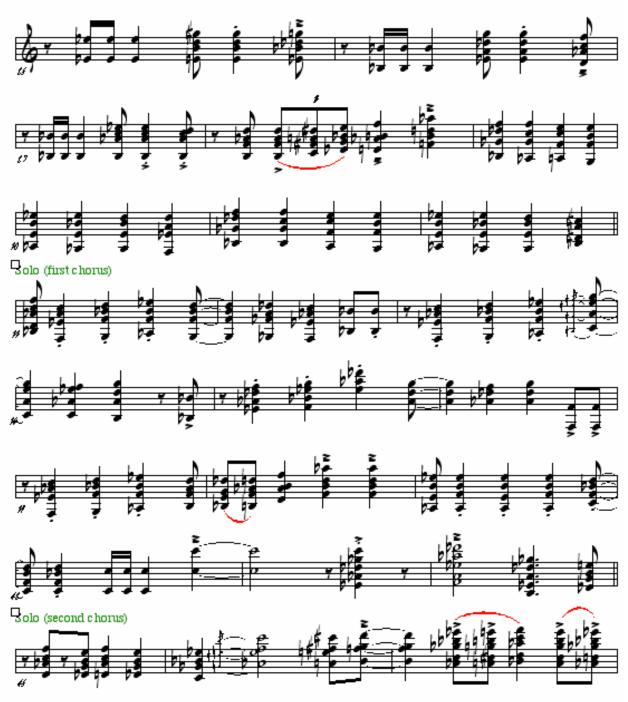Solo (first chorus)

Solo (second chorus)

Figure 5 Melody and Partial Solo Transcription of "J.P."

After stating the melody twice, Ponder begins to improvise using block chords. To balance the rhythmic and harmonic aspects of playing solo guitar, Ponder develops new melodies or themes, which he transposes to fit the chord changes. His improvised melodic lines, in this context, are thematic and highly syncopated. These lines are harmonized within the context of the chord progression but follow a pattern of harmonic preparation and resolution. Ponder uses preparation and resolution, or as he calls it, question and answer, and call and response, to create a personal dialogue. He does this by embodying different "voices" and playing them off one another. Each "voice" represents a part of the ensemble. Melodic content conjures the sound of lead instruments, block chords the sound of harmonic instruments, and octaves the sound of the drums. Balancing these "voices" is crucial for maintaining the energy and focus of the song, just as it is in the ensemble setting. If one "voice" predominates, then the "dialogue" collapses and the song loses meaning as a socially interactive event.

In measures 33-34, Ponder establishes the first improvised theme, which he rearranges to fit the chord progression. The theme has a clear melody, harmonic framework, and rhythmic approach. He emphasizes the upbeat with thick block chords and resolves with an octave hit on the fourth beat. He responds, in two bar phrases, that use upward moving melodies placed in a similar rhythmic framework. This propels Ponder into the second chorus of improvising where he begins to create longer, overlapping phrases that emphasis a more melodic approach.

Ponder's right hand technique allows him to create an intricate rhythmic framework for the melodic and harmonic material. This is essential for the "feel" of the song (sense of swing), which far outweighs melodic content in terms of aesthetic affect. There are two primary techniques that greatly contribute to the sense of swing. The first is the muted attack preparation. This involves hitting the strings with the thumb of the right hand while the left hand is still lightly touching them. This produces a muffled pop of indeterminate pitch that prepares a chord or melody. The sound is similar to that of the organ bass, where the actual pitch is delayed slightly because of the release sound of the previous note. This rhythmic attack emphasizes the underlying triplet division much as a drummer would when playing a shuffle beat. Notating these non-pitch sounds makes the transcription unwieldy though they are important to the overall effect of the music. (fig. 6)

Figure 6 Muted Attack (measures 29-30 of "J.P.")

The second technique is also a rhythmic figure that prepares chords or octaves. This figure is not muted and most often involves a quick down and upstroke just before or after the

downbeat of the chord. Notating these patterns also makes the transcription less intelligible though it exemplifies the complexity of Ponder's approach to phrasing and creating a swing feel (fig. 7).

Figure 7 Rhythmic Attack (measures 52-53 of "J.P.")

For Ponder, successful solo performance requires as much attention to tone and dynamics as it does to the harmonic and melodic content. The natural sound of the guitar has a small dynamic range and requires amplification to balance with other instruments and project through venues. Ponder generally uses a small Fender or Polytone guitar amplifier with a ten or twelve inch speaker. Occasionally, he will use a guitar effects pedal to add chorus, delay, or reverb, but most often the amplifier serves simply to magnify the "natural" sound of the instrument. In smaller venues, the sound produced by the amplifier blends with the acoustic sound of the guitar (In Ponder's case, a Gibson Super 400 acoustic arch-top). Exploiting the dynamic range of the guitar is central to Ponder's approach in any playing situation. He feels it is essential to maintaining the energy of the music and maintaining a cycle of new ideas. The basis for his approach to improvising in a solo context is to create new melodies or themes and rearrange them to fit the given chord progression. The performance is propelled through a pattern of tension and release: ideas in the low register are followed by those in the high register, melodies are answered by block chords, loud passages by soft ones, and aggressiveness by subtlety.

5.0 ANALYSIS: PONDER'S RECORDED OUTPUT

Jazz history has been intimately tied to its recorded output. Styles and genres are defined by landmark records, which stand responsible for representing the diffuse activities and artistic visions of a given musical community or individual. However, recordings are not simply glimpses of past musical realities but rather images of those realities filtered through various "lenses." The restrictions of technology, interests of record companies, personalities of record producers, and versatility of musicians all affect what is presented as the musical reality of an individual artist and time period. Scholar Jed Rasula notes that "recordings have the status of an impressive testimony that is, regrettably for the historian, a secondary substitute for the 'living presence' of actual performance."[89] There is a danger when creating jazz history from commercial recordings for the interpreter must contend with the processes of recording that set the end product apart from live performance.

There are two general shortcomings encountered when recreating an artist-centered history of jazz from recordings. The first is that the centrality of improvisation is undermined through the reification of specific moments, giving emphasis to performance (music as sound) over the processes enabling the performance (music as a social process).[90] Copious transcriptions are created in an attempt to understand the musical experience and uncover the musical identity

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[89] Jed Rasula, "The Media of Memory: The Seductive Menace of Records in Jazz History," in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Kirn Gabbard (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 135.
[90] Rasula, 144.

of the "master" performer giving the impression that the recreation of sound is the recreation of a creative experience.

The second shortcoming is historiographical in that it concerns the conceptualization of stylistic change. Rasula notes that it is "a sign of systematic misconception that a music celebrated for its improvisatory character is viewed chiefly as an example of developmental progress."[91] Recordings create an evolutionary understanding of jazz history by providing concrete objects through which stylistic developments are traced. However, as an art that derives meaning and form from social processes, jazz does not evolve into a more meaningful expression as time passes. Rather, the music changes, therefore maintaining its function as a means through which individuals identify themselves as well as their place within society.

