

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

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| Course ID: | Jazz History - MUSI 2381-01 | Instructor Name: | Josiah Boornazian, DMA |
| Term: | Spring 2020 (3 credit hours) | Office Phone: | 956-882-7700 |
| Location: | TSC Performing Arts Center 1.022 | E-Mail: | josiah.boornazian@utrgv.edu |
| CRN: | 62589 | Office Location: | TSC Performing Arts Center 1.022 |
| Class Times: | Tues./Thurs. 11am–12:15pm | Office Hours: | Tues./Thurs. 12:30–1:30pm |

Textbook and Resource Material

Required text:

- *Concise Guide to Jazz* by Mark C. Gridley (Sixth Edition, Published 2009 by Prentice Hall; first published November 1991)

Course Description

This survey course will introduce students to the key historical influences, style periods, performers, composers, events, and socio-musical trends that outline the tradition of jazz music in the United States of America. In addition to providing students with a broad overview of the historical development of jazz, this course will also help students become more informed, attentive, and analytical music listeners. In this course, students will develop an understanding of fundamental musical and historical concepts, listening techniques, and terminology, as well as written and oral communication skills. Students will apply their knowledge and skills by writing and about and discussing jazz history in a manner appropriate for a scholarly context.

Prerequisites

There are no official prerequisites for this course. All that is required is an interest in jazz, a passion for learning, a strong work ethic, and an open mind.

Rationale

For music students to fully realize their potentials as performers, composers, educators, and/or scholars, it is highly important that they have a thorough understanding of music history. No musician exists in a historical vacuum. Whether they are consciously aware of it or not, all musicians operate within the confines of a specific time, place, and social context. Awareness and understanding of the contexts musicians operate within today is an essential step in a music student's development. Even the most knowledgeable and skilled musicians can benefit from a deeper exploration of the music that came before them.

Understanding jazz history is likewise important because all the jazz styles of today are fundamentally indebted to and influenced by the music of the past. In order to understand how jazz arrived at its current state of development, it is essential that students explore the history of the music. Knowledge of jazz history leads to deeper respect and appreciation for the musicians who labored in the past in order to pave the way for today's music. Also, formally studying jazz history will likely expose students to a wide variety of music they would otherwise never have experienced. Exposure to unfamiliar jazz styles can provide a lifetime of inspiration, insights, and enriching musical experiences for music students. Studying jazz history also provides students with a broader cache of musical ideas to draw upon while composing, improvising, and teaching. The study of jazz history is also important because of jazz's status as one of America's unique and indigenous art forms. Teaching and learning jazz history raises awareness of this fact and is an important component in the process of historical preservation.

Student Learning Objectives and Course Outcomes

Upon successful completion of all required applied lessons, students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the major style periods, performers, composers, events, and trends that characterize the historical development of jazz music in the United States of America
2. Identify and discuss the defining musical elements that differentiate the various genres, styles, composers, performers, and historical eras of jazz
3. Listen to jazz recordings critically and analytically in order to identify the historical style period(s) they exemplify
4. Justify their classification of the historical style of jazz performances and recordings by referencing specific characteristics within the music
5. Verbally discuss and write about jazz in a manner appropriate for the academic environment while using evidence and technology to support their claims
6. Correctly utilize relevant and appropriate musical vocabulary while discussing jazz
7. Develop a deeper understanding of and appreciation for a wide variety of jazz styles which they may or may not already be familiar with
8. Feel inspired, motivated, and encouraged to continue to seek out, listen to, study, and appreciate new styles of jazz and other music for the duration of their lives

Learning Objectives for Core Curriculum Requirements

This course satisfies the following core curriculum requirements set by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB):

- **Critical Thinking Skills:** Studying jazz history requires the development of critical thinking skills. Students will be challenged to think critically about the various socio-cultural factors that influenced the historical trajectory of jazz as musical style. Students will be required to listen to music critically and to analyze its form and content in order to make reasoned arguments about its historical origins and influences.
- **Communication Skills:** Students will be required to communicate their evolving understanding of jazz history both verbally and in written form.
- **Teamwork:** Students will be required to present on a jazz history topic during the course of the semester in which they will conduct research in small groups. This task requires and helps develop teamwork skills.
- **Personal Responsibility:** The individual studying and listening required to develop a firm grasp of jazz history necessitates self-discipline, time-management skills, personal responsibility, self-awareness, patience, goal-setting, and personal accountability.

