VOLUME !

Volume !

La revue des musiques populaires

13 : 2 | 2017

Inna Jamaican Stylee

Jazz in Jamaica, at Home and Abroad

Le jazz jamaïcain, sur l'île et à l'étranger

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/volume/5313>

DOI: 10.4000/volume.5313

ISSN: 1950-568X

Translation(s):

Le jazz jamaïcain, sur l'île et à l'étranger - URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/volume/5276> [fr]

Publisher

Association Mélanie Seteun

Printed version

Date of publication: 21 April 2017

ISBN: 978-2-913169-42-5

ISSN: 1634-5495

Electronic reference

Herbie Miller and Roberto Moore, "Jazz in Jamaica, at Home and Abroad", *Volume !* [Online], 13 : 2 | 2017, Online since 21 April 2017, connection on 24 August 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/volume/5313> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/volume.5313>

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Jazz Jamaica at Home and Abroad

by

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Abstract: Jazz is not the first genre to come to mind when one thinks of Jamaican music. However, already quite lively in the 1920s, jazz gathered a limited but brilliant group of musicians, especially after the war. These Jamaican jazzmen, such as Ernest Ranglin, Monty Alexander or Douglas Ewart, will play their role in the first steps of their island's music, and will bring their irreducible Jamaican feeling to the sounds and evolutions of jazz, in the United Kingdom or in the United States. This essay recounts the story of jazz in Jamaica, as well as the careers of its most famous figures.

Keywords: *circulation – musicians – diaspora – jazz – acculturation – Jamaica*

Résumé : Le jazz n'est pas le genre musical le plus immédiatement associé à la Jamaïque. Pourtant, vivace dès les années 1920, il réunit un groupe – limité mais brillant – d'instrumentistes jamaïcains, notamment dans l'après-guerre. Ces jazzmen jamaïcains, tels Ernest Ranglin, Monty Alexander ou Douglas Ewart, participeront aux premiers pas de la musique de l'île, et apporteront une touche irréductiblement jamaïcaine aux sonorités et aux évolutions du jazz, que ce soit au Royaume-Uni ou aux États-Unis. Cet article se propose de retracer l'histoire du jazz en Jamaïque, et les trajectoires de ses plus illustres représentants.

Mots-clefs : *circulation – musiciens – diaspora – jazz – acculturation – Jamaïque*

Alpha Boys School: Jazz in the midst of colonial inculcation and education

Of all its creative and cultural aesthetics, music is perhaps Jamaica's most dynamic cultural contribution to the world. This has been so since the old plantation days of slavery and colonialism when music played an important role in reconstructing and maintaining an identity for many Jamaicans of African descent.¹

Among the enduring institutions signifying Jamaica's colonial past is the Alpha Cottage School, which opened in 1880 when Justina Ripoll (Sister Mary Claver) of the Roman Catholic Order of the Sisters of Mercy established an industrial school for orphaned, neglected, and errant boys. By 1893, a drum and fife corps was established, which became the foundation to the school's emphasis on music. With instruments received in 1908 from the Roman Catholic Bishop of Jamaica, Alpha's legendary music programme took root and flourished. In the ensuing years, the school earned the distinction of being the single most important entity responsible for producing trained musicians, especially horn players. It seems nine out of ten of Jamaica's most outstanding musicians, especially horn players, between the late XIXth century and the 1970s were trained at Alpha Boys School.²

During her sixty plus years at Alpha, one nun in particular, Sister Mary "Iggy" Ignatius (1921-2003), affectionately referred to as "the Mother of Jamaican Music," provided strict but, by all accounts, loving motherly guidance and encouragement to her boys, the majority of whom came

from either broken homes, parents who were peasants, poor, unemployed, and at best working class. The story goes that Sister Iggy's ears were acutely attuned to music and she was directly responsible for the development of some of Jamaica's most talented musicians, having introduced them to instruments on which each individual was most suitable.³ Sister Ignatius is credited with discovering many of Jamaica's leading instrumentalists from among the school's most gifted boys and cultivating in them skills and deportment that would take them from that noble institution in Kingston to the world.

