The following is a chapter supplementary to my book:
*An Uncommon Music for the Common Man — a polemical memoir,*
Copula, 2020.

**No Name is Innocent**

> *"Jazz is a weak, derivative music"* [1]
> — discuss

Anyone familiar with my music and philosophy will recognise the allusion to my first book *No Sound is Innocent.*[2] This new chapter refers to, and hopefully develops, one of its major themes: the pursuance of self-invention. But, be warned. I have inter-leaved a number of narrative strands — of personal history as well as diverse analytic material — that might be thought to be served better if given separate air. But, I am minded that aesthetics, history — personal and general — combine with social and political deliberation. These, along with our biology, are what informs the human condition.

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What we do defines us. But 'self-invention' should not be confused with 're-invention' of the individual. This latter construct is often used as an excuse for real change. Moving into a new environment, or re-configuring the furniture in one's life, are comfortable justifications for avoiding the organic, or evolutionary developments arising out of objective change. This distinction offers an analytic compass.

The eminence of identity seems to have become a sharper imperative within the current social narrative: i.e. identity politics. Giving an appropriate name to things is consequential. It lends respectability or dynamism to the object, project, organisation or person; and is often, in our current socio-economic culture, driven by a desire for market advantage. Equally, discredit or derision can ensue from nominal association with a negative condition. Name-calling has a long history.

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[1] Attributed to BBCTV Controller, Aubrey Singer, during the early 1970s. [Source:unpublished but circulated jazz monograph, 'Jazz 625' A History; a Detective Story; an Appreciation' by John Jeremy.]

[2] Edwin Prévost, *No Sound is Innocent,* Copula, 1995

Most names are inherited. Unasked: individuals are born or inducted into a given identity. The unborn have no say into which universe, race, nation or class they find themselves in on arrival. They will have a range of family and social norms, to which it is expected they will conform. Even if unconsciously reflexive, youthful rebellion is surely a resented expression of the unasked-for social trap of birth.

'Culture' — a word notoriously difficult to define — is an amorphous blend of connections within the extraordinary diverse possibilities of human experience. Each of us has a multitude of nodal points which shape and define us. Maybe more unique than a fingerprint. Our cultural bearing is capable of forever changing its coordinates.

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I am not certain when, or how, my ancestors suffered the incision of the name I inherited. My Huguenot forebears, who although originally welcomed (mainly for their textile expertise) began to feel the deskilling pangs of the capitalist industrial revolution. This group of people, escaping France because of Papal persecution, were the first cohort to whom the now menacing appendage 'refugee' was applied. But, somewhere along the line, experiencing the host hostile environment, and perhaps attracted to the comfort of assimilation: Prévost became Prevost. The acute accent was either ripped off because of social disapproval, or quietly put into a draw and left, best forgotten, because it implied a 'foreign' distinction. In a sense, this could be interpreted negatively as cultural emasculation, or positively as an adaptive retreat. Names exist like genetic codes. There are mutations. Sometimes wholesale transplantations: immigrants from Europe were processed at New York's Ellis Island, many, who upon finally reaching the New World and given sanctuary, found they also had been awarded a new name.[3]

In the case for my ancestors, a certain equanimity was probably gained by losing a foreign marker of difference. Thenceforth, phonetic adjustment also occurred. None of that fancy French frippery here! 'Prevvo' became 'Prevost'. Unusual, but not so socially awkward. However, for whatever reason, the change also signalled a cultural loss. The protesting, creative, artisanal and politically progressive history of these people disappeared within an increasingly expanding, and rootless industrial proletariat. It was my school-teacher of French who made me more aware of my name's origins. It was

[3] Names given to overworked and exasperated immigration officials who could not understand what their charges were telling them.

she who more or less insisted that the acute accent be reinserted. And, curiously (in light of current attitudes), it was easily accommodated by the teaching staff and my fellow pupils without any controversy. Even some of my mates, from the then rougher bomb-damaged home locality of the London Borough of Bermondsey, showed respect, and even a kind of admiration for this extra dash — a teardrop of ink. It gave me an unbidden kudos. This was an early incident in accidental self-invention. It was, of course, banging a drum of identity. More banging of a specific percussive type would ensue.