Overview of Assignments

Assignments will consist of:

1. Five reading and listening quizzes, 10-15 minutes in length
2. A written midterm examination (including listening identification)
3. A written final examination (including listening identification)
4. A 5-page minimum written assignment and accompanying in-class presentation
5. Weekly reading/listening assignments, and other miscellaneous assignments

Written Assignment and Presentation Details

Write a 5-page minimum scholarly research paper using proper formatting, citations, tone, and terminology. I prefer Chicago style for formatting, but you may also use APA or MLA if you are more comfortable with these styles. Your paper must use a minimum of three sources, at least one of which must be a book or scholarly article in addition to the textbook for the course. Be sure to give detailed citations for any albums you reference as well.

Please refer to this website for assistance with formatting your final papers:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/resources.html.

Then give an 8-minute in-class presentation on the topic of your paper utilizing multimedia. Be sure to discuss musical style and content as well as the social and historical contexts surrounding the artist and his or her music. A sample of the third type of research paper is included at the end of this syllabus.

There are three choices for the overall topic of the paper and presentation:

- 1. Compare and Contrast:** Pick two different albums or artists and write an essay that discusses the differences and similarities between the two, using the correct musical terms appropriately. Be sure to discuss why you selected the artists and albums you chose to juxtapose.
- 2. Evolution Over a Career:** Pick one artist and talk about his or her evolution over the course of his or her lifetime and career. Did the artist evolve or change very much? If so, how?
- 3. Neglected Jazz Master:** Pick an artist that is not covered in this course or that is merely mentioned and not discussed in depth. Give a brief account of his or her musical style, career, and artistic achievements. Provide an argument for why the artist deserves attention, appreciation, and study.

Note: For all research papers, please be sure to get written approval of your topic via email before beginning your research.

Grading Policies

UTRGV's grading policy is to use straight letter grades (A, B, C, D, or F). It is expected that the student will arrive to each lesson with reading and listening assignments completed.

| Relative Weight of Assignments: | Percent of Final Grade: | Points: | Grading Scale: |
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| Quizzes: | 20% | 40 points | 180-200 = A |
| Midterm Exam: | 25% | 50 points | 160-179 = B |
| Final Exam: | 25% | 50 points | 140-159 = C |
| Written Assignment/Presentation: | 25% | 50 points | 120-140 = D |
| Participation/Miscellaneous: | 5% | 10 points | 000-140 = F |
| Totals: | 100% | 200 Points | |

Calendar of Activities

The UTRGV academic calendar can be found at <http://my.utrgv.edu> at the bottom of the screen, prior to login. Important dates for this semester include:

- January 10** Last day to withdraw (drop all classes) and receive a 100% refund
- January 13** Classes Begin
- January 16** Last day to add or register for Spring classes
- January 17** Last day to withdraw (drop all classes) and receive an 80% refund
- January 20** Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday. No classes.
- January 27** Last day to withdraw (drop all classes) and receive a 70% refund
- January 29** Census Day (last day to drop without it appearing on the transcript)
- February 3** Last day to withdraw (drop all classes) and receive a 50% refund
- February 10** Dr. B's Birthday! Last day to withdraw (drop all Spring classes) and receive a 25% refund
- March 9-14** Spring Break. No classes.
- April 9** Last day to drop a class (grade of DR) or withdraw (grade of W)

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| April 10–11 | Easter Holiday. No classes. |
| April 30 | Study Day. No classes. |
| May 1–7 | Final Exams (schedule is posted at my.utrgv.edu) |

—UTRGV Policy Statements—

ATTENDANCE:

Students are expected to attend all scheduled class meetings and may be dropped from the course for excessive absences. Students will be allowed two absences during the semester. More than two absence swill affect the final grade. Students are responsible for all course material missed due to absences, excused or otherwise. Students should use their classmates as a resource to learn what was missed during absences. In the case of an emergency, please contact the instructor. UTRGV’s attendance policy excuses students from attending class if they are participating in officially sponsored university activities, such as athletics; for observance of religious holy days; or for military service. Students should contact the instructor in advance of the excused absence to arrange make-up assignments. In order to truly learn, earn a good grade, and benefit from this course, regular, punctual attendance is absolutely essential and mandatory. Discussing and listening to music are the key activities and focal points of lessons. Students simply cannot effectively listen and learn if they do not attend classes regularly and punctually.

CLASSROOM DECORUM:

It is important to maintain respect for the subject material, the academic process, the instructor, the university, and all students at all times. Students are expected to conduct themselves in a mature manner in accordance with the *UTRGV School of Music Student Handbook*. Disrespectful or inappropriately argumentative behavior directed toward the instructor, guests, or other students is not acceptable and will not be tolerated.