In the following two sections, I compare Ponder's recording and performance experiences so to explore processes outside of artistic creation that shape albums. Ponder, like many other creative artists, has faced recording both as an extension of their creative life and a means to make a living. At the center of this dichotomy is the widely addressed conflict of economic and creative interests, a concept central to most discussions concerning musician integrity and creative authenticity. In producing a viable commodity, Ponder has faced the task of communicating his musical voice, or creating an original and meaningful musical experience, within the constraints of commercial interests. Ultimately, recording becomes an important element in shaping one's musical identity because it is more widely consumed than live performance and hence more widely representative of one's playing abilities. However, I hope to show that commercial recordings subject musicians to different creative processes and hence form creative identities apart from those developed in live performances.

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[91] Ibid., 145.

5.1   EARLY RECORDINGS AS A LEADER

Since the early 1970s, Ponder has recorded as a bandleader for an array of record labels that specialize in jazz and "cross over" music. For Ponder, recording has provided a key source of income as well as a means for exposure. However, as a specialist with an artistic vision, he has, like so many other recording artists of the time, struggled with record producers over creative license. Often there exists a conflict of ideals in the process of recording that shapes the final product. In these cases, the artist must negotiate recording as income and recordings as representatives of creative output. When recording for income, the goal becomes the production of a hit or breakout album. In Ponder's case, several precedents existed as models for success, which producers utilized in hopes of achieving similar results. However, they failed to bring equal exposure.

Wes Montgomery provided the first model of success that was used by record producers in recording Ponder. Montgomery's cross-over recordings, where he played melodies to contemporary hit pop songs with added orchestral arrangements, were a departure from his small ensemble work though they still captured the essence of his approach to guitar. Producers used songs by groups such as the Beatles and Little Anthony and the Imperials to feature Montgomery's smooth sound and signature octave melodies. Improvised sections were either dropped or kept to a minimum to cut down on the song length. Musicians and devoted jazz fans viewed these recordings as a sacrifice of artistic vision for income. What they enabled, however,

was greater exposure to earlier records through increased demand for reissues and recognition across a wider audience.

Guitarist George Benson, who paired Montgomery's clean tone with a rhythm and blues and gospel influenced singing style, served as the second model. During the 1960s, Benson was recognized for his prowess as an improviser in small hard-bop instrumental groups. Through the 1970's, Benson produced vocal hits that featured his singing and pop sensibilities. Songs such as "This Masquerade" and "On Broadway" became signature hits that exposed Benson to a larger listening audience while also demonstrating his abilities as an improvising musician. While Benson and Montgomery have been widely recognized as innovative guitarists, both have been criticized for their commercial successes. Jazz historian Ted Gioia notes Benson's mid-1970s successes as a vocalist as "a success that threatened to obscure his talent as a soloist in a Wes Montgomery vien."[92]

Ponder, in his early years of recording, followed a similar path in that he established a reputation as a versatile sideman, which led to commercial recording work as a leader. In the late 1960s, Ponder recorded as a sideman with such artists as Charles Earland, Lou Donaldson, Donald Byrd, Andrew Hill, John Patton, and Johnny Hodges. On these recordings, Ponder proved to be equally adept at playing R&B influenced soul jazz as he was at big band and bebop-inspired straight ahead. On Byrd's *Fancy Free* (1969) and John Patton's Mosaic recordings, Ponder's solos are marked by an aggressive, yet harmonically uncomplicated, approach that reveals a training history on the bandstand as well as sensitivity to the blues. Using a pick, Ponder sounds like a younger and rawer version of George Benson and Pat Martino as he builds improvisations around repetitive, double-time licks and searing, single-line melodies laid over

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[92] Gioia, 367.

mid-tempo swing and shuffle grooves. On veteran saxophonist Johnny Hodges' *Rippin and Runnin'* (1968), Ponder gives more attention to harmonic movement and melodic development in his improvisations. On the extended composition "Moonflower," Ponder forgoes the pick for his thumb, taking a spacious and laid back solo that complements Hodges' loose phrasing and clear tone. Behind Hodges' solo, Ponder regularly interjects thematic jabs with block chords, dialoguing with drummer Freddie Waits and organist Willie Gardner while bassist Ron Carter creates a steady backdrop. On Lou Donaldson's "Say it Loud" (1968), Ponder "chickn' picks" over the medium Meters-esque funk, opting for a twangy, punchy sound characteristic of funk guitarists. The song is somewhat politically charged beginning with the band shouting "Say it Loud," to which Ponder interjects a three note riff followed by the band response: "I'm Black and I'm Proud." The song follows the twenty-four bar ABA form with Donaldson, trumpeter Blue Mitchell, and Ponder taking extended solos. Like contemporary mainstream funk, the song is targeted at audiences that want to dance or just "groove" in a social environment, though "Say it Loud" distinguishes itself as crossover by featuring long improvisations.

What becomes clear from this cursory look at Ponder's early work as a sideman is a proficiency in several adjoining eras of African-American popular music. Depending on the needs of the occasion, Ponder may reach back to the feel and orchestral sensitivity of Ellington and Basie's big bands, into the blues styling of singers such as Ruth Brown, the drive and popular appeal of 1950s doo-wop and R&B groups, or the "pocket" of late 1960s and early 70s funk groups. Ponder, however, is not a strict "session player" yet is versatile at providing a number of styles in a recording session. Rather, Ponder's creative voice is defined by a conscious emphasis of those traits similar to all of the above mentioned styles, namely the drive of a cyclical pulse, attention to the expressive capacities of a melody, call and response phrasing,

74

thematic use of dynamics, and the emphasis of audience-performer interaction in creating the music. In any musical setting, Ponder strives foremost to express these traits, none of which can be ascribed to any one style or any one approach to performing. Though Ponder's recordings, particularly during the 1970s, often reflect the various labels' commercially motivated interests, his creative voice and conceptual approach have remained continuous.

Ponder's early records as a leader are the most commercially oriented, reflecting a compositional orientation towards contemporary rock and a sensibility to funk as it was shaped by such artists as James Brown and Sly and the Family Stone. Guitarists Montgomery and Benson, while providing a crossover template, also led producers to seek other contemporary popular music from which to draw. Ponder's first record, *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*, was recorded in 1973 by Cadet records and includes a collection of instrumental pieces heavily colored by funk, disco, and rock and roll. The opening track is an elaborately orchestrated song that largely obscures Ponder's accompanying abilities under layers of string and horns. The arranger spared the orchestration during Ponder's solo, where he attacks the one chord vamp with a torrent of gutsy blues riffs and lines. The second track, in common programming fashion, sets the mood apart from the opening track by presenting a saccharine, love-ballad. This piece exploits Ponder's thick tone, melodic sensitivity, skill with octaves, as well as his ability to build a solo over the simplest of chord changes. These traits would come to be key identifying traits in Ponder's musical voice for as his harmonic and melodic language developes, he continues to maintain the primacy of "feel," "groove," and dynamics over theoretical complexity. The rest of the album forgoes any feels associated with traditional jazz, namely swing. The exception is the jazz standard "I Only Have Eyes For You," which is rendered as a medium tempo pseudo-Latin jazz arrangement. In the recording, there is ample room for Ponder to experiment with the

melody and maintain a creative dialogue with bassist Bob Cranshaw though the use of strings to fill sonic space and double the melody draw attention away from the interactive dynamic of the group giving the recording a mundane quality.

