MITOCW | MIT21M_342F08_lec18.mp4

BILL LOWE: So first, I need to know what you know. IF I say-- no, really, it's not a big deal. If I say Dizzy Gillespie, does that mean anything?

AUDIENCE: It does.

BILL LOWE: Who is he? What do you think of when I say, Dizzy Gillespie?

AUDIENCE: The trumpet player, bandleader, also an advocate [INAUDIBLE].

BILL LOWE: Everybody is on that page? Well, let me back up. Give a timeout here. I'll make a meta comment. The question I'm about to ask are not a test. I'm not going to give you points. I really just need to know so that-- I mean, there's a zillion things I could do, and so I'm just trying to get a sense of what's going to be the most useful for the time where here. So I just need to know what reference people have.

So if I say Afro-Cuba, what does that mean to you? Afro-Cuban thing, what is that about?

AUDIENCE: Like a fusion genre.

BILL LOWE: OK, fusion with-- fusion always implies something and something and something. So what's-- help him out, now. Don't everybody leave him hanging. Come on, now.

AUDIENCE: I think of a lot of congas.

BILL LOWE: You think a lot of congas, OK.

AUDIENCE: Like a Latin and bebop sort of thing.

BILL LOWE: OK, that's what I was getting. Those are the terms that get used is this Afro-Cuban thing, there's this Latin thing, there's this bebop thing. Because that's really what I want to help us with today. These terms are useful. These terms, as all terms, are misleading, and they're used all the time, and that's OK. I'm not here to challenge the terms at all, although I've done that.

For example, one of my mentors and teachers-- and I could, in fact, call him a friend, Max Roach, Max told me, OK, Bill, you're all right, but if you call me a jazz-bebop drummer, I'm going to kick your ass. And even then, I knew not to-- yes, sir, Mr. Roach, sir. I never called-- because there was a reason for that. It had to do with who Max felt he was and who Max and what Max felt that those terms meant.

Because terms aren't just terms. You know that because you're smart. You go to MIT. So you know the terms aren't just-- words aren't just out there, and they reflect a lot of things. So I'm going to stay with the Max example for a minute. Max, he really would. I mean, in public, I've seen him go after people who call themselves critics for calling him a jazz-bebop drummer, even when they were saying he is the inventor of jazz-bebop drumming, he wanted to go up and do some bebop upside their head.

At the same time, in other circumstances, when Max was at the drum set and he was playing a suite, the big fusion kind of suite of orchestra and so-called jazz-bebop band and so forth, Max was an incredible percussionist. And so if you wanted Max to play tympani, he'd tympani you to death. Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom. So he'd have the tympani, and he'd had his drum set.

So on his chart, it said, letter G, bebop. He didn't get up and punch the copyist out, he played bebop. So the words have a meaning, and the words also have a connotation. So I'm belaboring that because what we're going to talk about today is really about that. It's really about what Dizzy means and meant by Afro-Cuban and what it meant to him and what it means to me.

I really thought about this a long time because Mark and I are old friends, and we're also professional colleagues. So I'm really interested and the work that you guys are doing. I think it's very important work. I really do.

And I work with a lot of different people, a lot of different musicians, but I also work with a group down in New York called the Center for Jazz Studies. See, this way you know I'm a professor because I could use the chalk. See up until now, you just thought I was a dumb, bald guy who couldn't press buttons, but now--

When you pay the money you pay to come to MIT, you don't want to be talked at by just anybody. You want a professor, right? I mean, that's-- hi. How you doing? What's up? You got it. Sarah Palin.

AUDIENCE: We want to see chalk.

BILL LOWE: You want to see chalk. That's right. So the Center for Jazz Studies is a group of people in New York, gathered around-- it's a set of ideas and gathered around a person called Robert O'Meally, who just stepped down as the director. the Center was in place for about 15 years. The new director is a trombonist called George Lewis and a composer and a MacArthur fellow.

So when I go down to New York to hang out at the Columbia Center for Jazz Studies-- and George is my friend. I knew George before he was a MacArthur. But now that George is a MacArthur, I love to go out to eat with him because I never pay. George, you're the MacArthur, you pay.

And I'm belaboring this because I want you to check it out. The Center for Jazz Studies, most of the people who are in the center are quote, "scholars" rather than musicians. And it's this whole notion of, it's what some of us call the new jazz studies.