Acquiring the necessary skillfulness and demeanor began with performances at local state and national events including private affairs at affluent homes. According to Sparrow Martin (2007), bandmaster and former Alpha student, in addition to palatial homes of the white and wealthy browns, Alpha boys band also played official functions at King's House, the residence of the Governor General.

We were thought all kinds of songs for different events. At occasions when foreign dignitaries and royalty visited the island we played songs for dancing, dining and even when dignitaries entered the room. At those times tunes such as "Happy Wonderer," "The Morin," and "Colonial Boogie" would be played.

Concurring, Rico Rodriguez, the celebrated Rastafarian trombonist, recalled (2005):

Jamaican and Caribbean folk airs, European classical music, popular American and traditional British show tunes, were encouraged, but rag, blues and jazz were frowned on. But later on sister Ignatius would allow some of the better musicians like Donald (Drummond) to go on gigs with bands like Eric Deans.

The formative Years: Jazz Joints and Musicians

Though never attracting a major following, jazz in Jamaica had a loyal audience. In the mid 1920s, Jamaica's chief newspaper, *The Gleaner*, began splashing the word jazz across its pages, in advertisements for dances, concerts, and, for the latest jazz records. These public announcements capitalized on the growing interest in this emerging American music. However, as in the land of its origin, jazz had local detractors too—especially among the elite, but not solely, who only acknowledged classical music.

Hot jazz, as it was often called, fused elements of ragtime, West African rhythms, brass band marches, spiritual music, work songs, the blues and French quadrilles. Some aspects of this emerging art-form were already familiar to most Jamaicans. Spiritual songs were widespread, and ragtime had been a feature for dance pianists since the 1900s, while for most musicians, experiences in brass came chiefly from the Salvation Army band, and the brass sections of the West India Regiment or Alpha Cottage bands.

Two prominent dance orchestras of the period to incorporate jazz in their repertoire were the Ramblers orchestra and the Pep Entertainment Players. Made up of white members, both these sextets were popular among the city's affluent, with the exclusive Bournemouth Club in East Kingston being central to their fame.⁴

Two other orchestras from this period were the *Deluxe Syncopators* and the *Hot Strutters*. Cyril

Harris, a veteran pianist who on occasions visited the jazz hotbed of New York to keep abreast of current trends, led the latter. In addition to introducing the latest jazz to the public, Harris also tutored on the various aspects of playing authentic modern jazz. In addition to playing at central Kingston's Murcott Lodge, the Conversorium and Lucas sports club in Rollington Town were regular venues for the Hot Strutters. Leader of the Syncopators was Adrian Duncan, a classically trained pianist, and one of the earliest purveyors of jazz, having formed his first group in 1922. A racially mixed band of "Negro" and "mulatto" players, the Syncopators frequently played at the high society Constant Spring Hotel in upper St Andrew, also the Conversorium, among other society venues.⁵

The growing appeal of jazz encouraged the formation of more dance orchestras in the 1930s. One of the decade's towering figures of the local jazz movement was saxophonist Albert "Bertie" King, who formed his famous Rhythm Aces band in 1931, and ruled Kingston's dance and jazz scene for the next five years. Other well-known orchestras that emerged in this decade include: Redver Cooke's Red Devil's, John Weston and his Blue Rhythm orchestra; Steve Dick's, Milton McPherson's, and Dan Williams' Rhythm Raiders, among others.

By the late 1930s, local dance orchestras were playing swing, a new and more danceable form of American jazz, which became the staple music at local dances throughout the 1940s. Local swing aggregations were influenced entirely by their famed American counterparts, playing the

same written arrangements as they did. American orchestras that exerted considerable influence on local swing were those led by Tommy Dorsey, Glen Miller, Count Basie, and Duke Ellington, among others.

Leading the local charge in swing in the early 1940s were the orchestras of Milton McPherson and Redver Cooke, both formed in the early 1930s. McPherson directed what many believed to be the best swing dance band the island, boasting the cream of local musicians. His prowess in the new trend saw him often referred to as the “King of Swing,” and he played in all the major entertainment venues, including the Bournemouth, Slipper Silver, and Springfield clubs, as well as in the Carib Theatre. McPherson also initiated a one night all-star show entitled “Fashions in Music” at the Ward Theatre in 1943, a highly anticipated show that featured the latest in big band jazz. Cooke, often called the “King of Bounce,” was equally popular, especially among the masses, also led his Red Devil’s Orchestra at major entertainment joints across the island.