Of course, this minor personal example is mirrored, particularly in the more obvious minorities of subsequent refugee stock. And, much more shocking histories are not masked by carrying the names of white British origin by people who obviously owe their ancestral roots to Africa. It can seem impossible to escape these genetic and social-historical traits. Yet who can blame anyone for rejecting this condition. 'I am not that'. Some of the black jazz heroes of my youth, with brash confidence, alerted listeners to their desire for a non-European affiliation. They tried to jettison the remnant of their community bondage: Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Yusef Lateef, and Ahmad Jamal.[4] There is a possible unintended irony within this self re-naming. The deep well of African memories may have all-but dried. But, an adopted Moslem name should not mislead us into thinking that it was merely a socio-political gesture: a way of distancing themselves from the Christian, mainly 'white' ex-slave owning, religion of the USA. Africa, at the time of marauding European slavers, was far more advanced culturally than is commonly recognised. Long before the Christian cross, which so often accompanied the sword, musket, whip and chains of imperialist Europe, Islam had already left its mark, even on sub-Saharan Africa. But, its effect was syncretic. It merged with the indigenous polytheisms. This facility, this idiosyncratic disposition, to encompass many identities (perhaps so alien to the general European mindset) was to become a characteristic of black moral independence during slave times and beyond. It should be noted, even now in the religious practices of the black diaspora. It is said that slave masters thought that conversion to Christianity would make their charges more obedient, compliant and passive. Others think that it might be that, rather than converting to Christianity, the slaves converted Christianity for their own self and social protective ends. The ultimate jazz self-inventor was perhaps Sonny Blount's conversion into Sun Ra. He creatively adopted and transformed the myths of a far older and mysterious civilisation of ancient Egypt, into a cult of supportive brotherhood.

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[4] Many other jazz musicians converted to Islam but remained largely known by their 'given' names, e.g. Gigi Grice, McCoy Tyner, Kenny Clarke and Art Blakey.

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Apart from being given a name, which always says more about the assignor than the named, we are all generally subject to collective nouns. I am (now an old) white southern Englishman, and probably classified as lower middle-class. I move around in my society relatively (no: almost entirely) unhindered. I have only once ever been stopped by the police. Driving homeward from a New Year's party through north London in the early hours. The traffic was light in the Finsbury Park area. But, without any traffic violation, I was flagged down: asked to get out of my car, answer some irrelevant and impertinent questions, requested to walk in a straight line (successfully achieved), and subjected to a drink- driving breathalyser test, which proved to be negative. Why? It was winter, I was wearing heavy clothing and a hat. I was driving a rather old and battered (but mechanically sound) car. I think the two constables were surprised when I stepped out of the car. It was only then, I surmise, that they realised that my wife (who was also in the car) and I were not black.

We know that, from community categorisation, general assumptions of individual behaviour come. This is described and rationalised as 'racial profiling'. In other words, institutional racism. Although, I would prefer to call this irrational act 'institutional prejudice'.[5] It is an atavistic attitude that surfaces as soon as there are any real, or manufactured, strains within socio-economic life.

Of course, black lives do matter. And, communities drawn from non-indigenous cultures (just like my Huguenot roots) should not have to be sublimated in the cause of some disrespectful assimilative levelling-out diktat. The collection of all our respective histories is, arguably, what makes Britain a creative place. This is marred only by irrational fear of others, whipped-up opportunistically by the hegemonic forces of reaction. It is a matter of historical record what Arthur Wellesley (the Duke of Wellington) thought of the soldiers who fought his wars. To him they were expendable scum. Obviously, social realities and acceptable sensibilities, have changed during the intervening years. But, evidently, though, 'the Duke' (Wellesley) was something of a sobersides. And, there is nothing, in his long residual Tory politics, to suggest that 'scum' was an affectionate, if rough, military soubriquet for his common soldiers.

Human life, especially for the lower orders, rarely elicits sympathy from those in power. And, even allowing for the change in social circumstances, there is

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[5] For a thoughtful appraisal of racial realism and the general narrative of racial language etc. read Angela Saini, *Superior: the return of race scienc*e, Becon Press, 2019.

little evidence that personal or collective agency is something ever really encouraged. It has to be taken. We common Britons should not tolerate the unqualified heroism of popular historical narratives, which, at times, are elevated to super-human heights. And, we should recall, that throughout the industrial revolution, and the wars of imperialism, ordinary folk were considered primarily as factory, cannon, and more recently, covid-19, fodder. The imperialist triumphalism ever-aided by the emergent mass media, developed into populist myths (naming, framing and shaming) which still continue to beguile those unable to distance themselves from this peculiarly entertaining, seductive, but nevertheless corrosive, social narrative.