Many of you didn't know there was an old jazz studies. Well, as things tend to progress in intellectual circles, this group-- and I guess I'm part of this group-- is part of this thing called the new jazz studies. The old jazz studies was about-- there's this stuff called jazz, and these musicians make it. And the people doing the studying, the intellectuals, aren't musicians, but since musicians don't know how to talk, then these critics and so forth will have to do it for them and inform the people just what jazz is about.

The new jazz studies said, well, wait a minute, some of these musicians do seem to be able to run their mouths and actually, can put a couple sentences together, and so forth. But also, in the old jazz studies, the notion tended to be about-- even when it was good stuff, not the negative stuff that I presented, but even when folks did good work, it tended to be about recognizing that jazz is something that exists in a world culture and talk about the various effects and affects, the various things that impinge and helped to create this stuff called jazz. Jazz is the stuff over here and in the world impinges and the sociological aspects and the racial aspects and economic and all of those things, and that makes sense.

The new jazz studies, though, comes in the next-- I think now, it's the next little step in a very long conversation, which recognizes that it works both ways. That there are perhaps ways in which jazz, in fact, affects all these other things. So one of the publications, the first publication out of this group-- I mean, it is an intellectual group at Columbia University, so the bottom line, they want to do papers and books and have conferences and stuff. So we kind say, OK.

The first publication is a book that I strongly recommend to you. It's called*The Jazz Cadence of American Culture. The Jazz Cadence of American Culture.* It's a great title, actually. I like it.*Jazz Cadence of American Culture,* and the person who gets all the credit for the book is my friend and colleague, Big Bob O'Meally who's the Zora Neale Hurston Professor of English Literature at Columbia University. Bob is not a musician, although Bob-- I'm always going to stop and tell you stories because the stories really tell you more than the theory.

Bob really is a good friend. I've known Bob for years. We taught together at Wesleyan University long before he went to Columbia. And Bob grew up in Washington, DC and Bob loves the music. He's an English professor. He's a critic. He's written several books on Ralph Ellison and a couple of books on Billie Holiday and all that kind of stuff.

But Bob has an alto saxophone in a case. And I've always seen the case, I've never seen the alto saxophone. And Bob will come to a gig and with his case and he said, Bill, I'm ready. And I'll say, I'll let you know.

And then when the gig is over, oh, man, I forgot you were there. I'm sorry. That's our little joke. But Bob, actually, is a very brilliant man and a good person. So Bob is the editor of this text. And seriously, I really do suggest it to you, *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture.* And it's a collection of essays by a lot of people, a lot of people, a lot of people.

And that was the first one that came out about 15 years ago, 10 years ago. There are three. The second one, which is the one I'm going to talk about today, is-- I'm sorry the third one is called *Uptown Conversations. Uptown Conversations* is also credited to Bob, but then to other people, Farah Griffin, and one other person. I'll think of who it is in a minute. The point is that where this collection represented the old jazz studies, all the good stuff, a lot of good stuff. Ralph Ellison's in there and just a lot of good stuff. Check it out.

Uptown Conversations is like a manifesto of the new jazz studies. And George Lewis is there with a long article called "The AACM in New York." Now, I bring all that to say that George has a book, George himself, his newest book is this huge thick, it's thick, it's thick. If you have roaches, it's a great book. You just drop it on the roach, the roach is dead. It's incredible. He has a book on the AACM, which, again, I strongly recommend.

Now, why am I saying all this? I'm saying all this because I'm waiting for my registration to go through, but also, on the real side, because one of the tenants of the new jazz criticism, the new jazz studies, is this notion that since we recognize that there are folks like Salim Washington and Bill Lowe in this group, people who alleged to be intellectuals and also alleged to be musicians, how can a musician talk about this stuff? How do we talk about our stuff?

And there's a way in which we want to be scholarly. Remember, I came with my chalk, so you guys would know I'm a real professor, but also, there are strategies you have to develop. How much of what I have to say about Dizzy Gillespie should be objective, intellectual work, and how much should be subjective, since my subjectivity about Dizzy is really personal, and I would think that it's useful to you guys because, among other things,

I have a blessed life. I don't always feel like that. I feel blessed today because my man won the election, and that makes me think about all the good things that I have, and I'm blessed because my musical experiences have really been wonderful. I mean, over the years-- I'm just a trombone player.

Over the years, I've had the good fortune of working with my gods. I mean, I don't know any other way of saying it, so I worked with Dizzy. I played in Dizzy's band. It was one week. I did a week with Dizzy at a place called the Buddy Rich Jazz Club. Buddy Rich had a jazz club for half of a hot minute in New York in the '70s, and Dizzy was one of the first people in there. His big band was booked right at the same time as the George Wein's Newport Jazz Festival.