Another stimulating factor in the public’s interest in jazz and swing was the staging of a few band competitions, which dates to the 1920s. *The Gleaner* shows the Palace Orchestra, the resident band at the Palace Theatre, taking on the visiting Hot Tamale orchestra from Panama in a friendly battle in 1926. In 1935 and 1936, Bertie King’s Rhythm Aces were crowned all-island dance band champions. Steve Dick, a jazz pianist and bandleader of repute, outplayed trumpeter Doc Bramwell and his Springfield Specials

in the finals of a knock-out competition at the Palace Theatre in 1939. With that victory, Dick’s orchestra was often referred to as “Jamaica’s Kings of Jazz,” or he as the “Swing King.” These encounters continued in the 1940s, with Redver Cooke and Eric Deans being victors on a few occasions. Jam sessions were important too, as they helped to keep musicians sharp, as well as to hear what other musicians were playing.

As swing raged on through the 1940s, a new breed of bandleaders came to the fore. Now adding to Kingston’s vibrant dance scene were Eric Deans and his Liberators, Delroy Stephens and his Commandos, Rupert Miller’s Lennox Syncopators, George Moxey, and Roy White, to name but a few. However, by the late 1940s, and although still being played, swing was in decline, as jazz had reached another stage of evolution: bebop had arrived in Jamaica.

Alto-saxophonist Roy Coburn and his Blue Flames orchestra, and trumpeter Jack Brown and his orchestra, were two major bandleaders of the day who performed bebop. Other musicians such as trumpeter Con Lewis and tenor-saxophonist Marcus Brown were also displaying boppish touches in various aggregations. By 1948, with more zest, trumpeter Sonny Bradshaw and his Beboppers embraced the new trend. Bradshaw and company’s enthusiasm not only reflected the musical aspects of bebop, but also the sartorial and linguistic characteristics associated with it. Beboppers brought their brand of jazz to venues such as the Wickie Wackie Club in Bull Bay, the Success Club on Wildman Street, and in shows at popular theatres.

Visits by foreign swing and jazz bands such as the Hot Tamale orchestra in 1926, had increased the public's awareness of jazz, and generated excitement. However, based on accounts, it was appearances by two other visiting Panamanian bands in 1937 that drew the most attention. These were "Gussie Trym and his Swing Aces," an eleven-piece aggregation that arrived in May, and a nine-piece group led by Ray Cox in August. Described as Panama's champion dance band, Trym and company were well versed in jazz and swing, and local musicians took note. Trym drew large attendances at the Silver Slipper club, the Bournemouth club, and Murcott Lodge, and other prominent night spots, appearing alongside local swing masters such as Cooke's Red Devils and Bob White and his Garden Harmonizers. Cox's thirty-day tour took him to various venues around the city; however, it was his participation in the International Jazz Orchestra competition at the Ward Theatre that earned him local jazz immortality. The three band competition saw Cox going up against Bob White and his orchestra, and Milton McPherson and his Royal Jamaicans. By accounts, Cox was judged to have won easily, with McPherson in second. These visits helped to widen the appeal of jazz locally.

Many of Jamaica's finest musicians served their formative years in these bands of the 1940s, sharpening their talent and building formidable reputations on the local scene. The fine-tuning of their skills in these aggregations enabled some to make names for themselves on both sides of the Atlantic. Saxophonist Thomas McCook had his

first professional outing with Eric Deans in the early 1940s, with trumpeter Raymond Harper as a bandmate. For a few years in that decade too, tenor saxophonist Wilton Gaynair was a key member of Redver Cooke's Royal Jamaicans. Jazz guitarist Ernest Ranglin got his professional start with Val Bennet's orchestra in the late 1940s. In 1948, Roland Alphonso, then playing alto sax, was for a while with the Eric Deans band, while renowned jazz trumpeter Dizzy Reece's star began to shine in the band of Jack Brown.