Ponder notes that the producer selected the songs and musicians though he was responsible for arranging the songs after which separate orchestral string parts were added. This was problematic because Ponder was unable to read or write music and was faced with a limited time in the studio. Sir Roland Hanna, a friend and pianist on the session, aided Ponder in organizing the parts for the other musicians by writing charts and directing the band. The producer also influenced the sound of Ponder's guitar. On the title track, Ponder uses a wah-wah pedal and distortion to recreate an impression of the original Beatles rendition. Being unfamiliar with the original, Ponder improvises for the duration of the three and a half minute track leaving the melody for Hanna and the string orchestrator. Ponder's version is faster and brings a heavier funk "feel" to the backbeat. As he recalls, he argued with the producer to replace the session's original bass player with someone whom he felt understood how to play "commercial" funk. The result is a glimpse of a familiar song as conceived and created by a commercially minded record producer as well as a jazz guitarist with sensibilities to contemporary popular music. Ponder was paid "three to four thousand" for the recording session and says he was "thrilled to death" with the results. For him, the record was successful because of the musician's abilities to play "funky" and the "power" of the orchestra behind his playing.

For the next ten years, Ponder recorded as a leader for New York based labels ABC Impulse, Lester Radio Corporation, and Milestone from which seven albums were released. In addition to this, Ponder appeared as a sideman with Charles Earland, Willis Jackson, Etta Jones, Jimmy McGriff, Houston Person, Sonny Phillips, Shirley Scott, Joe Thomas, Stanley Turrentine,

and Mickey Tucker amongst others. Ponder's two albums for ABC Impulse, *Illusions* (1976) and *White Room* (1977), resemble *While My Guitar Gently Weeps* (1973) in that they are heavily funk influenced, feature both originals and covers of popular hits, and include string arrangements on top of the core band. The Motown hit "Do It Baby" (recorded in 1974 by the Miracles) opens the second side of *Illusions* and features Ponder rendering the melody and taking a solo with a wah-wah pedal, which was popularized by rock guitarists Jimi Hendrix and later Eric Clapton. Similarly programmed, *White Room* opens the second side with another "chart topper," this one taken from the British rock group Cream's 1968 album *Wheels of Fire*. In both cases, producer Esmond Edwards increased the recognizability of the album by including covers from the most commercially successful contemporary genres. For crossover albums, achieving a hit on the U.S. charts could be accomplished this way, just as it had been done with Wes Montgomery's version of "Going Out Of My Head," though there was also the chance of having a hit original single. Hoping to capitalize on the success of guitarist George Benson's singing, Edwards opens *White Room* with Ponder's original "If You Need Someone To Love," on which Ponder both sings and plays. Ponder's experiences singing in doo-wop and R&B groups becomes apparent as he renders the love song with the stylistic inflections and melodic treatment of Stevie Wonder, Smokey Robinson, and Marvin Gaye.

Ron Carter, a veteran jazz bassist and previous member of Miles Davis' mid-1960s quintet, appears on *Illusions*, infusing the funk and Latin jazz influenced songs with a more traditional jazz sensibility. On the R&B ballad "Jennifer," Carter and Ponder exploit their full-bodied, acoustic sound, forgoing electronic effects and using hollow body instruments. The group stretches the Ponder original to nine minutes, long over the average length of most popular releases created for airplay, and features extensive soloing by Ponder. Here, Ponder can be heard

using his thumb technique to bring out a singing quality in the spacious melody and improvise with octaves. "Jennifer" is longer in form and more harmonically complex than the other tracks showing Ponder's adeptness at "playing changes" and not relying on blues guitar clichés to propel his solos. The album concludes with a Ron Carter original, which features himself and Ponder (later to become the resident guitar-bass duo at Manhattan's club Sweet Basil) with percussionist Eddie "Bongo" Brown. The song is slow and wandering with elements of Spanish and Brazilian music mix with American blues. Stripped of the keyboard, drums, and horns, Ponder shows his developing strength as an orchestrator on the guitar, effortlessly shifting between block chords, octaves, and melodic lines all the while maintaining solid control of the slow pulse. Ponder's ability to simultaneously fill the roles of various instruments in small ensembles, and even when playing solo, has been key to his strength as an innovative guitarist though under documented on his early recordings.

All Things Beautiful (1978) would be Ponder's last full crossover album after which he would begin releasing albums that featured American songbook and jazz standards performed in feels characteristic of 40s and 50s jazz, such as swing, waltz, and bossa nova. Ponder's two Milestone recordings, *Down Here On The Ground* (1983) and *So Many Stars* (1983), include famous standards such as Billy Stayhorn's "Lush Life" and Rogers and Hammerstein's "My Funny Valentine" alongside Motown and R&B hits such as Stevie Wonder's "Higher Ground" and "Superstition" and Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean." These sessions capture, more closely, Ponder's live performance where sets are carefully programmed to include a blend of swing, Latin-jazz, soul-jazz, shuffle blues and ballads. Both albums include a vocal piece ("Down Here On The Ground" and "Save Your Love For Me") and open both sides with the more popular R&B and soul hits. Producer Bob Porter went as far as to organize two different bands, one,

including pianist Kenny Werner, bassist Scott Lee, and drummer Greg Bandy, to swing and one, including organist Lonnie Smith, electric bassist David Eubanks, and drummer Victor Jones, to play funk. By this point, Ponder had solidified his sound, playing his Gibson Super-400 hollow body jazz guitar with only his thumb. "Lush Life," performed solo on *Down Here On The Ground*, epitomizes Ponder's thick tone and masterly harmonizing and phasing abilities, which would become hallmarks of his later recordings.

5.2 LATE RECORDINGS AS A LEADER

Ponder recorded his last album for Milestone records in 1983, after which we went four years without a release as a leader. In 1987 Ponder signed with Muse, a New York record label, founded in 1972 by former Cobblestone Records head Joe Fields. In the 1970s and 80s, Fields signed artists who had made a name in pre-fusion jazz. Hard Bop musicians such as Sonny Stitt, Woody Shaw, and Houston Person as well as laid-back swingers Kenny Burrell and Kenny Barron were amongst artists in the Muse roster who maintained their stylistic roots throughout their careers. Field's emphasis on small groups, centered on the traditional jazz rhythm section (acoustic piano, double-bass, and drums), built on the tradition of such labels as Blue Note and Verve. However, while these older labels have continued signing younger artists who represent recent trends in jazz, Muse has focused on largely African-American artists of Ponder's generation who continue to play blues and R&B influenced jazz. In 1997, Muse became

HighNote, run under Joe Fields son Barney Fields. The younger Fields has continued with the tradition of recording jazz with deep roots in African-American popular music. As one of the few recording guitarists, who developed on the "chitlin circuit" and continue to compose and interpret the music of popular African-American musicians from Stevie Wonder to Duke Ellington, Ponder represents a shrinking genre of contemporary jazz.