And there's a story about that. Remind me in case I forget. It all has to do with tuxedos. So if I don't tell you about tuxedo, remind me to tell you about tuxedo. But the point is I work with this. I was in his band, and the generation that my cohort-- that let you know I'm an intellectual I can say words like cohort.

My cohort of musicians, we grew up in the '60s and the '70s and the '80s. Very important time to be learning the music because if we use that term bebop, for us, bebop was already there. Bebop existed. When I was growing up bebop was a thing. It wasn't something new, it was something that was in place. And in fact, there were a lot of challenges to bebop from people closer to my age in terms of what's the way to go with the music.

So I remember at the age of 21 trying to figure out, well, should I learn my craft following JJ Johnson and Dizzy and them, or can I skip over that and jump right in with Archie Shepp. Now, that may seem like a trivial-- turns out, that wasn't trivial at all. Because in the 1970s, that wasn't even trivial. Your life depended very often on how you answered that in terms of your survival, your musical and economic survival in New York, which way were you going. I grew up at a time when bebop was considered the standard.

Now, it wasn't that many years before that bebop was this new, radical thing that folks like Dizzy were considered crazy and weird and outside and messing up Jazz by doing it. So I grew up in a time where-- oh, and also, Dizzy was still around. It wasn't like, if you're in Western classical music and you're deciding whether you're going to be a Beethovenist or are you going to go with Beethoven, are you going to go with Brahms, fortunately, they're both dead. So you can just make up really what you think they're about and go ahead and do that and you pick it up, and I'm a Beethovenist, and dah, dah, dah, and you just do your thing.

You could decide to be a beboppist and then go down, and as I did and have to sit in and play the third trombone chart in Dizzy's big band at Buddy Rich's place. Now, that's Dizzy. Now, whatever I may have thought about Dizzy, it turns out it was fine for me because I loved Dizzy. I didn't have any problem with that Dizzy was old fashioned or any of that.

But even if I did have that notion, that's Dizzy. I recognize who he is. If I'm going in another direction, that's still Dizzy. I want to learn from him. So you want to give what-- I can give. I can bow down and kiss ass and all that.

But the real give, if you're making music, the real give is what? What's the real thing you give? What can you really give to Mark if you like him? What can you really give to him? What's the most valuable thing that you have that you can share with him?

AUDIENCE: Your insight. A different perspective.

BILL LOWE: Not even a different perspective. What's the coin of the realm? What's the real coin of the realm in here? What are you guys doing? I mean, are you are you making nuclear weapons? Are you making poison gas? This is MIT. Those are possible. What are you doing?

AUDIENCE: He makes music, so new music.

BILL LOWE: Don't even worry about new.

AUDIENCE: Just music.

BILL LOWE: Just music. If you love music, the most you can give to Mark is your sense of music, not your sense of new or old, hipty dipty, dippy blue, music. So if somebody calls me on the phone and says, for x number of dollars, you show up, dressed properly-- and that's what the tuxedo story is about. You show up dressed properly with your trombone in working order, they don't say all that. They just say, Dizzy needs a third trombone player, and I got your name. Can you come and do it?

Now, when I get there, the most valuable thing, the way I can show Dizzy that I love him the most is to play the shit out of the trombone, in whatever manner he asks me to do. Because that's the real coin of the realm. For the folks in my generation, at least most of them that I talk to, the question becomes, how do you do that? What's the mechanism? What's the exchange? What's the conversation?

I could sit up under Dizzy, and some have. One of my good buddies did that, Jon Faddis. Jon set up under Dizzy, and I've heard Dizzy say sometime Dizzy couldn't tell the difference between Dizzy and Jon Faddis. Sometimes Dizzy couldn't tell. And for a while, you're going to follow Dizzy, damn, Jon. And Jon has got the chops to do that.

But there was a point in Jon's life though, when while he's sitting up and Jon, contrary to what happened, Jon was the chosen one, not Mr. Marsalis. Jon was chosen one by Dizzy to be the next guy. Jon was the chosen one.

Jon has almost the same sense of humor, very crazy, as Dizzy. I mean, Jon was right there, but there was a point in Jon's life where Jon said, wait a minute, the essence of this music is I gotta find my own voice. Dizzy already did this. I gotta find mine, and he did. I mean, he got out from under that, and he still loved Dizzy and he still-- Jesus, but even he-- So one way is you get up under somebody and learn that.