Although swing waned in the 1950s, big band music was still the music of choice for dance bands, despite being frowned upon by some musicians who wanted to delve deeper into modern jazz. By the late 1950s, a third generation of musicians emerged, and mixed with a few from the second, unknowingly began what eventually led to a style of Jamaican dance music called ska. Ska would later influence alternative trends in international popular culture. This generation of musicians is among the many Jamaican jazz artists that established themselves internationally in popular music. Included among them are trumpeters Johnny "Dizzy" Moore; Oswald "Baba" Brooks and Raymond Harper, iconic trombonist Donald "Don" Drummond, saxophonists Roland Alphonso and Thomas McCook, and for a brief time as a teenager, enduring jazz pianist Monty Alexander. All straddled the borderlines of both jazz and pop music.

Jamaican jazz to the world: S.S Empire Windrush

As colonists of Britain, men from Jamaica, and indeed the West Indies, had served Britain during the First and Second World Wars. With Britain still recuperating from the second world war, the country's desperate call for a strong labor force to rebuild its industries became more apparent to West Indians in 1948, when English troopship the S.S. Empire Windrush offered enticingly cheap fares to England. Many unemployed Jamaicans jumped at the opportunity, viewing the Windrush as a vessel to unlimited employment opportunities. They left families behind, many reuniting later in Britain. This exodus accounted for the departure of some of the island's best instrumentalists as several musicians took advantage of the fairly easy migration process to England and settled permanently, some establishing residency in other countries across Europe, including France and Germany.

However, musicians had already begun a migratory trend from as early as the 1930s. Most prominent among them were trumpeters Leslie Thompson and Leslie "Jiver" Hutchinson, pianist Yorke DeSouza, multi reed player Bertie King, and engineering aspirant Coleridge Goode, who became a first rate bassist.

Between the wars, black British jazz musicians began making an impact in big bands, and at one point, in at least two all black swing orchestras: Guyanese Ken "Snakehips" Johnson and his West Indian Dance Band (1938), and Jamaican Leslie "Jiver" Hutchinson and his Coloured Orchestra

(1944). These were made up almost exclusively of West Indians, and it is out of that contingent that touring Black American musicians augmented their bands.

Some, such as saxophonists Benny Carter and Coleman Hawkins, while in Europe in the 1930s, employed alto saxophonist and clarinetist Bertie King and Yorke DeSouza for performances and recordings.⁶ King's compatriot, trumpeter Leslie Thompson, was employed by Louis Armstrong,⁷ while trumpeter Leslie "Jiver" Hutchinson, pianist Yorke DeSouza,⁸ and bassist Coleridge Goode were favored by Americans such as Ray Ellington and Mary Lou Williams, and the pair of Hot Club de France stars, Django Reinhardt and Stéphane Grappelli, all of whom found the Caribbean musicians swinging as much as they wished (Reinhardt, 2017).

These Jamaicans paved the way for other musicians, an exodus that intensified with the end of the war in 1945.

Horns from Alpha to the UK

Among those packing their bags was jazz trumpeter, Alphonso "Dizzy" Reece who was among the most notable to have migrated, which he did in 1948, gaining valuable playing experience in France, Belgium, Holland and Germany," before settling in Britain in 1950.

Dizzy Reece became one of Britain's finest trumpeters, performing and recording with touring American jazz musicians. Reece recorded several

albums of his own before deciding to take his chances in America in 1959, doing so for noted jazz label Blue Note. Reece has recorded with jazz giants such as Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, Hank Mobley and British tenor saxophonist Edward Brian "Tubby" Hayes. He appeared at leading clubs in New York such as The Village Vanguard, Birdland, and Eddie Condon's. Dizzy Reece had the distinction of introducing one of the most advanced musical thinkers to the London jazz scene before departing. That musician was his compatriot Joe Harriott, whose modernist ideas, cubist compositions and interdisciplinary performances with poets and modern dancers instigated controversy.

Alto saxophonist Joe Harriott spent his formative years in Kingston, honing his craft in the bands of Roy Coburn, Ossie DaCosta and the All Kings Combo, before traveling overseas with DaCosta and settling in Britain in 1951. Harriott was a Charlie Parker disciple before innovating an approach to the jazz form, which made him the irrefutable leader of the British avant-garde. His method attracted both criticism and earned him admiration as the father of European free jazz. Harriott's music inspired a generation of musicians and his working unit included fellow West Indians Ellsworth "Shake" Keene the Vincentian trumpeter and Jamaican bassist Coleridge Goode.