Ponder's twelve albums for Muse and HighNote show a consistent approach to improvising, song choice, sidemen and overall album character. Ponder's first album for Muse, *Mean Streets-No Bridges*, includes a mix of standards, ballads, Latin-jazz, and funky instrumentals. As is characteristic of his following albums, *Mean Streets* opens with a riff-based shuffle blues ("Next Time You See Me"), which features riff-melodies and blues improvisations that formed the core of his "chitlin circuit" performances. Absent is any need to alter the song form and harmonic language or demonstrate the technical prowess of the bebop era. The musicians are unanimously focused on "just swinging" and creating the right feel. The second track of *Mean Streets* is a funky cover of the popular Burt Bacharach hit "They Long To Be Close To You," hailing to the crossover days of interpreting chart-toppers. The choice vocal standard "Time After Time" features Ponder singing with the affect of a Gospel or R&B singer, adding an element of seduction to the album. *Mean Streets* provides a model for Ponder's following albums in that it featured a variety of stylistic influences as well as song choices. This approach hails from the "chitlin circuit" where audiences expected a diverse yet blues-rooted selection of music.

Soul Eyes (1991) also opens with a "down home" blues, giving saxophonist Houston Person, Ponder, and pianist Benny Green each a short solo in which they establish themselves as capable blues players. The album continues with Ponder exploring the harmonically complex

jazz ballad "Soul Eyes." Ponder stays close to John Coltrane's well-known arrangement pf the Mal Waldron composition, though he plays the first half of the melody as a solo arrangement, allowing Green to finish the melody and Person improvise over the changes. In contrast to Ponder's rubato solo ending is an aggressive funk version of Miles Davis' famous composition "All Blues." Drummer Victor Jones, a long time sideman with Ponder, exhibits his 1970s funk upbringing, propelling the song as Peter Washington lays down the bass groove. The rest of the album unfolds, setting ballads and swing songs against funk songs. "You Don't Have To Go," the closing song of *Soul Eyes*, ends in the same vein as it opened; with an acknowledgement of the importance of their urban blues roots.

Ponder's last three albums on HighNote, *Thumbs Up* (2000), *Alone* (2000), and *What's New* (2002), feature him in more exposed musical settings than on his previous albums. For many jazz guitarists, the lack of a pianist or saxophonist hinders their ability to improvise to their greatest ability and creatively experiment. This most often is due to being unaccustomed to filling the missing roles and being dependent on the force of a full band to drive their creative energy. For Ponder, the extra creative space allows him to further utilize his dynamic approach in developing his solos and interacting with his sidemen. Ponder's voice is, beyond his approach to tone and melodic treatment, distinguished by his comprehensive conceptual method wherein he maintains a balance between rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic material, arranging them so to maintain a steady dialogue and progression of improvised ideas.

On *Thumbs Up*, Ponder uses the traditional guitar trio format (guitar, bass, drums), which continues to comprise many of his live performances. With Pittsburgh bassist Dave Pellow and drummer-producer Cecil Brooks III, Ponder presents a selection of jazz standards performed in swing and bossa nova styles. With exception of the last track, "Funk Wit Dis," *Thumbs Up* is

what could be considered a traditional "straight ahead" album, demonstrating Ponder's fluency in jazz styles of the 1940s and 50s. In similar convention, *Alone* and *What's New* move away from R&B and urban blues to traditional swing. For Ponder, whose early playing experiences were in R&B and soul jazz groups, this tendency towards the "traditional" marks an amalgamation of musical experiences rather than a return to his "roots." On *Alone*, amongst the few commercially released solo jazz guitar albums following innovative solo recordings of Joe Pass, Ponder takes on difficult jazz standards, such as "Lullaby Of Birdland" and "Stompin' At The Savoy," stringing together block chord harmonized melodies while maintaining the strong swing feel. *What's New* presents Ponder in the organ trio (Hammond organ, guitar, drums) format where he is free to exploit his melodic approach on his choice standards.

After Ponder returned to Pittsburgh from Newark in the late 1980s, he did not regularly perform with New York sidemen. Besides short tours as a sideman or recording, the bulk of Ponder's performances from 1990 to 2006 were with local artists at local clubs. Ponder regularly appeared both as a solo act as well as leading a quartet at Craig Poole's jazz club James Steet Located in Pittsburgh's North side, James Steet maintained a regular performance schedule of local and east coast jazz and R&B bands until its close in 2005. The two intimately cramped and low-lit floors provided an ideal environment for Ponder to perform. With Pittsburgh musicians such as Mike Taylor (*b*), Dave Pellow (*b*), Dwayne Dolphin (*b*), Tony DePaolis (*b*), George Heid (*d*), Roger Humphries (*d*), Tom Wendt (*d*), Jevon Rushton (*d*), Howie Alexander (*p*), and Gene Ludwig (*org*), Ponder continues performing with fiery energy. Ponder's recent albums occasionally feature a Pittsburgh associate such as *Something To Ponder* (1994) with Roger Humphries and *James Street* (1997) with Dwayne Dolphin, though most are New York based artists associated with HighNote. The result has been albums that capture Ponder's approach to

82

interpreting jazz, blues, and R&B standards yet largely fail to communicate the energy and dynamics of his live performance.

5.3   PERFORMANCE AND RECORDING IDENTITIES

Recordings exist in part to replace the experience of live performance though they convey a different experience to the listener. While recording in a studio environment creates an impression of public performance, it is something quite different, born from different creative processes. Because the listener consumes and evaluate the recording itself, not the processes of recording, the musician must take a product-oriented approach. In a live performance, the creative process, as experienced by performer and participant, becomes a central element in the musical experience.

Jazz musicians often note that they approach performance in a recording studio with more restraint in order to capture an impression of the stage performance and to avoid mistakes. Drummer Greg Bandy, a long time sideman for Ponder, notes "In recording you got to think short and to the point where in the club…you can really experiment and get loose."[93] Implied in this statement is the necessity for an alternate playing style for recording that emphasizes understatement over emotional freedom. Part of the creative energy of the live performance is the close proximity of the musicians, which aids their ability to communicate musically, visually, and orally. Separation in a recording studio removes the physical experience of creating music, replacing it with a purely aural one. Bandy notes that live performance generally provides an

improved medium for creative musical expression because "one thing about being close on the bandstand, you *feel* the other musicians." In contrast, musicians in a studio environment are conscious of the fact that the performance will become a lasting statement of their abilities and so are less likely to experiment with new ideas. What may feel and sound like an inspired moment in a live environment may appear faulty out of context.

Because of this, the concept of the "mistake" functions differently in recording sessions as it does in live performance. In a club, a mistake in the right creative context is a sign of "pushing oneself" or reaching beyond one's abilities. This serves to heighten the experience of the musicians and audience by adding an element of risk to the performance. As Bandy notes, when the musicians are creatively engaged with one another in a live performance "even mistakes sound good." "Mistakes," on a recording, are more likely to be perceived as a flaw in the musicians' abilities than a part of the creative process. Because the musical experience has been reduced from a visual, physical, aural, and social phenomenon to a purely sonic form, the listener becomes "note focused," unable to evaluate or interact the musician's presence.