I also have aspirations, I guess, to be a composer. So what do you do with that? Do I always want to write like the people I like, or do I want to use that to find my own voice? So that does those questions make sense to you? Ask questions. And if you can imagine, they're not just questions that you have in a class. Nothing wrong with having questions in the class. In fact, it's a good thing to do, but these are questions that have to do with making music for a good bit of the time.

So that's where I want us to be. That was the point of all of that. How do we use the stuff that comes before? One of the ways that we use the stuff that comes before is to define the stuff that comes before. You see, the nature of this music is that even very often, the definitions are kind of loose and whatnot. So if we're going to have something called Afro-Cuban jazz, three very, very complicated terms

Now, let's see if I can do this. Cuban. Afro-Cuban. What does Cuban refer to? What does the word Cuban refer? Yeah.

AUDIENCE: I think a certain, I guess, full rhythms and instrumentation from Cuba, like the tumbao and the bell pats [INAUDIBLE].

BILL LOWE: OK, something from Cuba. I contend that in the second half of the 20th century, indeed, I would contend for the last 300 years, but certainly, for the second half of the 20th century, if you are an American person, then the notion of Cuba is not just the name of an island in the Caribbean. Although it is the name of an island in the Caribbean, but it's a little bit more than that.

AUDIENCE: That's an example of musician speaking for themselves.

BILL LOWE: That's right. That's why we need those critics. But check it out. I mean, that was funny, and that's very Dizzy. That's very Dizzy. In the old jazz studies pantheon, when you talk about bebop, there's Charlie Parker and there's Dizzy. And very often, what's talked about is that Charlie Parker was the musician, was the consummate artist and Dizzy could play, but Dizzy was more showbiz oriented, that he was more about doing just what you just saw, connecting with the audience.

And as we all know, you can't be showbiz oriented and talk about theory, can you? What the new jazz studies requires of me or what I require of it, actually, is a way to put into perspective, here's what I know. Well, Dizzy just said, that story that Dizzy just told, which you get the power to play the trumpet from your asshole.

I mean, the important thing about that story is that he told it. He told the story, and when he was explaining that to this woman, it was on television. It was on national television. It was on NBC. It was on national television, and I don't know if they had time to bleep him out or not, and his wife heard it.

There's a lot of information packed in that little story, a lot of information that, for me, is important about that generation that preceded me. Generation of African-American men mostly, but some women, who were in the so-called jazz world, who had to walk a very interesting and difficult, a very difficult path between show business and so-called art, between physical survival versus aesthetic integrity.

And it's this balance, and it is a balance, and it's very complicated, and it's very tricky. And you have to be very skilled. And the ones that lasted like Dizzy-- now, wait till you hear the people I'm going to put in that category. Dizzy, Miles, Parker himself. Parker didn't quite survive. Parker played the game though. Parker did play the game.

There's a game in this. There's some gamesmanship. Now, for those of us who come afterwards, if you weren't around when Dizzy and Charlie Parker were so-called creating bebop, you can still know about it because you get the recordings. How much of your study is based when Mark put 17 chord changes on the board and tell you to do it. And then he'll say go listen to the recording. So you get it in your ear.

The fact that it is a recording means that some of these people played this game successfully. That's not trivial. That's not trivial. The fact that there are all those recordings of Miles and Diz and Monk and Charlie Parker is because they were able to play this game in a particular way. That's important.

If you're were 30-something whatever age I was in the '70s, dealing with trying to find my voice, not just my voice as a musician, it's not just my voice as what notes will I play. Am I going to be Afro-Cubanist? Am I going to be free player? Am I going to play in a big-- what am I going to do?

It's not just that though, it's how do you conduct yourself. Because so much of the people, Dizzy and Max, what I learned from those guys, Bill Barron, what I learned from those guys is that how you presented yourself was as much a part of your musical identity as the notes you chose. How you looked, how you carried yourself, how you dealt with cab drivers, how you dealt with who your women were, who your people were. That was much that was as much about your music as the notes you played.

Now, when I was coming up there was a resistance to that. So one of the biggest arguments in a lot of the bands that I played in the '70s in New York was dress. We're going to play down at the such and such. Well, what's the dress? These three people want to wear dashikis, these three people over here want to have on tuxedos, these four people over here want to have on a shirt and tie, and these seven people who are younger, want to have on jeans with holes in them.