Another Alphanian giant of jazz was Tenor saxophonist Wilton Gaynair. While still at Alpha, Gaynair was allowed to play in Carlyle Henriques's big band. After Alpha he gained a seat in the Redver Cooke band, and later in the orchestras of Roy Coburn and Ozzie Wilkins. Inspired

by Coleman Hawkins, Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis, and Sonny Rollins, Gaynair developed a full-bodied tone. From the late 1940s until the time he migrated in the mid 1950s, Gaynair was considered the star tenor saxophonist on the island, a status that earned him an invitation into the Jamaica All-star band of 1948. Gaynair arrived in London in 1956, making a name for himself there before moving to Germany, where he became one of that country's outstanding jazz musicians. His 1958 recording "Blue Bogey" is unquestionably one of the true recording treasures of jazz. As indicated by fellow musicians such as Tommy McCook, Janet Enwright, Sonny Bradshaw and Roland Alphonso, Gaynair's impact on other musicians of the day was immense.

Arguably, Gaynair's biggest challenge atop the tenor sax mound was from fellow Alphanian Harold "Little G" McNair. McNair further exemplifies the Jamaican musician's deep appreciation, understanding and embodiment of the jazz vernacular. He was introduced to the tenor saxophone in 1945, and by the close of the decade, had been a member of swing bands such as Whylye Lopez and the Baba Motta led Honeydrippers. Subsequent groups led by Motta, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, also featured McNair, earning him wide local acclaim.

An exceptionally talented musician, McNair's instrument skill wasn't restricted to the tenor sax, as he was equally adept on the alto sax, the clarinet, and especially the flute—in addition he was also a fairly decent singer. His multi-instrumentalist prowess attracted overseas interest too, gaining employment in Nassau (Bahamas), London,

Europe, and New York. In the early 1960s, he worked and recorded in London with some of the finest jazz musicians in Britain, among which, Tony Crombie, Phil Seaman, Stan Tracey, and Terry Shannon. He also performed and recorded in London with American sax giant Zoot Simms at the famed Ronnie Scott jazz club. In Europe he toured with Quincy Jones and Kenny Clarke; while back in Britain he made what is considered his finest recording, *Affectionate Fink* (McNair, 1965), featuring Ornette Coleman's bassist David Izenzon and Charles Moffett the drummer, with the Englishman Alan Branscombe on piano. McNair was popular with the emerging rock pop musicians as well touring and recording with Donovan and Ginger Baker's Airforce. Recordings by McNair are among the most sought and revered in jazz, such as "Up in The Air" his first, "Harold McNair," "The Fence," and "Flute and Nut," but none more than "Affectionate Fink."

Ernest Ranglin

Guitarist Ernest Ranglin is considered by musicians and critics alike as one of the leading jazz voices on that instrument over the last half-century. His talent became obvious when as a youth he watched his uncles play guitar and copied their actions. Music on the radio attracted his attention and on hearing records of the remarkable jazz guitarist Charlie Christian, the young Ranglin's future as a guitarist was sealed.

While still a teenager in 1948, he joined the Val Bennett Orchestra gaining experience playing

local Coney islands and hotels. Within a couple of years the popular bandleader Eric Deans, with whose orchestra he traveled to Haiti and the Bahamas, hired Ranglin. These experiences provided opportunities to interact with fellow musicians, acquire skills in composing and arranging as well as expand his musical perception and concepts.

While fronting his own group in 1958, Ranglin's amazing musicianship was recognized by Chris Blackwell, who offered him his first opportunity to record. It was a first for both young men as the record, done with Bermudan pianist Lance Heyward, launched Blackwell's Island label and introduced Ranglin as a favorable recording artist, while fostering a lifelong friendship between them. In addition to jazz, Ranglin's performances of pop material signified his deft yet empathetic commercial presentations were just as remarkable as his jazz performances. By the early 1960s, he established himself as the guitarist of choice among producers who insisted on his inclusion on studio sessions of various kinds of popular music including mento, rhythm and blues and ska.