How we view and hold ourselves is an important first step to command agency. How we allow others to describe us can be dangerous. When I reinserted the acute accent on my name, it was not as some kind of social affectation. It is, as I have already explained, an acknowledgement of Huguenot protestations. This, rather than meekly accepting the degradation measured by my family's own long history and impoverishing exposure to early British industrial capitalism. An acute accent is a small but significant mark of historical identity. Apart from any personally defining confidence, it also illuminates the role of mainly French silk-weavers who contributed to British life and economy.

Names are important. And, those in our population who hear themselves referred to as BAME should be wary. This acronym is redolent of how bureaucracies identify and circumscribe 'other' totalities — 'black, Asian and minority ethnic' people.

No person is a BAME. Each of the intended nominees are imprisoned by this term. For each has a separate and identifiable heritage. Whatever its value, say, for genetic profiling in medical practice, its wide-spread use should be resisted, especially in terms of social control and in the allocation of social goods. We must prise 'BAME' open to display its constituent parts, so that individuals and communities can be properly recognised, respected, and enjoyed for their differentials. Adding them to the more longer-serving colourful peoples residing in the British Isles: our Geordies, Scousers and Cockneys.

There is, of course, a glaring omission within this rant about naming. Ellis Island renaming, or black people branded with the mark of their ancestral slavers, are constant reminders of dehumanising conditions. The snatching of a person from their cultural cradle. The expunging of the subject's past: removing them from familial and originating cultural roots, with all the

potential for a different kind of individual and communal life. This enslaves them within a more pernicious kind of stockade: modern capitalism. But, as an almost afterthought (which signifies a more general act of cultural dereliction), we must mention (no: underline!) the extent to which approximately half of the world's population has endured the systematic (ritualised into normal) renaming of a person in the act of marriage. This is a sort of moral female mutilation, at best, divorcing the woman from her biological family and numbing any natural inclinations of social rearing, in favour of promoting the male lineage. This, arguably, is a damning shadow incidence of human enslavement.

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**A (hopefully) short (but necessary) diversion into aesthetic theory:**

In order to understand social and cultural dynamics it seems necessary, when reviewing collective activities, to note objectives and outcomes. Aesthetic movements, and an appreciation of genre, are subject to aggregation. When we survey examples of modern jazz we necessarily must include Charlie Parker alongside Lee Konitz as exponents of bebop saxophony. And too, the respective pianism of John Lewis and Errol Garner. They are significantly different, but have a lot in common. Enough I think to be classified together in an homogenous genre. Although, in their respective approaches, they could never be mistaken for each other. There is, arguably, enough in their overall methodology to treat them as fellow travellers: and maybe their mutual inclusion in a single genre owes something to community or musical fellowship — they are somehow socially connected. All of these musicians could appear in the same concert — certainly in a festival of modern jazz.

This situation holds also for free improvisation. Take the extreme example of Peter Brötzmann, at his most growling, grinding and groaning intensity, and the sometimes infinity-aching pianissimo passages from pianist John Tilbury. Yet in the pantheon of free-improvisation (and in the unlikely event of them duetting) we should consider them heterogeneous and connected.

Thus, a genre, or an aesthetic movement has to be conceived as a nuanced amalgam of statistical and social parts. In which, curiously, we have the 'statistical' possibility of median subjects (i.e. an average exponent) not existing. And if there is, it might be supposed that no one would want to listen to them! But, this hypothetical statistical construction could throw up — because of the many facets in such a qualitative calculation — a phenomenon to amaze us all.

Nevertheless, within the practice of jazz (and improvised music generally) there is sufficient commonality to make all participants feel part of a whole, and allow for a meaningful assessment of an aesthetic movement. As in this attempt to construct a framework for an aesthetic theory, it seems necessary to combine (albeit imagined) statistical and social components when assessing artistic merits and ideological consistency.

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With these thoughts in mind, I suggest that modern jazz was intrinsically 'progressive', in that it adopted advanced (and exploratory) technical procedures to develop a new music, and to delineate an ongoing route. In other words, without defining a specific outcome, it pursued a sense of progress. Free jazz was more obviously communitarian and oppositional. It implicitly rejected the technocratic display inherent in bebop in favour of a folk-political demeanour. It also rejected the pull of marketisation (or was unable to 'compete' within it) in the newly created domain of jazz-rock. Free jazz had an ear to civil and racial abuses. Plainly, it did not offer palliatives to ease social unrest. Its often self-conscious ugliness proclaimed grievance. Arguably, though, what we hear in the atonality and the irregular tempi are perhaps intuitive experiments that not only reject the hegemony of Western classical music, but also rehearse the residual dreams of Africa. But what of the jazz that has since followed?