Because the issue is, how seriously will the music be received? And very often, rightfully or wrongfully, that's based on how the people look. Seems kind of silly, but we wouldn't have all these recordings if Diz and Byrd and Miles didn't play the game in a particular way.

Miles was great. Miles come out of his house with the wrong colored pants on and not have time to go change. By the time that happened, he was so much the fashion guy, that became the new fashion. Miles come up looking raggedy as hell because he made the wrong choice, but because Miles had it on, oh shit, that's what we got to do.

He got to have-- Miles was seen on the street wearing his bedroom slippers. Everybody in New York was walking out with bedroom slippers. It's incredible. It's incredible. That's the game that you play, but that was part of his power as a musician as well.

Now, is that jive? Is that silly is that-- all that time, you spent figuring out what pants to put on, you should have been practicing the trumpet. Oh, really? A story, Wes Brown-- watch how I segue. I'm masterful. I'm sorry.

AUDIENCE: Don't forget the tuxedo.

BILL LOWE: Thank you. Thank you. I'm coming to that. Wes Brown, who knows Wes Brown? You don't know Wes Brown. Wes Brown is a very fine bass player and I've known for many years. Wes lives out in the western part of the State. That's not why he's called Wes, but he just happens to live out in the west part of the State.

And Wes, was young-- well, not so young anymore, but when I first knew him and where we the story comes, from he was relatively young, about the age of most of you guys in here. Very bright, very talented, African-American man who played a mess out the bass and was on the scene with us in Middletown in New Haven, Connecticut, and he was one of cats, you know, Anthony Davidson. And he wouldn't make no money, but he was one of the cats.

And he got a gig with Willie "The Lion" Smith to play bass in a trio thing out in Las Vegas. So the thing-- I didn't tell you about Wes Brown is that Wes Brown doesn't like to wear shoes. So that's his thing. Even now, he's gotten a little more mature, but Wes doesn't like to wear shoes, and that's just Wes's thing. So Wes will walk around the wintertime with just in his bare feet.

Well, if it was cold in Middletown, Connecticut, so if it's cold, he might put on some socks, but he never wore shoes. So he gets this gig with The Lion. So they go to Las Vegas, and the way the business works, they didn't really rehearse. He's a bass player, he was supposed to know the tunes. He's going to make it or not on the gig.

So he shows up on the gig in Las Vegas. He was dressed he had on just the right clothes and well-- from here to here. He had on the right suit and everything. Looked good. Clean. Had his aftershave, he smelled good. He wasn't dirty now. He just didn't have his shoes on. But he's playing a formal gig, so he had on black socks.

So he plays the gig, and they said, that's good, man. He plays the gig. He's fine. Gig is over. Yeah, baby, you sound good, but come with me. Took him upstairs to his-- they're on the road, mind you. Took him upstairs to his room, opens the closet, and Wes said he had 10 pairs of shoes on the floor in this closet. 10 pairs of all kinds of hip shoes.

10 pairs of shoes, just shoes. Looked like a shoe store. And he said, baby, one of those is yours. You can take any one you want. Take two pairs if you want, but you don't come on my stage with no shoes on. And went out the room.

So Wes played the gig with some very nice shoes, but he was serious about that. He didn't make any cracks about-- now, if Wes hadn't played the bass correctly, he would have fired him, and he wouldn't have gotten any shoes. So it wasn't like bass playing didn't matter, it's that it was the total picture.

In case I forget, let me just tell you the tuxedo story, and then I'll get on and let you hear some more music. My time with Dizzy, as I told you, that's the way it was. It was 1970 something, probably '75 or '76, somewhere in there.

Get the call. Go down. We're going to play a week with Dizzy, no time for the rehearsal. So-and-so couldn't make it, you're the one. Come on down. It starts at whatever it was, 9:30. Sure. I'll play with Diz.

Now, the big festival was in town, the Newport Jazz Festival, George Wein's Festival, as it happened, I had a gig before. I had a gig at Lincoln Center with Marian McPartland, actually, her band. She put her band together, so I was playing. Now, for that gig, you had to wear a tuxedo for the gig at Lincoln Center.

Now, at that time in my life, I was a young whippersnapper and part of the new generation. I didn't own a tux. I figured that was-- I don't know what I thought, but I didn't have a tux. So I had to go rent. Every time I got a gig where I needed a tux, I had to go rent a tux. And I waited until the last minute. Oh, shit, I got to rent my tux.