In addition to commercial success in England arranging the international hit "My Boy Lollipop" for vocalist Millie Small (1964)—again a Blackwell production—, Ranglin sat in at London's famous Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club to enthusiastic audience response. This led to an extended residency, gigs with Ronnie Scott's aggregations, brought him wider audience recognition and earned him number one guitarist in *Melody Maker's* 1964 Jazz poll.

Word of mouth spread by other jazz musicians including Les Paul, Sonny Stitt, Randy Weston, Sonny Rollins and Ronnie Scott, set the foundation for a career in jazz beyond Jamaica and Britain and leading to bookings in Europe, Japan and America. With such peer support and with a career lasting over sixty years, Ernest Ranglin has established a distinguished status as a jazz musician performing at clubs, festivals and concerts worldwide. He is also recognized as a musician whose vast cultural interests allow him to seamlessly integrate his style in every musical situation he has encountered. He is endowed with a rich, vivid imagination, fascinating melodic invention and dexterous lyricism, added to his fine jazz chops and individuality, that the admiration for Ernest Ranglin has been sustained over a virtual lifetime.

Monty Alexander

Pianist Monty Alexander has carved a niche for himself and remains quite a visible and viable jazz artist over the more than fifty years since he first made America his home. Of all the Jamaican jazz musicians, he consistently displays more Caribbean influence and swinging upbeat feeling and pulsation than others. Not that he doesn't swing within the bebop vernacular or play soul-searching blues in the tradition of the jazz vocabulary. But there is no getting around the lilt that betrays his strong Jamaican identity when experiencing one of his performances.

Born 1944 in Kingston, Monty gravitated to the piano when he was four years old. At around six, like so many other children, his parents sent him to music lessons. Upon entering high school Monty began recording with elders including bassist Cluet Johnson, guitarist Ernie Ranglin and Roland Alphonso the saxophonist at Federal Studio.

When his parents took him to a Louis Armstrong concert in Jamaica, as he recently told his audience in Kingston, his life was forever changed: he wanted to become a jazz musician. Nat Cole, Oscar Peterson and other visiting jazz luminaries inspired a deeper commitment to jazz. But popular music was still in his veins as he put together his first band, Monty and the Cyclones, playing clubs and even having the opportunity to record.

In 1961, Monty found work as a pianist in Miami, Florida, after his family moved there, in the process he caught the attention of Frank Sinatra and his friend Jilly Rizzo, a club owner who extended an invitation to play in New York. An offer proposing a prolonged stint in Las Vegas delayed accepting the proposal but a chance meeting, again with Sinatra and Rizzo, in Vegas provided an airline ticket and Alexander has lived in New York ever since.

Alexander's playing matured under the influence of Errol Garner, Oscar Peterson, Amad Jamal and Wynton Kelley and in demand pianist of Jamaican progeny. Attracting further attention from jazz grates Ray Brown, Harry "Sweets" Edison, Milt Jackson and others provided many opportunities that catapulted Alexander's career.

A good singer in the tradition of the master crooners, Monty has performed tributes to Nat King Cole in addition to singing popular standards. He also returned to his roots by putting a reggae band together, recording with reggae musicians Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare and forming the Harlem Kingston Express, by merging both his jazz and reggae aggregations. By adding the melodica as a vehicle to embrace the Jamaican dub tradition this Jamaican prodigy has come full circle.⁹

Discussing the concept of his musical with critic Tom Ineck, Monty explained (Ineck, 2016):

It's a flavor. It's a reality that is so infectious to regular people. I don't mean, necessarily, sophisticated people who are well read on the ins and outs of jazz as we love it, brought to us by the masters. This is comin' from a different source, altogether. It's somethin' that is about dancin' and feelin' good. People like to feel a rhythm, and when you apply a different approach, it is a happy marriage for the listener, and certainly for me playin' it, because even though it's different from gettin' on the bandstand with a straight ahead jazz musician, I find the value in it. To me, it's a whole world of culture. It's my life as a young Jamaican and keepin' in touch with what's come out of Jamaica.

Monty Alexander has recorded and performed with some of Jazz's biggest names including, Clark Terry, Ernestine Anderson, Benny Golson, Ray Brown and others.