FOOD AND DRINK POLICY:

Please avoid eating or drinking anything other than bottled water during class.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

Students with a documented disability (physical, psychological, learning, or other disability which affects academic performance) who would like to receive academic accommodations should contact **Student Accessibility Services (SAS)** as soon as possible to schedule an appointment to initiate services. Accommodations can be arranged through SAS at any time, but are not retroactive. Students who experience a broken bone, severe injury, or undergo surgery during the semester are eligible for temporary services.

Pregnancy, Pregnancy-related, and Parenting Accommodations

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination, which includes discrimination based on pregnancy, marital status, or parental status. Students seeking accommodations related to pregnancy, pregnancy-related condition, or parenting (reasonably immediate postpartum period) are encouraged to contact Student Accessibility Services for additional information and to request accommodations.

Student Accessibility Services:

Brownsville Campus: Student Accessibility Services is located in 1.107 in the Music and Learning Center building (BMSLC) and can be contacted by phone at (956) 882-7374 or via email at ability@utrgv.edu.

Edinburg Campus: Student Accessibility Services is located in 108 University Center (EUCTR) and can be contacted by phone at (956) 665-7005 or via email at ability@utrgv.edu.

MANDATORY COURSE EVALUATION PERIOD:

Students are required to complete an ONLINE evaluation of this course, accessed through your UTRGV account (<http://my.utrgv.edu>); you will be contacted through email with further instructions. Students who complete their evaluations will have priority access to their grades.

SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY:

As members of a community dedicated to Honesty, Integrity and Respect, students are reminded that those who engage in scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and expulsion from the University. Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, plagiarism (including self-plagiarism), and collusion; submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person; taking an examination for another person; any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student; or the attempt to commit such acts. Since scholastic dishonesty harms the individual, all students and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced (Board of Regents Rules and Regulations and UTRGV Academic Integrity Guidelines). All scholastic dishonesty incidents will be reported to Student Rights and Responsibilities.

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT and MANDATORY REPORTING:

In accordance with UT System regulations, your instructor is a “Responsible Employee” for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and so must report to the Office of Institutional Equity & Diversity (ois@utrgv.edu) any instance, occurring during a student’s time in college, of sexual misconduct, which includes sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, domestic violence, and sexual harassment, about which she/he becomes aware during this course through writing, discussion, or personal disclosure. More information can be found at www.utrgv.edu/equity, including confidential resources available on campus. The faculty and staff of UTRGV actively strive to provide a learning, working, and living environment that promotes personal integrity, civility, and mutual respect that is free from sexual misconduct, discrimination, and all forms of violence. If students, faculty, or staff would like confidential assistance, or have questions, they can contact OVAVP (Office for Victim Advocacy & Violence Prevention) at 665-8287, 882-8282, or OVAVP@utrgv.edu.

COURSE DROPS:

According to UTRGV policy, students may drop any class without penalty earning a grade of DR until the official drop date. Following that date, students must be assigned a letter grade and can no longer drop the class. Students considering dropping the class should be aware of the “3-peat rule” and the “6-drop” rule so they can recognize how dropped classes may affect their academic success. The 6-drop rule refers to Texas law that dictates that undergraduate students may not drop more than six courses during their undergraduate career. Courses dropped at other Texas public higher education institutions will count toward the six-course drop limit. The 3-peat rule refers to additional fees charged to students who take the same class for the third time.

STUDENT SERVICES:

Students who demonstrate financial need have a variety of options when it comes to paying for college costs, such as scholarships, grants, loans and work-study. Students should visit the Students Services Center (U Central) for additional information. U Central is located in BMAIN 1.100 (Brownsville) or ESSBL 1.145 (Edinburg) or can be reached by email (ucentral@utrgv.edu) or telephone: (888) 882-4026. In addition to financial aid, U Central can assist students with registration and admissions.

Students seeking academic help in their studies can use university resources in addition to an instructor’s office hours. University Resources include the Advising Center, Career Center, Counseling Center, Learning Center, and Writing Center. The centers provide services such as tutoring, writing help, critical thinking, study skills, degree planning, and student employment. Locations are:

| Center Name | Brownsville Campus | Edinburg Campus |
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| Advising Center AcademicAdvising@utrgv.edu | BMAIN 1.400 (956) 665-7120 | ESWKH 101 (956) 665-7120 |
| Career Center CareerCenter@utrgv.edu | BCRTZ 129 (956) 882-5627 | ESSBL 2.101 (956) 665-2243 |

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| Counseling Center Counseling@utrgv.edu | EUCTR 109 (956) 665-2574 | BSTUN 2.10 (956) 882-3897 |
| Learning Center LearningCenter@utrgv.edu | BMSLC 2.118 (956) 882-8208 | ELCTR 100 (956) 665-2585 |
| Writing Center WC@utrgv.edu | BUBLB 3.206 (956) 882-7065 | ESTAC 3.119 (956) 665-2538 |

ELECTRONIC DEVICES POLICY:

All electronic devices are to be turned completely off for the duration of each class meeting, unless they are being used directly for a task assigned by the instructor (e.g., a metronome, tuner, or lead-sheet viewed on a phone). This includes all cell phones, smart phones, tablets, laptop computers, gaming devices, and all other handheld personal electronic devices. Though sometimes useful, these items are incredibly distracting in the educational environment and they are inappropriate for the private lesson setting. Also, recent research suggests that students retain information better when they hand-write notes as opposed to typing them.