Ponder often speaks of the importance for continually reaching beyond one's means in a performance, whether in trying to instantaneously conceive a complex rhythmic phrase or rearrange a song on the bandstand. This approach pushes him to continue developing as a creative artist and maintains a high level of awareness, interaction, and respect amongst his sidemen. In live performances, Ponder develops devices that make the music exciting and surprising. When ending a piece Ponder may "tag" the last four measures so to create a new cycle over which to improvise. After building the "tag" to a climax he will begin playing a short rhythmic phrase in which he will give the slightest flick of his hand signaling an immediate cut-

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[93] Greg Bandy, Personal Interview (January 3, 2006).

off, despite his place in the cycle. If a musician should miss this signal or not break with the right conviction, Ponder will demand that they perform the "tag" again so that they can end the song to his satisfaction. This theatric display could never be rehearsed with convincing results, nor would Ponder strive to do so. His goal in live performance is to balance surprise with anticipation not only for his audience, but for himself and his musicians as well. Rarely is this element of performance captured in Ponder's recordings. A good example is *To Reach A Dream* where Ponder and organist Lonnie Smith conceptually experiment with no pre-determined arrangements. On the title track, Ponder takes a short initial solo following the melody. Smith enters slowly after Ponder's abrupt solo, singing over his chords as he builds to a massive apex of screaming organ chords. After a quick restatement of the first part of the melody, Smith begins a chord vamp subverting Ponder's attempt to state the melody bridge. Settling into the new harmonic framework that Smith sets up, Ponder launches into an aggressive solo followed by a rhythmic vamp that ends the piece. While the recording has moments of uncertainty, the musicians' abilities to adapt to one another's whims capture a piece of the freedom that is experienced in the informal environment of the "chitlin circuit," where nothing less would be accepted by audiences.

Ponder's creative voice does not live solely in his recorded output. As creative processes differ from the stage to the studio, so do the end products. Live performances exist in the memories of the participants, both performers and audience members, while recordings exist in a concrete form that is consumed by individuals removed from the creative process. To understand Ponder's voice, or that of any improvising musician, requires an examination of the creative processes involved in both live and studio performances. Ponder draws as much from formative life experiences as he does from harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic norms in improvising. When

improvisations are examined outside of their social context, they become theoretical ideas independent of the ideals from which they were created. I have, in this study, aimed to approach those creative processes that have enabled Ponder to develop a musical identity. While Ponder succeeds as a creative individual worthy of the status of innovator, those formative processes involved in creating his voice apply across the phenomenon of modern African-American popular music. What remains intriguing is the creative success of the individual in the midst of this uniformity.

6.0   CONCLUSION

The larger questions that have led me to this study are "How do individuals generate meaningful creative identities from musical traditions?," "What is the relationship between the improviser's social experiences and musical output?," "What identifies the individual improviser as innovative?," and "How do creative processes differ between live and recorded performances?" This paper has explored these questions through the creative life of guitarist Jimmy Ponder, an individual whose musical approach was born from African-American music and social life of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s.

The first section, "Jazz at the Mid-Century," explores interactions between jazz, blues, doo-wop, R&B, "soul" music, and rock 'n roll. Jazz, as an integral part of the African-American tradition of musicking, is intimately related to the aesthetics of these other musical genres. Ponder, having come to jazz as a doo-wop and R&B performer, demonstrates how musical foundations in popular music inform conceptual approaches to jazz and ultimately enable a recreation of the genre so that it remains pertinent to contemporary audiences. Ponder's life demonstrates that jazz is not a static art form. Its practitioners often react and interpret that which is most present to them: contemporary popular music and culture. It is in this respect that jazz can be viewed as process rather than product oriented.

The second section, "Race and Music," addresses the social context of much of Ponder's performing life; the chitlin circuit. This context, born from segregation, testifies to the close

relationship between community identities, understandings of race, and musical processes in America. Those aesthetics and social norms common to the chitlin circuit informed Ponder's creative goals; namely spiritual release, creative dialogue, and "serving his audience" (what I interpret as his conviction to provide his listeners with a perspective to engage their own aesthetic values). In examining the venues in which Ponder developed his creative approach, I have connected urban demographics, performance practices, and ideas of race to show larger trends in African-American popular music.

In the third section, "Ponder's Voice," I examine how Ponder's creative goals have been realized in his technical approach to the guitar as well as his performance practices. His conceptual and technical approaches to music comprise what I call his voice, which is a concept applicable across jazz. The voice functions on both micro and macro levels. On the macro level, it serves the observer in identifying the larger creative contexts of which the individual performer is a part, in this case urban African-American musical traditions. On the micro level, the voice is a means for the individual to create meaningful expressions. Performance becomes meaningful, or authentic, because it is an individualized approach based off interpretations of other musician's approaches.

The final section, "Recording," addresses recording trends in jazz in the 1970s and 80s where commercially driven crossover formulas heavily influenced the creative process. As a musician widely experienced as both a performer and recording artist, Ponder faced the task of negotiating conflicts between his creative approach and the interests of recording companies. In addition, Ponder shows that beyond commercial influences, creative processes in jazz differ considerably from the stage to recording studio resulting in a dichotomy in the musician's musical identity, what I call performance and recording identities.

What makes Jimmy Ponder an intriguing subject of study is the diversity of musical styles and life experiences that comprise his musical identity and more importantly enable him to communicate in a way that is creative, personally meaningful and individually oriented. As a musician operating within the tradition of jazz, Ponder demonstrates the ever-changing nature of the music. Ponder's creative endeavors show that the impetus of jazz derives as much from established musical languages (be-bop, avant-garde, Dixieland…) as it does from social environments (the chitlin circuit, concert halls, university classrooms…). I feel these assertions have implications for academic jazz studies, which emphasize the analysis of musical products over creative processes and individuals over social contexts. As jazz increasingly becomes an academic phenomenon and less as a means of communication within social environments, I feel the need to re-emphasize the importance of understanding it as a social force and not a collection of rules deduced from great innovators. For it to remain a living art, jazz must function as the individual's means to engage their social existence. For performers and participants alike, jazz is a means of engaging and reasserting the value systems that create both individual and community identities. Taken from this context, we are left to wonder what meaning it carries.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

The titles included in this discography were compiled from *The Jazz Discography,* [94] *The Penguin Guide to Jazz on CD,* [95] various record collections, and the internet search engine *Google*. Titles released under Ponder's name are organized chronologically whereas recordings as a sideman are organized alphabetically by leading artist.

A.1 JIMMY PONDER AS A LEADER

<u>JIMMY PONDER</u> (b. 1946) Guitar

WHILE MY GUITAR GENTLY WEEPS (1973) Cadet CA 50048
Ponder; Roland Hanna (*p*); Bob Cranshaw, Wilbur Bascomb (*b*); Jimmy Johnson (*d*); Montego Joe (*perc*); Hubert Laws (*fl, picc*); George Marge (*ob, f, cl*); Marvin Stamm (*t*); Tony Studd (*tb*); David Nadien, Joseph Malin, Paul Gershman, Emanuel Green, Marvin Morgenstern, Charles Libove, Paul Winter, Harry Lookofsky (*vn*); George Ricci, Charles McCracken (*clo*).