Douglas Ewart

Jamaican Douglas Ewart is regarded as an important multi-instrumentalist with a vast variety of

instruments at his disposal, someone that inhabits an infinite world of cultural diversity. It has been suggested Ewart's creative *œuvre* "might be mistaken for the work of a small culture rather than one man."

According to jazz reviewer Glenn Siegel, Ewart "is a skilled improviser capable of shaping sound and telling stories in real time without a script." But this Jamaican reed master is much more than a musician. Siegel continues: He is an "historian and past president of Chicago's hugely influential AACM (Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians); a world-class sculptor, instrument maker, teacher, poet and musician. He is the embodiment of the multi-disciplinary imperative of the AACM" (Siegel, 2015).

Douglas Ewart was born in Kingston in 1946, and as a teenager he lived among Count Ossie's Rastafarians in Wareika hills, where he participated in Grounations. He was drawn to the music of the Skatalites and in particular Don Drummond and also immersed himself in creating art objects of all kinds. Ewart migrated to the United States in June of 1963, joined the AACM, studied saxophone and theory with Roscoe Mitchell and Joseph Jarman. Inspired by the creative force of the two reed masters and pianist Muhal Richard Abrams's creative conviction, he adopted the AACM's idea that "music was a life and death matter."

Back in Jamaica, Ewart was as interested in music as he was in social movements. At Count Ossie's camp, the Grounation sessions he experienced instilled in him aspects of Rastafarian

philosophical and musical culture, which later influenced some AACM members, particularly of the second generation.

Given the AACM's broad based multidisciplinary concepts, it was not strange that some of its members liberally absorbed characteristics associated with Jamaican Rastafarians. These features include embracing the "dread locks" hairstyle and Nyahbinghi music, which were introduced to popular culture by touring reggae musicians.

Ewart's *Velvet Drum Meditations*, a recording by his Nyahbinghi Drum Choir, includes some second generation AACM members, and is dedicated to his early mentor "Oswald 'Count Ossie' Williams and Mystic Revelation of Rastafari." Writing about his contribution to the AACM, Ewart's close friend and musical collaborator, the trombonist, improviser, and technologist, George Lewis, asserts: "Douglas Ewart is undoubtedly a critically pivotal figure in this second wave." (2009 : 277)

As a critically acclaimed improviser with a career in excess of fifty years, Ewart has performed in every conceivable musical context—ska, Rastafari niahbinghi, dixieland, modern, bebop, experimental, avant-garde; with dancers, poets, painters, and street peoples; with film and theatre, and from solo recitals to leading extra large orchestras, performing and creating with children and more—it's almost impossible to think of anything this diverse thinker and multi-instrumentalist has not done in the name of jazz improvisation.

Coda

Jamaican jazz musicians at home and abroad have contributed to this new world genre as much conviction, creative energy and influence as any other. Jazz masters such as Bertie King, Leslie "Jiver" Hutchinson, Coleridge Goode, Winton "Bra" Gaynair, Harold "Little G." McNair, Dizzy Reece, Sonny Gray, Monty Alexander, Douglas Ewart, Kenny Terroade, Ernest Ranglin, Monty Alexander and particularly Joe Harriott have distinguished themselves among jazz's most established innovators. Many of these musicians performed and recorded with Americans like Louis Armstrong, Modern Jazz Quartet, Mary Lou Williams, Benny Carter, Coleman Hawkins, Quincy Jones, Eric Dolphy, Randy Weston and Miles Davis.

As early as 1926 Louis Armstrong's "King of the Zulu" invoked the Jamaican presence in jazz. As Armstrong protests the interruption of his solo by an interloper, the intruder replies in an island accent (Armstrong, 1926):

I come from Jamaica and a don't mean to interrupt the party but one of me country man tell me there is a chitin rag going on here. Madam, fix me one of those things you call chitin but I call in a tube and I will play you one of my native jazz tunes.