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**A cultural case-study**

It is a fair bet that few (if any) associated with the November 2020 'Jazz 625 — The British Jazz Explosion' (a BBCTV programme) — be they producer, presenter, musician or technician — was alive when the originating title for this 1960's programme 'Jazz 625' heralded a golden period for British jazz lovers. Obviously, this 2020 presentation alludes to, rejoices in, and takes inspiration from the earlier major series of BBC televised jazz programmes.

I was one of the generation who saw many of these programmes when first broadcast. But, even then, the television set was not the ubiquitous object in homes that it became. I had to make a special arrangement to visit a relative or a friend suitably kitted-out.

The original 'Jazz 625' arose at the watershed moment, when corduroy trousers, thick wooly jumpers and duffle coats were being replaced by sharp Italian tailoring and winkle-picker shoes. But, despite the move from utility to

fashion, much else remained in mono-colour. 'Jazz 625' was only in black and white. Our 2020 version is in high definition and sleek colour. But there is something troubling about the softer hues and the (albeit covid necessary) absence of a live studio audience. The explosion was muffled. It may have been a dud. But I sense there is an unexploded bomb buried somewhere.

The 1960s tentative step towards progressive programming in British television, which 'Jazz 625' represented, was never secured. This series, and a subsequent one, short in number: 'Jazz Goes to College', were at the fag-end of a bold project that was crushed by the tonnage of tradition and 'establishment' reaction.

What initially confused me about the 2020 programme was the title: 'Jazz 625.' This might have been intended to stir nostalgic juices. But the music was offered by young people, who could not have been born when the original 'Jazz 625' was produced. But despite this, nostalgia was evident. Strong references were made, especially to the musicians of the bebop era. This attendant reference to past glories are what interests me here. Let us review matters and keep our attention upon what things are called.

It is difficult to judge the title for a 2020 jazz television programme that includes the term '625', as anything other than 'retro'. This is a somewhat jaded fashion soubriquet, but it encapsulates the post-modern. How far does this 2020 presentation cast the shadow of naive, or unintended, meaning? Do any of the musicians involved know what they are lending to this project? Given that their avowed historic heroes were part of a modernist cultural thrust, these retro-modernists are guided by a very conservative premise, and happily provide us with a 'post-modern' jazz.

My own formative strides in making music arose from skiffle, and then towards jazz that became known as 'Trad'. This was, in effect, a self-imposed informal musical decree, that positively discriminated in favour of the King Oliver and Armstrong 'Hot Five' recordings over almost everything else Louis Armstrong subsequently did. British 'trad-jazz' was highly (almost fanatically) derivative. It got as close to the perceived New Orleans model as was possible. Every clarinetist strived to play, was obliged to play — ritually copying note-for-note — the highly admired, revered, solo from an early

recorded version of the tune ‘High Society’.[6] Maybe this confirmed authenticity, alongside a connection with the emergent African-American ethos which was capturing popular music in the developed industrial cultures. But, the newly converted disciples of this imported anti-establishment cultural strain, were infected with a bizarre sense of purity. Saxophones were looked upon with suspicion. Although, of course, any cursory review of early recordings of jazz will find enough saxophones to dispute any historical source for this aversion. My point here is temporal. ‘Trad’ was just 30 to 40 years after the first great stride in jazz history, that was facilitated by mass radio listening and a burgeoning record market. Meanwhile, the current focus on bebop leaps over a gap of 60 to 70 years without any obvious regard to what may have happened in between.

Most of the musicians in the (1950s/60s) British ‘Trad’ boom were white, and had a high regard for what jazz music represented culturally. It was also, despite the presence of old-Etonian trumpeter Humphrey Lyttleton, a mainly working-class initiative. And, although exceptions will no doubt be found, it had strong socialist and egalitarian leanings. During the late 1950s, I was in a band that had a magnificent London east-end Jewish trombonist, Sidney Gonshaw who, no doubt with initial foreboding, played with a visiting trumpet player from Germany. Even the non-Jewish musicians in the band were also dealing with a residual rumbling of post-war anti-German sentiment. What cemented and controlled our relationship was our mutual admiration for the African-American model, towards a music of the common man.