GENERAL OUTLINE OF COURSE TOPICS

Please note: Though some listening examples will be played in class, students will be responsible for familiarizing themselves with all listening assignments outside of class. Listening assignments will be announced in class.

Sequence 1: Introduction and Influences on Jazz

- Introduction lecture and discussion: What is Jazz? Why study Jazz?
- Broad overview of historical jazz style periods
- Early influences on jazz:
 - Blues: Robert Johnson, Bessie Smith, Charley Patton, Frank Stokes, Leadbelly, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Mamie Smith, Son House, W.C. Handy
 - Scott Joplin, James Reese Europe, and ragtime
 - African roots of jazz:
 - West African drumming, syncopation, polyrhythms, swing, blue notes, bent pitches: Prince Diabate, Neba Solo, Oumou Sangare, “Akbeqor”
 - Other early influences on jazz: brass and marching bands, spirituals, work songs, gospel, minstrel shows, popular songs, vaudeville, *fin de siècle* classical music

Sequence 2: Early Jazz in New Orleans and Chicago

- Louis Armstrong, King Oliver, Jelly Roll Morton
- Bix Beiderbecke and Frankie Trumbauer, Original Dixieland Jazz Band

Sequence 3: From New Orleans and Chicago to New York and Europe

- **Pianists:** Art Tatum, Fats Waller, James P. Johnson, Willie “The Lion” Smith, Art Tatum, Earl Hines, Errol Garner, Teddy Wilson, Mary Lou Williams
- Fletcher Henderson, Louis Armstrong, Sidney Bechet, Django Reinhardt
- Early Duke Ellington with Bubber Miley
- “Tin Pan Alley” Composers and “The Great American Songbook”
 - George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, Harold Arlen, Lorenz Hart, Jerome Kern, Cole Porter, Hoagy Carmichael, Johnny Mercer, Oscar Hammerstein II

Sequence 4: Swing Era

- **African-American Big Bands:** Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Chick Webb, Bennie Moten, Jimmie Lunceford, Benny Carter
- **White Big Bands:** Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Woody Herman, Paul Whiteman, Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, Gil Evans and Claude Thornhill

- **Swing soloists:** Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins, Roy Eldridge, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Frank Sinatra, Oscar Peterson, Nat King Cole

Sequence 5: Bebop

- **Transition to Bop:** John Kirby and His Onyx Club Boys
- Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell, Charlie Christian, Max Roach, Oscar Pettiford, J.J. Johnson, Dexter Gordon, Early Miles Davis

Sequence 6: Hard Bop, Modal, and Cool Jazz

- Miles Davis
 - Birth of the Cool and other collaborations with Gil Evans
 - First Quintet
 - Second Quintet
 - Kind of Blue
- Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, Horace Silver, Clifford Brown, Charles Mingus, John Coltrane, Wayne Shorter, Joe Henderson, Cannonball Adderley, Sonny Rollins, Freddie Hubbard, Bill Evans, Chet Baker and Gerry Mulligan, Lennie Tristano, Warne Marsh, Dave Brubeck, Paul Desmond, Lee Konitz, John Lewis, Lionel Hampton

Sequence 7: Revolution – Avant-Garde, Free Jazz, and Fusion

- **Avant-Garde and Free Jazz:** Ornette Coleman, Sun Ra, Cecil Taylor, Eric Dolphy, Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), Herbie Nichols
- **Fusion:** Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, Weather Report

Sequence 8: Jazz Today and Non-American Jazz

- Jan Garbarek and Hugh Masakela
- Keith Jarrett and ECM
- Wynton Marsalis and jazz preservation via Jazz At Lincoln Center
- David Binney, Chris Potter, Michael Brecker, Donny McCaslin, Brian Blade, John Zorn, Randy Brecker, Dave Douglas, Alex Sipiagin, Alan and Mark Ferber, Mark Giuliana, Kneebody, Snarky Puppy, Pat Metheny, Brad Mehldau, Maria Schneider, Darcy James Argue, Bill Frisell, Wayne Krantz, Craig Taborn, Claudia Quintet, Gretchen Parlato