ILLUSIONS (1976) ABC Impulse ASD 9313
Ponder; Jerome Richardson (*f*); Sonny Burke, Mickey Tucker, Ronnie Foster (*ky*); Chuck

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[94] Tom Lord, *The Jazz Discography* (West Vancouver, B.C., Canada: Lord Music Reference, c1992-c2004. 34 v.)

[95] Richard Cook and Brian Morton, *The Penguin Guide to Jazz on CD*, 3rd ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1996).

Domanico, Ron Carter (*b*); James Gadson, Grady Tate, Brian Brake (*d*); Eddie 'Bongo' Brown (*perc*); Johnny Pate (*string arrangement*).

WHITE ROOM (1977) ABC Impulse AS 9327

Ponder (*g, v*); Albert Prince (*ky, org*); Sonny Burke (p, *clavinet*); Cedric Lawson (*ky*); James Jamerson Sr., Scott Edwards, Chris White (*b*); Victor Jones, James Gadson (*d*); Paulinho daCosta, Stacy Edwards (*perc*); Johnny Pate (*string arrangement*).

JIMMY PONDER (1978) LRC CDC 9031

Ponder; Jon Faddis, Marvin Stamm (*t*); Barry Rogers, Urbie Green (tb); Eddie Daniels, David Tolfani (*reeds*); Bobby Rose, Jeff Maelen (*g*); Pat Rebilliot, Rob Mounsey (*ky*); Jimmy McGriff (*org*); Ron Carter (*b*); Richard Crooks, Jim Young (*d*); Gwen Guthrie, Diva Gray, Jocelyn Brown, Jonathan Grody (*v*).

ALL THINGS BEAUTIFUL (1978) LRC 9322

Ponder; Richard Crooks, Jimmy Young (*d*); Neil Jason (*b*); Bob Rose, Jeff Mironov, Lance Quinn (g); Jimmy Maelen (*perc*); Pat Rebillot, Rob Mounsey (*ky*); Gordon Grody, Diva Gray, Jocelyn Brown, Gwen Guthrie (*v*); Jon Faddis, Marvin Stamm (*t*); Barry Rogers (*tb*); Eddie Daniels, David Tofani (sax); Gene Orloff, Sanford Allen, Mat Raimondi, Louann Montesi, Joseph Malignaggi, Frederick Buldrini, Marvin Morgenstern, Kermit Moore, Gerald Tarack, Paul Gershman, Jonathan Abramowitz, Yoko Matsuo (*strings*).

PONDER'N (1979-1981) LRC

Ponder; Ron Carter (*b*); Victor Jones (*d*); Benny Green (*p*).[96]

DOWN HERE ON THE GROUND (November, 1983) Milestone M 9121

Ponder (*g, v*); Mickey Tucker (*p*); Victor Jones (*d*); Scott Lee, Paul West (*b*); Arnold Sterling (*as, ts*); Mino Cinelu (*perc*).

SO MANY STARS (November, 1983) Milestone M 9132

Ponder (*g, v*); Lonnie Smith (*org*); Kenny Werner (*p*); David Eubanks, Scott Lee (*b*); Victor Jones, Greg Bandy (*d*); Mino Cinelu (*perc*).

MEAN STREETS-NO BRIDGES (June, 1987) Muse MCD 5324

Ponder; Bill Saxton (*ts, f*); Big John Patton (*org*); Geary Moore (*g*); Greg Bandy (*d*).

JUMP (March, 1988) Muse MCD 5347

Ponder; Jimmy Anderson (*ts*); Big John Patton (*org*); Geary Moore (*g*); Eddie Gladden (*dr*); Lawrence Killian (*perc*).

TO REACH A DREAM (July, 1989) Muse MCD 5394

Ponder; Lonnie Smith (*org*); Geary Moore (*g*); Greg Bandy (*d*); Lawrence Killian (*perc*).

COME ON DOWN (1990) Muse MCD 5375

Ponder; Houston Person (*ts*); Lonnie Smith (*org*); Winard Harper (*d*); Sammy Figuera (*perc*).

SOUL EYES (May, 1991) Muse MCD 5514

Ponder; Houston Person (*ts*); Benny Green (*p*); Peter Washington (*b*); Victor Jones (*d*); Sammy Figueroa (*perc*).

SOMETHING TO PONDER (1994) Muse 5567

Ponder; Mark Soskin (*p*); Roger Humphries (*d*); Peter Washington (*b*).

JAMES STREET (June, 1997) HighNote HCD 7017

Ponder; John Hicks (*p*); Dwayne Dolphin (*b*); Cecil Brooks III (*d*).

GUITAR CHRISTMAS (June, 1997) Highnote HCD 7034

Ponder; Don Braden (*ts*); John Hicks (*p*); Dwayne Dolphin (*b*); Cecil Brooks III (*d*).

STEEL CITY SOUL (1998) 32 Jazz 32075

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[96] Orchestral instrumentalists not included.

Ponder; Benny Green, Mark Soskin (*p*); John Patton, Lonnie Smith (*org*); Houston Person (*ts*); Bill Saxton (*f*); Roger Humphries, Victor Jones (*d*).

AIN'T MISBEHAVIN' (June, 1998) HightNote HCD 7041

Ponder; Don Braden (*ts*); John Hicks (*p*); Dwayne Dolphin (*b*); Cecil Brooks III (*d*).

THUMBS UP (July, 2000) HighNote HCD 7080

Ponder; Dave Pellow (*b*); Cecil Brooks III (*d*).

ALONE (Sept, 2000) HighNote HCD 7069

Ponder (g, v).

WHAT'S NEW (August, 2002) HighNote HCD 7100

Ponder; Gene Ludwig (*org*); Cecil Brooks III (*d*).

A.2   JIMMY PONDER AS A SIDEMAN

JOHNNY ADAMS vocalist

ONE FOOT IN THE BLUES (June, 1996) Rounder 612144

Adams; Dr. Lonnie Smith (*org*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Ed Petersen (*ts*); Donald Harrison, Jr. (as); Jamil Sharif (*t*); Shannon Powell (*d*).

ERNIE ANDREWS (b. 1927) vocalist

NO REGRETS (August, 1993) Muse MCD 5484

Andrews; Houston Person (*ts*); Junior Mance (*p*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Ray Drummond (*b*); Michael Carvin (*d*).

B. BAKER CHOCOLATE CO.

B. BAKER CHOCOLATE CO. (1979) Lester Radio Company LRC 9325

Diva Gray, Gordon Gray, Jocelyn Brown, Lonnie Groves (*v*); Bob Babbitt, Neil Jason, Will Lee (*b*); Alan Schwartzberg, Jimmy Young, Richard Crooks (*d*); Sherry Winston (*f*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Derek Smith, Jimmy McGriff, Lonnie Smith, Pat Rebillot (*ky*); Jimmy Maelen (*perc*); Dave Tofani, Eddie Daniels, Lew Delgatto, Lou Marini, George Young (*reeds*); Allen W Sanford, Frederick Buldrini, Gene Orloff, Guy Lumia, Harold Kohon, Jesse Levy, Joe Mullin, Jonathan Abramowitz, Kermit Moore, Marvin Morgenstern, Pat Winter, Regis Iandiorio (*strings*); Barry Rogers, Dave Taylor (*tb*); Alan Rubin, Jon Faddis, Lew Soloff, Marvin Stamm (*t*).