Among others, Armstrong's contemporary, the composer and pianist Thomas "Fats" Waller and his Jamaica Jammers, also acknowledged Jamaica's contribution to jazz with the recording of "West Indian Blues" in 1924 as a tribute to Marcus Garvey (Waller, 1992).¹⁰ As well, modernists like the late Lester Bowie and ace session guitarist Eric Gayle lived in Jamaica during the 1970s, absorb-

ing reggae rhythms. Both were among the first to introduce these rhythms into contemporary or modern jazz in the USA. At the same time, trombonists Steve Turre, Delfeayo Marsalis and George Lewis, among others, have admired, praised and paid tribute to their Jamaican counterpart Don Drummond.

Just as jazz influenced Jamaican popular music, so too liets and cadences of Jamaican/Caribbean music has, in many instances, colored the language and beat of jazz. There have been innumerable well-regarded master jazz musicians of Jamaican or Caribbean heritage whose personalities and syntax have informed the jazz aesthetic. As Duke Ellington once remarked “A whole strain of West Indian musicians came up who made contributions to the so-called jazz scene” (Ellington,

1990: 108-09). And specifically addressing the prowess of his West Indian trombonist “Tricky” Sam Nanton, Ellington continued:

What he was actually doing was playing a very highly personalized form of his West Indian heritage. When a guy comes here from the West Indies and is asked to play some jazz, he plays what *he* thinks it is, or what comes from his applying himself to the idiom. “Tricky” and his people were deep in the West Indian legacy and the Marcus Garvey movement. [...] Bop, I once said, is the Marcus Garvey extension of jazz. (*Ibid.*)

Out of a British plantation and colonial experience, Jamaicans have used music, including jazz, to assert their liberty, independence and aesthetic values and in so doing they have enhanced humanity with optimism and artful music from Jamaica to the world.

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- CARTER Benny (1945), *Farewell Blues/I'm Coming Virginia*, [78 RPM] France, Swing 201.
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Notes

1. Before independence, local folk, mento and Jazz artists impressed foreign visitors, traveled abroad establishing names for themselves, promoting the island, and especially its tourist industry.
2. Between the 1930s and the 1970s Alpha produced many prominent internationally recognized horn players including Leslie Thompson, Leslie "Jiver" Hutchinson, Sammy Walker, Wilton Gaynair, Dizzy Reece, Harold McNair, Joe Harriott, Sonny Gray, Tommy McCook, and Don Drummond along with many, many others.
3. Saxophonist Tony Greene informs: "Sister Ignatious would say to a boy, 'let me see your fingers' or 'let me see your lips' before recommending which instrument he should play."
4. Located on the edge of the Harbour in East Kingston, Bournemouth Bath and Club was exclusive to the elite class before it was taken over by the municipality in the 1930s and opened to the general public.
5. The Constant Spring Hotel, now the Immaculate Conception High School for girls, was an exclusive venue for the socially privileged.
6. Benny Carter and his Orchestra: Benny Carter (as, tp), Fletcher Allen (as), Bertie King (cl), Alix Combelle (ts), Yorke DeSouza (p), Django Reinhardt (g), Len Harrison (b), Robert Montmarche (dm)—Paris, March 7, 1938. I'm Coming, Virginia, Farewell Blues, Blue Light Blues.
7. In 1934–35 Leslie Thompson toured Europe with Louis Armstrong. In 1936–37 Thompson played with Benny Carter, and later in the 1930s played double bass with Edmundo Ros.
8. Jamaican pianist Yorke DeSouza appears on more than a dozen recordings made between 1938 and 1950. He appears on a number of sides cut with the French guitarist Django Reinhardt. Benny Carter's early recordings as a leader also involve this pianist. (<http://www.allmusic.com/artist/york-desouza-mn0001251209/biography>).
9. In addition to over one hundred jazz recordings with some of jazz's most recognized artists of the xxth century, Monty Alexander has also recorded fusions of Jamaican mento, ska and reggae with jazz underpinnings. A sampling includes: Monty Alexander With Ernest Ranglin - Rocksteady; Monty Alexander Featuring Ernest Ranglin - Rassl; Harlem-Kingston Express Live!: At Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola and Concrete Jungle: the Music of Bob Marley.
10. Fats Waller: The Chronological Classics, 1922-1926 (France: Classics 664, 1992), Compact disc. Of note, "West Indian Blues" bears a striking resemblance to Garveyite Sam Manning's "Englerston Blues" in which Marcus Garvey is mentioned.