Josiah Boornazian
Neglected Jazz Masters
Prof. Ray Gallon
November 13, 2011

Herbie Nichols: A Neglected Jazz Master

Throughout the relatively short but dense history of jazz music in the United States of America, there have been many performers and composers who, for various reasons, never received the sort of critical or popular recognition that they deserved. There are many reasons a jazz musician may be relegated to obscurity. Whether it is because of a lack of media attention, a lack of critical attention, a lack of documentation of the artist's music, a lack of financial means to promote or document the artist's music, the eccentricities of the artist that drive away potential admirers, the challenging nature of the artists music, or simply bad luck, sometimes great masters of the jazz idiom are overlooked by jazz scholars, historians, and jazz musicians. Herbie Nichols, unfortunately, is the epitome of a neglected jazz master. Relatively few jazz musicians listen to or discuss Herbie Nichols and his music today. Despite the fact that Nichols is slowly gaining some recognition from jazz musicians today, he is still largely overlooked compared to some of his contemporaries such as Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell, and Horace Silver. Very few jazz history books give him the recognition he deserves as one of most distinctive and innovative jazz pianists of the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Herbie Nichols qualifies as a neglected master of the jazz idiom, and he deserves more attention and appreciation because of his unique, highly-advanced, and innovative understanding and use of modern harmony, his impeccable and unique touch as a pianist, his immaculate and distinctive sense of rhythm and time, and his very individualistic approach to improvisation, composition, and accompanying.

Herbie Nichols was born in New York on December 3, 1919. He attended DeWitt Clinton High School and the City College of New York. Nichols studied classical piano with a

teacher who, interestingly enough, forbade him to play jazz from 1928–1935. His first professional work as a jazz musician came in 1937 when he performed with the Royal Baron Orchestra. In 1938 Nichols worked with Floyd “Horsecollar” Williams at Clark Monroe’s Uptown House. In 1939 he began to produce some of his first compositions. Nichols was drafted into the US Army in 1941 and he served in the Pacific theater during World War II. Upon his discharge and return to New York in the mid-1940s, Nichols performed with some relatively unknown jazz musicians and ensembles such as Walter Dennis, Ernie’s Three Ring Circus, Sahib Shihab, Herman Autry, Hal Singer, Freddie Moore, and Danny Barker. In 1946 Nichols began to play with more notable figures in the jazz world, such when he played in a swing band led by Illinois Jacquet that included J. J. Johnson, Leo Parker, and Shadow Wilson. Between the years of 1947 and 1950, Nichols worked with John Kirby, Maxine Sullivan, Snub Mosley, Bobby Mitchell, Charlie Singleton, and Frank Humphries. In 1951 Nichols worked with Lucky Thompson and Edgar Sampson, and that year he was also introduced to Mary Lou Williams by Thelonious Monk. Williams recorded some of Nichols’s compositions the following year. In 1952 Nichols was co-leader of a recording session for Savoy with Danny Barker, the double bass player Chocolate Williams, and Shadow Wilson. Nichols also recorded with Rex Stewart and his Dixielanders for Jazztone Records. From 1952 to 1955 Nichols worked with Barker, Sonny Stitt, Arnett Cobb, and Wilbur de Paris. Nichols’s last recording as a sideman was with Joe Thomas, with whom he had worked since the early 1950s, in 1958. In the last years of his life, Nichols played regularly in Greenwich Village with Dixieland revivalist groups such as the group led by the drummer Al Bandini (whom some considered to be obscure and inept).

Alfred Lion signed Herbie Nichols to Blue Note Records in 1955. Lion considered Nichols to be one of his most important discoveries. Nichols documented his compositions

during his brief stay with Blue Note and during recording sessions with the Bethlehem record label in 1957. In the liner notes to *The Herbie Nichols Trio* (Blue Note Records 1519, 1956) Nichols listed his influences as: West Indian folk music, calypso, Jelly Roll Morton, Beethoven, Bach, Chopin, Villa-Lobos, Duke Ellington, Art Tatum, Dimitri Mitropoulos, Bartók, Stravinsky, Hindemith, Shostakovich, and Walter Piston. He died of leukemia at the age of forty-four on April 12, 1963. Nichols's composition "Lady Sings the Blues" is considered to be a jazz standard and it is, as of this writing, the one composition of his that became part of the standard jazz repertoire, despite his having composed approximately 170 compositions. Only 80 his compositions survived the fire in his father's apartment in New York where they were stored after Nichols's death. Nichols died in almost utter obscurity, and he only released four albums featuring his original compositions during his lifetime. He never made very much money from his own compositions either; Nichols spent most of his career as a sideman working in the Dixieland genre.