So literally, just before the gig, I lived in Brooklyn, I run down, downtown Brooklyn. I went, look, I need a tux. So they had one tux, one tux left that fit me, and it was one of the tux with the shirts. This was one of the most elaborate shirts I ever seen. The tux was just a tux, but it was a nice tux, but the shirt had all these ruffles and piping on the side. I mean, just woof.

Now, I thought that was funny because well, the Marian McPartland gig, that would fit right in. So nobody said a word. I went out, I played my gig. Now, because I had the idea was I'm going to go change because I knew that the dress for Dizzy's gig was shirt and tie. And I had my suit in my bag, so when I'm done at Lincoln Center, I'm going to change or jump in the cab, go down, make the gig.

Well, in all the running, I forgot my suit. So when I'm done with Marian, now, I gotta go downtown to the club, and I'm dressed, a little overdressed. I got on this super tux. So I get down, I know some of the people in the band. I know Jimmy. He's there. I know Jimmy. I know some of the cats. Hey, Bill, they start looking and they start laughing.

I said, OK, guys, look, I'm here. I made a mistake. Let's just get on with it. So I'm sitting down. And now, ladies and gentlemen, cause it's all about showbiz, that's the point. Now, ladies and gentlemen, this is the last. For now, here's the band. We're up there, warming up and we're sitting there. Dizzy Gillespie.

So Birks comes out. Gets his trumpet, looks, and he goes-- and he says in the mic, damn. Jimmy, who's the ah-- damn! And he went on for 10 minutes. He went on for 10-- well, it wasn't 10 minutes, probably 5 minutes. But it felt like three hours-- damn. Stand up, brother. I mean, he just went on and on and on.

Jimmy, these new cats, don't they know they're not supposed to look better than the leader? Damn. I mean, he just went on and on. I felt about that small. That's his. Don't come on my set looking like a fool, and it was all funny. It was all fun and games and all of that. And everybody was laughing, and the first set I missed and the tunes that I knew by heart, and I messed up because I was just so rattled by that whole-- but by the second set, I got it together, and was fine.

The point is though, I helped. That was something I gave to the night, because Dizzy used me to make his comedic entrance for the day. If Dizzy didn't do that, we wouldn't be there playing for those people. I just run that out. OK. There he is.

Now, I want to do this next thing. I hope this works. Let's see now. I want the RGB. Yes. OK.

[MUSIC]

See, I have my tux on again.

OK, that's not Dizzy Gillespie. You figured that out, and that's also not Arturo Sandoval. That's me, and that's on my trip to Cuba. Dizzy's first trip to Cuba was in 1987 or '88 or so.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE].

BILL LOWE: Nope. I don't think so.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE].

BILL LOWE: You just wanted to come in and see what the music was. Lying about his umbrella. This was my life, Dizzy. I had always wanted to go to Cuba. And I still, I've been now six times. And like, Dizzy, I live in a country, I have a passport that says me and Cuba, there's some problematic stuff going on.

And the problematics don't come from the Cuban people. The Cuban government has no problem letting Americans come in to Cuba, it's the other way around. The American government, there's a ban. There's an embargo, and Americans traveling to Cuba, there's a very limited license you can get from the Treasury Department. You would think the State Department, turns out from the Treasury Department.

And you can get the license if you're going to do scholarly work or if you're a journalist or if you're going to-- I don't know something to do with money. I've been several times. This was my first time. That time I went very legally. I got the proper credentials and through the Treasury Department took forever. I was traveling with a group. I was traveling with a group of scholars who went to Cuba to study various Afro-Cuban religious practices. Afro-Cuban religious practices. I was a part of that group.

I had on my scholarly hat, but I'm no fool. I took my trombone with me. I'm going to Cuba. I'm not going to just go with a pencil and paper. Please. These two gentlemen act as the camera person is being-- she wants to show me there's another guy over here, three drummers. These are Batá drums.

Now, these same guys, earlier in the day were in Hulguin. Hulguin is a city on the coast in the Eastern part, sort of in the middle of Cuba on top on the Atlantic Ocean side. And it was not too far from the headquarters of United Fruit, back in the day, but that's another story.

Anyway, we were there for various reasons, and early in the day, these guys had drums that looked like conga drums, and they were conga drums. And they were playing, and they performed with the dancers. You're going to see some of that later, these folkloric, ritual dances that the Cubans still do for tourists. You got to go see one of these, and it's great. It's just wonderful to see.