RUSTY BRYANT Tenor Saxophone

RUSTY BRYANT VOL. 2 (February/October, 1971) Prestige PRCD 24211

Bryant; Bill Mason, Leon Spencer (*org*); Jimmy Ponder, Ernest Reed, Wilbert Longmire (*g*); Idris Muhammad, Buddy Caldwell (*d*).

WILDFIRE (1972) Prestige PRT 10037

Bryant; Bill Mason (*org*); Jimmy Ponder, Ernest Reed (*g*); Idris Muhammad (*d*); Buddy Caldwell (*perc*).

DONALD BYRD (b.1932) Trumpet

FANCY FREE (May/June, 1969) Blue Note CDP 89796

Byrd; Frank Foster (*ts*); Lew Tabackin, Jerry Dodgion (*f*); Julian Priester (*tb*); Duke Pearson (*ky*); Roland Wilson, Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Joe Chambers, Leo Morris (*d*); Nat Bettis, John Robinson (*perc*).

HANK CRAWFORD (1934) Alto and Baritone saxophones

DOWN ON THE DEUCE (June, 1984) Milestone M 9129

Crawford; Cedar Walton (*p*); Jimmy Ponder, Melvin Sparks (*g*); Wilbur Bascomb, Jr. (*b*); Bernard Purdie (*d*); Danny Moore, Martin Banks (*t*); David Fathead Newman (*s, fl*); Howard Johnson (*s*).

STEPPIN' UP (June, 1987) Milestone MCD 9153
Crawford; Jimmy McGriff (*ky*); Billy Preston (*p*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Vance James (*d*).

PORTRAIT (1990) Milestone MCD 9192
Crawford; David 'Fathead' Newman (*ts*); Johnny Hammond (*org*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Vance James (*d*).

LOU DONALDSON (b. 1926) Alto Saxophone

BROTHER SOUL (1968)

BLUE BREAKBEATS (January, 1963; June, 1970) Blue Note CDP 7243
Donaldson; With Ed Williams, Blue Mitchell (*tr*); Melvin Sparks, Ted Dunbar, Jimmy Ponder, George Benson, Grant Green (*g*); Lonnie Smith, Charles Earland, Leon Spencer, John Patton (*org*); Idris Muhammad, Ben Dixon (*d*).

SAY IT LOUD (November, 1968) Blue Note BST 84299
Donaldson; Blue Mitchell (*t*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Charles Earland (*org*); Leo Morris (*d*).

MR. SHING-A-LING (October, 1967) Blue Note CDP 84271
Donaldson; Blue Mitchell (*t*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Lonnie Smith (*org*); Idris Muhammad (*d*).

CHARLES EARLAND (b. 1941) Organ

BOSS ORGAN (1967?) Choice MG 517
Earland (*org*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Bobby Durham (*d*).

SOUL CRIB (1969) Choice ST 520

Earland; George Coleman (*ts*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Walter Perkins (*d*).

SMOKIN' (1977) Muse MR 5126

Earland; Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Dave Schnitter, George Coleman (*ts*); Herb Fisher (*perc*); Walter Perkins, Bobby Durham (*d*).

ORGANONMICALLY CORRECT (1977-78) Savoy Jazz SVY 17225

Earland; George Coleman, Houston Person, Frank Wess (*ts*); Jimmy Ponder, Melvin Sparks (*g*); Walter Perkins, Grady Tate (*d*); Bill Hardman (*t*); Ralph Dorsey, Lawrence Killian (*perc*).

<u>ANDREW HILL</u> (b. 1937) Piano

GRASS ROOTS (April/August, 1968) Blue Note

Hill; Lee Morgan or Woody Shaw (*t*); Booker Ervin, Frank Mitchell (*ts*); Jimmy Ponder[97] (*g*); Ron Carter, Reggie Workman (*b*); Freddie Waits, Idris Muhammad (*d*).

<u>JOHNNY HODGES</u> (b. 1907) Alto and Soprano Saxophone

RIPPIN' AND RUNNIN' (December, 1968) Verve 8753

Hodges; Freddie Waits (*d*); Ron Carter (*b*); Willie Gardner (*org*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*).

<u>RICHARD "GROOVE" HOLMS</u> (b. 1931) Organ

BLUES ALL DAY (February, 1988) Muse MCD 5358

Holmes; Houston Person (*ts*); Cecil Bridgewater (*t*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Cecil Brooks III (*d*); Ralph Dorsey (*perc*).

HOT TAT (Sept., 1989) Muse MCD 5395

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[97] Ponder appears on the 2000 reissue.

Holmes; Cecil Bridgewater (*t*); Houston Person (*ts*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Wilbur Bascomb (*b*); Greg Bandy (*d*); Ralph Dorsey (*perc*).

GROOVE'S GROOVE (1997) 32 Jazz 32047

Holmes; Cecil Bridgewater (*t*); Houston Person, Dave Schnitter (*ts*); Cecil Brooks III, Idris Muhammad (*d*); Buddy Caldwell, Ralph Dorsey (*perc*); Jimmy Ponder, Bob DeVos (*g*).

WILLIS JACKSON (b. 1928) Tenor Saxophone

IN THE ALLEY (1977) Muse MR 5124

Jackson (*ts*); Sonny Phillips (*p*); Carl Wilson (*org*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Jimmy Lewis (*b*); Yusef Ali (*d*); Buddy Caldwell (*perc*).

ETTA JONES (b. 1928) Vocals

MY MOTHER'S EYES (June, 1978) Savoy Jazz SVY 17280

Jones; Sonny Phillips (*ky*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Rufus Reid (*b*); Lawrence Killian (*perc*); Houston Person (*ts*); Idris Muhammad (*d*); George Devens (*vib*).

LEWIS KEEL Alto Saxophone

COMING OUT SWINGWING (August, 1990) Muse MCD 5438

Keel; Harold Mabern (*p*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Jamil Nasser (*b*); Leroy Williams (*d*); Buzz Hollie (*perc*).

JIMMY McGRIFF (b. 1936) Organ

THE MAIN SQUEEZE (1974) Groove Merchant GM 534

McGriff; Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Connie Lester (*as*); Eddie Gladden (*d*).

TAILGUNNER (May, 1977) LRC 903

McGriff; Lew Delgato, Eddie Daniels, George Young, Alan Rubin, Randy Brecker, Jack Frosk, Marvin Stamm, John Sheply, Dave Taylor, Barry Rogers, Dominic Menardo, Joe Randazzo (*horns*); Gene Orloff, Paul Gershman, Guy Lumia, W. Sanford Allen, Harry Lookofsky, Gerald Tarak, Tony Posk, Julian Barber, Richard Maximoff, Jesse Levy, Richard Locker (*strings*), Pat Rebillot, Paul Griffin, Ralph Schuckett (*ky*); George Young (*fl, as, ts*); Lance Quinn, Jerry Friedman, Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Bob Babbit, Will Lee, Francisco Centanao (*b*); Yolanda McCullough, Alan Schwartzberg (*v*); Brad Baker (*conductor/arranger*).