Herbie Nichols was set apart from the majority of his peers, along with other jazz luminaries Monk and Powell, for his deep understanding and innovative use of harmony. Nichols has a very distinctive approach to harmony that contributes to his very unique musical personality. Nichols combines some conventional jazz piano voicings with both unconventional and conventional classical harmonies. For example, in the introduction to Nichols's composition "2300 Skiddoo," Nichols plays some interesting chords in the upper register. He combines very dark-sounding minor chords with altered dominant chords built on the note a half-step above the starting chord. His voicings are dense and colorful, and they are played over a bass pedal note which occasionally side steps up a half step. The introduction is full of tri-tone relationships both in his voicings and in the harmonic movement of the bass notes. On paper, this description might

sound similar to the harmonic devices that Monk and Powell often used, however the effect in reality is very different. Nichols sounds very little like either of those, and “2300 Skiddoo” is a quintessential example of Nichols’s unique use of harmony as a composer and improviser. His touch and exact voicings are also different from Monk and Powell. Nichols did not shy away from dissonant voicings, like Monk, particularly the use of tri-tones and half- and whole-step diads. The difference, however, is that Nichols was trained to play with a more orthodox piano technique than Monk.¹ Monk treated the piano more as a percussive instrument at times. Nichols was always very polished with a softer and more subtle touch, and he drew a very dark and warm sound out of the piano, in spite of his often jagged melodic lines, powerful rhythmic punctuations, and dissonant chords. He also often composed songs that have very chromatic chord structures and bass movements. Many of his compositions feature non-functional harmony or chord progressions with unexpected turns and/or unconventional resolutions. Many times his tunes will move through multiple key centers in a way that was not common in jazz from the mid-1950s. The “A” section to Nichols’s “Step Tempest” is an excellent example of this: the bass line starts as an ascending chromatic figure, then the chord progression leaps around blending both some standard ii-V7-I harmonic language and some non-functional progressions and resolutions.

Nichols played exposed open fifths and whole- and half-step dyads in the left hand, which was still a relatively unused approach at that time. He also takes advantage of the full range of the piano, sometimes voicing his chords in the middle or upper register of the piano, as

¹ “Thelonious Monk is an oddity among piano players. This particular fellow is the author of the weirdest rhythmical melodies I’ve ever heard. They are great too. (don’t ever praise Monk too much or he’ll let you down). But I will say that I’d rather hear him play a “Boston” than any other pianist. His sense of fitness is uncanny. However, when Monk takes a solo, he seems to be partial to certain limited harmonies which prevent him from taking a place beside Art [Tatum] and Teddy [Wilson]. He seems to be in a vise as far as that goes and never shows any signs of being able to extricate himself.” Herbie Nichols, “Jazz Milieu,” *The Music Dial*, August 1944, Vol. 2, No. 2, P. 24.

in his arrangement of the standard “All The Way,” other times playing chords in the very low, muddy range of the piano, as in the introduction to his tune “Cro-Magnon Nights.” He also used cluster voicings, and very colorful altered chords, building on the bebop tradition. In the “A” section of “2300 Skiddoo,” the majority of the emphasis in his left hand is on very low open fifth sounds, as he outlines the interesting and abnormal root movement. Even though the root movement of the “A” section can all be analyzed from the vantage point of a minor tonality, Nichols obscures this by using some non-conventional resolutions. The open fifths also create the illusion that Nichols is straying from the tonality because he jumps from the root to the minor third to the natural seventh, which creates the illusion of a significant tonal shift because the fifth above the natural seventh is not a note that exists in a normal minor scale, even though it is essentially conceived out of the melodic minor scale. The open fifths in Nichols’s left hand create such a dark and powerful foundation to frame his quirky, groovy melody and they allow him to have the freedom to jump around and create a really fascinating balance between tonality and dissonant chromaticism.

The melody of “2300 Skiddoo” is also brilliant in its simplicity, its blending of various influences, and its subtle use of color. The melody has a blues-tinged minor-pentatonic character that reveals the influence of blues, African music, and traditional jazz on Nichols’s composing, yet the melody is simultaneously strangely reminiscent of melodies in minor tonalities that are typically associated with European classical music. The “A” is dark, haunting, and mysterious, yet rhythmically the melody has a bit of a bounce to it. The melody by itself is triadic and stays essentially in one tonal center, but when coupled with Nichols’s brilliantly creative bass line which hints at shifting tonalities, the mood and effect of the melody completely changes. The “A” section is a stark contrast to the bridge, which features a melody that is more reminiscent of

bebop vocabulary. The melody during the bridge sequences in a way that gives the listener the illusion of a certain amount of predictability, which Nichols immediately destroys with the surprising, dissonant flourish that he ends the bridge with. The last phrase of the bridge sounds like something Art Tatum might play, except that it is slightly choppy rhythmically and melodically, and it has a very dark, altered-dominant sound. Another song Nichols wrote that demonstrates his unique style is the tune “House Party Starting,” which features a muddy, dark sounding left hand accompaniment to a melody that has chromatic features and colorful harmonic implications yet is simultaneously bluesy and evocative of older styles of jazz.