But this was at night, and we all shared mojitos, et cetera. And it's a dangerous drink. Mojitos are very dangerous, I mean, the real ones. A friend, Leonard Brown, had been the year before, and these guys knew of me, and this was a test. These guys are part of-- we call, the Americans call it voodoo or Santeria. They call it something else. They're part of the group that provides the music and the dance for the religious rituals, and there's a whole secret society aspect of it.

This is the same demographic that Chano Pozo came from. That's the point of this. This is the same demographic. These are the same set of folks that Chano Pozo came from. Not that these guys knew Chano. No, they're too young, but I'm not claiming that they're Chano's grandchildren or something. I never asked them about Chano Pozo. But in terms of their place in the Cuban society, this is Chano Pozo people.

And the deal was, we met and hung out in the day, and you all right, but the real deal, are you all right, can you play? They say you're a musician, can you play? Remember Dizzy said earlier, he told Stan Getz, Stan, what we need to do is when we get down there, we take out our horns because they're going to play at us, we're going to play it then, this whole notion of music as a form of exchange, of cultural exchange, of spiritual exchange.

So it's not about I'm going down to look at you or you coming to look at me, so that whole objective observer business gets messed with. If you're a musician, you're supposed to share music. You ain't no damn ethnographer. Come down here, can you play, or can't you?

So they had been teasing me, and I didn't think-- I had my horn because it was there, but you can see, woman, you who don't know me, but I'm not ready to play. If you see me in shorts and sandals, I'm not ready to play anything. I'm ready to drink some mojitos, because it was hot. It was beautiful hot. I'm ready to drink some mojitos and look at all the pretty women, but I'm not ready to play the trombone. I'm not ready to perform.

But this wasn't a performance, you see? These guys, they were playing for-- everybody was digging it, because they got down. I mean, they were good during the day, but this night, they got their old drums. These were the ritual drums. Some priest and priestess had blessed these drums. This is the real deal. If you touch one of those drums without asking, you might lose your hand-- seriously.

I mean, these guys are not fooling around. That's the stuff. That's power. That's not just some drums. And so they were playing, and then all of a sudden, the rhythm went somewhere else. You talk about the Afro-Cuban rhythms, the rhythms went somewhere else. I'm digging it. And all of a sudden I hear, Toca, Toca. Bill, Toca. Oh, shit.

So I didn't share with you at the very beginning, I went out and knelt down, hoping that they'd not ask me. No, they kept playing, and they said, play. Now, here I am. What am I going to do? I'm where I want to be. I'm with the music that I want to hear. Nobody passed out a chart. We're not playing "Night in Tunisia." We're not playing "10 10 Dayo." We're not even playing "Guantanamera."

They're just playing the root stuff. They're playing the rhythmic stuff. They're calling on the gods and the goddesses. They're calling on the orishas. What am I going to do? And what I decided-- I always remember this decision, I still don't know if it was the right decision. What I decided was that I needed to look for not Bill, the bebopper, not Bill, the Afro-Latin, not Bill the salsa, the trombone player.

Surrounded by all this rhythms, what you going to do? And I made a conscious decision not to try to play some tune. Now, the day before and during that day and the next day, I hung out with the musicians, and we did we play. I got that on the tape too. I may or may not show you. I played "Night in Tunisia" and all that stuff because that's what you do.

Sa Davis was down there with us. We had a great time, but this was something different. This is the top of the building. This was the roof of a building. There are no lights except here. This little town. There's no lights. It's dark it's pretty. Mojitos. And these guys are talking about Toca.

So what do you do? Well, this is what I did.

[MUSIC]

Now, is that Afro-Cuban? Is that Afro-Cuban bebop? That's a real question. Is that free jazz? Is that a 6 foot 1" person about to shit in his pants? What is it? What is it? Microphones. Really?

And it goes on for a while, but there's some other things I wanted to show you before we-- the point here is that what is it? It's what-- I love, that's a great shot there. I like that. I did. I knew that. I planned that. I like that a lot.

The punch line is when we're all done, they said I was OK, and they bought me some more drinks and we were fine. But the point is that I will always remember how I felt then, and I was not analytical, I didn't even try to figure out where the [? cloud ?] lay was. And the question I think that it poses for you guys, if you're going to be in music that you know about, second or third hand, and then you find yourself in it firsthand what do you do? remember, I asked you the first thing. I asked you, what do you give back?

You've gotta find in yourself what you want to give back, because that's your best shot. If you try to be cute, you're going to fuck up. I'm telling you, if you're in the vicinity of the real cats, if you're in the vicinity of these guys, if you're in the vicinity of Dizzy, if you're in the presence of people that are really doing it, if you try to be cute, you're going to mess up. Because you haven't been at it long enough that you can get over being cute.