OUTSIDE LOOKING IN (1978) Lester Radio Company LRC 9320
McGriff; Pat Rebillot, Barry Miles (*p*); Jimmy Ponder, Lance Quinn, Jeff Mironov (*g*); Bob Babbitt, Neil Jason (*b*); Jimmy Young, Ron Zito (*d*); Eddie Daniels (*ts*); Hank Crawford (*as*); Jimmy Maelen (*perc*).

CITY LIGHTS (1980) Jazz America JAM 002
McGriff; Danny Moore (*t*); Lee Johnson, Bill Easley (*as*); Harold Vick (*ts*); Wayne Boyde, Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Alfred Johnson (*b*); Idris Muhammad, Victor Jones (*d*).

MOVIN' UPSIDE THE BLUES (December, 1980-81) JAM 005
McGriff; Arnold Sterling, Bill Easley (*as*); Bill Hardman (*t*); Harold Vick (*ts*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Vance James, Victor Jones (*d*); Richard Byrd (*perc*).

SKYWALK (March, 1984) Milestone M 9126
McGriff; Michael Ridley, Glenn Kaye (*t*); Dominick Carelli (*tb*); Bill Easley, Arnold Sterling (*as*); Coy Shockley (*ts*); James Brudige (*bar*); Wayne Boyde, Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Don Williams (*d*).

STEPPIN' UP (June, 1987) Milestone MCD 9153
McGriff; Hank Crawford (*ts*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Vance James (*d*); Billy Preston (*p*).

ON THE BLUES SIDE (1989) Milestone 5M 9177
McGriff; Hank Crawford (*ts*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Vance James (*d*).

<u>JACK McDUFF</u> Organ

THE FOURTH DIMENSION (1974)

<u>JOHN PATTON</u> (b. 1936) Organ

JOHN PATTON (April, 1963; October, 1968) Mosaic; Blue Note
Patton; Fred Jackson, Harold Vick, Junior Cook, Harold Alexander (*s*); Richard Williams, Blue Mitchell (*t*); Grant Green, Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Ben Dixon, Clifford Jarvis, Hugh Walker (*d*).

<u>HOUSTON PERSON</u> Tenor Saxophone

ISLAND EPISODE (April, 1971; January, 1973) Prestige PRCD 11007
Person; Victor Paz (*t*); Hank Jones (*ky*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Andy Gonzalez (*b*); Jerry Gonzalez (perc); Nicky Marrero (*timbales*).

STOLEN SWEETS (April, 1976) Muse MR 5110
Person (*ts*); Jimmy ponder (*g*); Sonny Phillips (*org*); Frankie Jones (*d*); Buddy Caldwell (*perc*).

LOST & FOUND (September, 1977; June, 1991) 32 Jazz 32020
Person; Charles Brown (*p, v*); Gaylord Birch, Idris Muhammad (*d*); Red Callender (*b*); Danny Caron, Jimmy Ponder, (*g*); Bill Hardman (*t*); Sonny Phillips (*org*); Larry Killian (*perc*).

<u>SONNY PHILLIPS</u> (b. 1936) Piano; Organ

MY BLACK FLOWER (September, 1976) Muse MR 5118
Phillips (p, org); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Galen Robinson (*f*); Qaadir Almubeen Muhammad (Ben Dixon), Frankie Jones, (*d*); Ralph Dorsey (*perc*).

<u>IRENE REID</u> Vocals

THANKS TO YOU (1990) Inspire Productions IPC 0001

Reid; Jimmy Sigler (*p, ky*); Jimmy Ponder, Rodney Jones, Melvin 'Sparks' Hasan, Ronald Jackson (*g*); Harry Anderon, Tarik Shah (*b*); Leo Johnson, Dave Hubbard (*ts*); Mansoor Sabree (*g*); Jesse Hameen II (*d*).

SHIRLEY SCOTT (b.1934) Organ

SUPERSTITION (1973) Cadet CA 50036

Scott; Jimmy Ponder, David Spinozza (*g*); Jimmy Owens, Arthur Hoyle, Murray Watson (*t*); Ron Carter (*b*); Ramon Morris, Clifford Davis (*ts*); Grady Tate (*d*); Frederick "Derf" Walker (*perc*).

DR. LONNIE SMITH (b. 1942) Organ

THE TURBANATOR (July, 1991) 32 Jazz 32209

Smith; Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Houston Person (*ts*); Buster Williams (*b*); Buddy Williams (*d*).

JOE THOMAS (b. 1933) Flute and Tenor Saxophone

THE JOE THOMAS GROUP (1968) Cobblestone CBS 7001

Thomas; Jiggs Chase (*org*); Robby Porter (*b);* Kenny Pollard (*d*); Jimmy Wilkinson, Jimmy Ponder (*g*).

HERE I COME (1977) LRC 9318

FLASH (1980) Chiaroscuro CR 2018

Thomas; David Spinozza, Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Seldon Powell (*ts*); Garnett Brown (*tb*); Royal (*t*); Kenny Pollard (*d*).

STANLEY TURRENTINE (b. 1934) Tenor Saxophone

AIN'T NO WAY (May, 1968) Blue Note LT 1095

Turrentine; Shirley Scott (*org*); Bob Cranshaw (*b*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Ray Lucas (*d*).

COMMON TOUCH (August, 1968) Blue Note BST 84315

Turrentine; Shirley Scott (*org*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Bob Cranshaw (*b*); Leo Morris (*d*).

STRAIGHT AHEAD (1984) Blue Note

Turrentine; George Benson, Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Les McCann (*p*); Ron Carter, Peter Brown (*b*); Jimmy Madison, Gerrick King (*d*); Jimmy Smith (*org*).

MICKEY TUCKER (b. 1941) Piano

TRIPLICITY (December, 1975) Xandu 128

Tucker; Gene Perla (*b*); Jimmy Ponder (*g*); Eddie Gladden (*d*).

CHRIS WHITE (b. 1936) Bass

THE CHRIS WHITE PROJECT (1993) Muse MCD 5494

White; Steve Nelson (*vib*); Grachan Moncur III (*tb*); Jimmy Ponder, Marvin Horne (*g*); Cassandra Wilson (*voc*); Michael Raye (ky); Keith Copeland (*d*); Steve Kroon (*perc*).

A.3   COMPILATIONS

T.K. JAZZ SAMPLER (1978)

THE BEST OF THE JAZZ GUITARS (1988)

BIRTH OF THE COOL FUNK (1998)

2 BY 5 GUITAR JAZZ (1998)

JAZZ THAT COOKS (1999)

JAZZ FOR A LONELY HEART (2001)

GROOVE (2004)

THE MOST RELAXING JAZZ GUITAR MUSIC IN THE UNIVERSE (2005)

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