Herbie Nichols said it was important for him to highlight the drums in his music, because he felt that drums were an important instrument in jazz music, and he felt that the drums were being relegated to the sidelines too often in the music being composed and performed by many of his contemporaries. So in order to feature the instrument that he considered to be the originator of jazz, Nichols very often incorporated drum fills and trading with the drums in interesting ways in his compositions. On all of his recordings for Blue Note, Nichols has either Art Blakey or Max Roach on drums, and he features these masters of the drums heavily through brief musical snapshots as well as extended solos that are built in to his compositions. Dannie Richmond is the drummer on Nichols’s *Love, Gloom, Cash, Love*, his only album not recorded for Blue Note (it was released under the Bethlehem label). Nichols’s drummers also do an excellent job of highlighting the brilliant rhythmic intricacies of Nichols’s compositions. As a matter of fact, one might say that one of Nichols’s trademarks as a composer is his tendency to start tunes with a brief, very rhythmically interesting introduction which in some way incorporates trading with the drummer, rhythmic “call and response,” or a drum fill. It is really remarkable how often Nichols incorporates drums fills, call and response or trading with the

drums in the introductions of his tunes: examples of this include Nichols's compositions "Step Tempest," "2300 Skiddoo," "The Third World," "Dance Line," "Blue Chopsticks," "Cromagnon Nights," "It Didn't Happen," "Amoeba's Dance," "Shuffle Montgomery," "Crisp Day," "The Gig," "Applejackin'," "Hangover Triangle," "Chit Chatting," "House Party Starting," "Furthermore," "117th Street," "Nick At T's," "Terpischore," "Orse At Safari," "Wildflower," "Trio," "The Spinning Song," "Riff Primitif," "Query," "Every Cloud," "Argumentative," "Portrait of Ucha," and "Beyond Recall." This shows an incredible penchant for incorporating trading with drums or drum fills in his introductions: twenty-nine of his recorded compositions feature the drums in the introduction. This is a very large percentage of his compositions, considering he only wrote approximately 170 compositions (as compared to the over 1,000 that Duke Ellington penned), only roughly eighty of which survived the flood that damaged Nichols's father's apartment after Nichols's death, and furthermore only thirty-nine of which were actually recorded by Nichols.

In addition, Nichols often has the drummer play specific rhythmic hits with himself and the bassist. This creates a wonderful effect as it creates the illusion that time stops or is suspended, and it provides a contrast for the times when the drummer is playing straight "time." "Blue Chopsticks" is an excellent example of Nichols's creative and unique way of incorporating the drummer into his trio. Firstly, the tune starts with only Nichols and the bassist playing a phrase which is like a "call" in a "call and response" phrase, which is then answered by the drummer in a way that is evocative of the sound of banging wooden chopsticks together or on a plate. The "A" section of "Blue Chopsticks" can be viewed as another phrase of musical call and response: the first four bars are played in a sort of rhythmically broken stop-time manner, with the drums playing only accented rhythms that double the melody, then for the second four

measures of the “A” section, the drum switches to a “four-four” swing feel where he is strictly playing “time.” Another composition of Nichols’s that features a very interesting and unclassifiable drum groove in the introduction is “Sunday Stroll,” which has a triplet-feel that is essentially a blending of a shuffle and a west-African six-eight feel. Nichols makes liberal use of stop-time figures and drum breaks as a built-in feature of his compositions to create musical variety, excitement, and to give his music structure and direction.

Nichols’s “Brass Rings” features a very dissonant and fascinating introduction which has some musical elements that were still relatively unused if not downright innovative at the time, namely the use of a straight-eighth drum beat coupled with an ostinato bass line. This introduction is almost reminiscent of something Ahmad Jamal might play, particularly considering Nichols’s use of space, but the contrast of the sometimes dissonant chords with their very consonant, triadic-like resolutions, and the nearly unclassifiable rhythmic feel created by the drum beat and bass line make this tune undeniably unique, and the aesthetic clearly belongs to Herbie Nichols. In many ways, this groove is typical of Nichols: it shows his diverse influences and makes his music impossible to classify.