You gotta figure out where you are and bring that to the moment, whatever that moment is, whether it's writing out for bars or whatever it is, find out where you are, and use that to give back. That makes sense?

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE].

BILL LOWE: That's Harry Belafonte is the narrator. Actually, it's his video. Real quick though, the separations that we think of as separations, there's a separation that we make between people who are musicians, particularly jazz musicians and people who are intellectuals. Dizzy just gave that little funny story about him and Chano being able to talk to each other in the 1940s is about a clear exposition of world international African diasporan concepts that you could possibly have.

It wasn't done in an institution. It wasn't the result of years-- it was these two guys on the street, talking negritude, saying-- and Chano was the one who brought it. The crazy drummer from Cuba brings that. And at the time, by 1948, in Harlem, the going back and forth between musicians and poets and dancers between Harlem and Cuba have been going on for years.

Langston Hughes was a frequent traveler to Cuba, and some of the Cuban, Nicolas Guillén, in particular, very important Cuban poet, he and Langston are literally like that in more ways than one, but literally like that. And Langston translated a lot of his poetry. That connection-- and that was long before the Castro revolution, that was long before-- back in the '30s and the '40s, people in America, the ruling classes of America thought of Cuba as their personal, private brothel.

And there was a lot of travel back and forth between Harlem and Havana, between Harlem and Santiago of musicians, poets, dancers. This is the same time when Katherine Dunham travels to Cuba and to Jamaica to find a way to make her dance technique, her African diasporan ballet dance technique.

So there's a tendency to think of these new jazz studies things as these 21st century items, devised by people who are designated intellectuals. If you call Dizzy an intellectual, he will point you out, or actually just laugh at you. He was very happy to be who he was. So I just throw that out, that the categories, the names mean something, but the divisions aren't as clear as the names imply.

The very fact that Dizzy could ask his friend, Mario, to get him a drummer and the rest, literally, is cultural history of significant-- one result of that conversation is that Max Roach stopped playing drums for five years. Max heard [? genre ?] and said, shit, I can't handle that. What was that? And Max literally stopped and got a wire recorder and went up into the hills of Haiti for two years doing what we call ethnomusicological discovery.

Because what Chano put in to what they were doing was just, Max needed to go somewhere else to figure it out. But what you got to understand, Chano had been playing with jazz bands in Cuba, because it went both ways. It's not just the one. What, I have 2 minutes now?

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

BILL LOWE: Now, if you want to hear the rest of that, as it turns out, the reason why I mentioned Wes Brown, Wes Brown is going to be the bass player or is the bass player in the group that I'm bringing to Bunker Hill Community College on Thursday, the 13th of November. That's a week from today. Oh, Lord, I got to go finish my arrangements.

Anyway, the 13th at 1:00 from 1:00 until 2:15, we're doing a tribute to Dizzy Gillespie, and the band is being billed as Bill Lowe's Afro-Cuban Jazz Tent. But here's something a little different that I'm doing with it. The core of this, the center of this, the drumming center, I have on traps, Toma. Toma Fujiwara is playing trap drums.

And the African percussion is not Sa Davis, but in fact, it's Mr. Obeng, who is a Ghanaian master musician, who I worked with many years. He used to be at Wesleyan, and Martin Obeng. And he literally is a Ghanaian drum master, and he comes with all of his Ghanaian stuff and the talking drums and all this. And so we're going to do Afro Afro-Cuban.

And Frank Wilkins is in the band and Fred Woodard and Taylor Bynum and a lot of people. So you should come out, 1:00. It's a free concert, and remember I said at the beginning, what do I do with this stuff? So what I decided to do for this is I've put together a suite, a suite of four-- I haven't figured out, four or five of Dizzy's tunes. And the rhythm is going to start at approximately 1:10, and then at 2:15, it's going to stop. And in between, we're going to play all of these tunes, this one suite.

See, if the music that's going before you has gone before you, then you use that to make your next thing. I don't have any problem with that. You may have. It may suck once you hear it, but the intent is, this is what went before, and I'm playing with it. I got a Ghanaian guy doing the core, of course, not Chano Pozo. It's not even Sa Davis, it's Martin Obeng, and it's-- oh, my goodness.

AUDIENCE: Sorry, Bill.

BILL LOWE: Don't be sorry. It's time to leave Thank you all very much.