Nichols’s approach to improvisation is very unique. He was a virtuoso- the speed at which he plays his lines is incredible. He also plays flourishes and very angular melodies, often leaping all over the piano’s keyboard with speed, accuracy, and beautiful touch. He mixes bebop- or post-bebop-sounding melodic lines with classical sounding flourishes. He also contrasts his use of melody with an excellent sense of space, and he also plays jagged rhythmic phrases to compliment his melodies. There is a lot of variety and space in his playing- the listener can at once hear all of his various musical influences and yet Nichols possesses an utterly unique musical identity. An excellent example of all of these elements of Nichols’s playing is his

solo over his composition “Chit Chatting.” On “Chit Chatting,” an up-tempo tune, Nichols seems to float over the time in a dreamy, stream of consciousness way at some points and at other points he plays strong rhythmic cadences, often implying other time-feels or meters. He uses short, broken-up phrases, slightly longer bebop sounding phrases, and very angular melodies with large, sometimes dissonant leaps in addition to repeated notes, punctuated chords, and melodies that reference more traditional styles of jazz.

Nichols also helped create his own strong musical identity through his use of odd phrases and rhythmic groupings as a soloist and a composer. His forms have odd phrases and intros and outros. For example “The Gig” has a nine-bar “A” section. Nichols’s “Applejackin’” has a twelve-bar introduction followed by a four-measure phrase that is very clearly phrased as a bar of 2/4 followed by three bars of 4/4 followed by another bar of 2/4. His music is full of these odd phrases. “Terpischore” is a fascinating tune and an example of Nichols’s creative use of musical form: it has a ten-bar introduction, followed by an ABBA song form. The “A” section starts with strong rhythmic groupings of three quarter-notes superimposed over the 4/4 time signature to give the illusion of a temporary meter shift, but it actually is still an eight bar phrase in 4/4 time. The “B” section switches from a swing feel to a quasi-latin feel, to a straight-eighth feel then back to swing. During the last “A” section, measure eight of the phrase is elongated into a 6/4 bar which is followed by a four bar phrase during which the ensemble switches to a half-time feel. This level of rhythmic, formal, and phraseological complexity and intricacy was almost unheard of at the time. Only Horace Silver and perhaps a few others were composing with such unique, creative, and challenging phrases and song forms during that period in jazz history.

Nichols also combined old compositional devices with new ones, in addition to occasionally completely breaking with tradition. Even when Nichols does stick more or less to a

traditional AABA song form with eight measures per section, he sometimes chops up the sections in unorthodox ways. For example, Nichols's song "Orse at Safari" is a thirty-two bar song in AABA form with an eight measure introduction and a two-bar interlude but the "A" section of the song is phrased as a six-bar phrase followed by a two-bar phrase rather than two four-bar phrases or one single eight-bar phrase. Nichols is sometimes very subtle in his tweaking of the traditional AABA form. Upon first listening to his composition "Step Tempest," it is easy to think the form is the standard thirty-two measure AABA format with an eight bar introduction- but in reality the song has a seven measure introduction (if thought of in 4/4 time- it could also be analyzed as an eight measure phrase where the first four bars are in 3/4 time and the last 4 bars are in 4/4 time) and the last "A" section is cut short (it is a six bar phrase) and is followed by an eight measure interlude. Another example of a relatively simple change Nichols did to the traditional thirty-two bar song form is his composition "Dance Line" which features an eight measure introduction, a sixteen-bar bridge, and a four measure addition to the last "A" section.

He combines traditional swing, folk, and blues melodic vocabulary with some bebop vocabulary and with interesting and unconventional harmonies. Nichols's composition "Sunday Stroll" is an example of this brilliant blending of older, standard vocabulary with newer, more dissonant approaches to composition and improvisation. The tune starts off with a shuffle feel which implies older styles of jazz, or perhaps the Kansas City blues tradition, yet somehow the feel of the introduction also implies the 6/8 feel that is prevalent in west African music. The "A" section features a melody that starts off sounding like something from the bebop era with its chromaticism and colorful harmony, but it suddenly shifts to a contrasting phrase that sounds very soulful and bluesy. Nichols's music is full of these delightful contrasts and he manages to

incorporate all of his disparate musical influences into his unique style of composing and playing.

Herbie Nichols is clearly someone who deserves more attention as a pianist, an improviser and a composer. His style of music is utterly unique and he was a true virtuoso. Even the odd, clever, and distinctive titles of his compositions, many of which are listed above, are testament to his singularity as an artist. Every single one of his compositions and his solos bears his unique stamp as an artist and they all challenge and stretch the limits of what jazz can be while simultaneously integrating much of jazz's own history and outside influences as well. Nichols is a neglected jazz master, and well worth listening to, transcribing, appreciating, and discussing.

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