Why, though, in these current (2021) times of culture wars, are these young British musicians so slogan savvy but so politically passive? Bebop is a crowning glory of a radical culture, which had to confront and overcome a hostile social and economic environment. It, like the earlier New Orleans creative eruption, gave an impetus to social and artistic agency for all of common humanity. I have often, in the past, referred to my own artistic and socio-political awakening to the explosions of American free-jazz as a joyous ‘permission to disobey’. This came after my initial admiration and respect for the giant innovators of bebop who, artistically, set an invigorating technical bar to which many aspired. Yet there was a niggling doubt about the politics of beboppers. For sure, they were rightly cognisant of their artistic achievements, but there was an obvious appetite for wider cultural and social

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[6] The origins of this solo appears to have been in an orchestration by Robert Recker circa 1901. Later, in New Orleans, Alphonse Picou adapted the piccolo part into a clarinet variation. But was probably made more famous due to its use by Johnny Dodds and Jimmie Noone. Essentially it become a kind of test-piece for all aspiring clarientists of the New Orleans style. A trumpet playing friend confirms that this tradition persists into the 2020s.

recognition beyond their own milieu. In retrospect it now looks to me that some of these ‘giants of jazz’ craved validation of the more powerful ‘white' dominated cultural hegemony. Acceptance of which, I concede, may have ultimately been the only possible route to some kind of commercial success. I recall becoming alarmed at hearing some of the latter-day super-group ‘aristos' of modern jazz talking about their share-portfolios! The USA establishment was not averse to using internationally famous jazz musicians as part of its geopolitical soft-cold war effort. While the attention resulted in greater public profile and, presumably, a stronger foothold in the cultural market-place, in effect, bebop was happy to be culturally tamed.

Curiously, being young, white, working-class and mostly autodidactic in Britain during the 1960s, meant one was immune to the faux blandishments afforded mostly to the black cultural heroes. The front covers and main features of the modish press, or even jazz periodicals, were much less likely to feature ‘white’ (and non-American) practitioners. And, I for one, never had a problem with this. At that time, I believed it was their due. I did not initially see how patronizing, and ultimately empty and insulting much of this romancing of blackness — at a safe distance — really was.

At a deeper level of musical analysis, one can perceive that the technical brilliance achieved through bebop, was refracted though a lens focused upon Western classical music’s structural template. Jazz dared to advance into creative domains without reading the map. Although, those musicians had already absorbed the basic determinants of conventional tonality, theirs was an audacious high-wire performance without a safety net, which we, their admirers and supporters, cheered. What though, were we cheering for? Was it, (most effectively) a collective ability to syncretise, as noted of earlier African cultural responses?

But, in gaining grudging technical respect, and achieving a certain exotic attraction, there was never any complete acceptance of this accomplishment. It would always remain secondary to the mainstream Western classical model. In the late 1960s, the controller of BBC2 Television was to pronounce that jazz was ‘a weak and derivative music’ [7] It was at best a novelty act. Two examples serve this perspective: André Previn’s (or more locally, Richard Rodney Bennett) obvious jazz facility. This showed that ‘a properly’ schooled musician could demonstrate commensurate easy jazz prowess. And, Wynton Marsalis’ award winning trumpet concerto feats. To the establishment, this only served to prove that any extension of cultural creativity through jazz

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[7] This clumsy elitist remark set the tone for (and justified?) future programming decisions. See footnote 1.

owed its technical credentials — and ultimately a cultural debt — to the Western classical music model.

There is a more nuanced interpretation available in the relationship of jazz in its accommodation, and embracing, of the hegemony of Western music's equal-temperament. I am not convinced it informs the rationale of even the most ardent supporters of the bebop achievement — although it should. As can be noted in the deeper literature of African culture, before the Western slaving expeditions, and subsequent responses of the black diaspora occasioned by slavery and beyond, there is a continuity. It is the adaptive power that resides in syncretism. An ability to deal with reality, no matter how alien, or discomforting the conditions. And, of course, different social and economic environments tend to produce a variety of responses.

Cultural adaptivity of enslaved West Africans played out differently in other regions of the New World. For example, the African diaspora was to overthrow their enslavement in Haiti. A move stimulated and, to some extent, supported by the European French Revolution. But, much like the enslaved communities of British West Indies and North American mainland, 'white' religion was used to enforce passivity and compliance. Pre-Revolutionary French slavers were, of course, Roman Catholic. The Haitian African diaspora took a different syncretic form from the more Puritan form redolent of the British experience. And, as readers of Eugene Genovese (the American scholar who did much to develop a historic perspective to African-American enslaved experience) will recall differences in adaptivity are to be noted in the Spanish and Portuguese responses of central and South America.

But, given the island's successful slave revolt (1791-1804), the French colonial government was over-thrown, slavery was abolished, and a new Haitian settlement developed. Culturally, the African strain was much more dominant than the US Puritan variant allowed. However, and as-ever, the popular capitalist cultural machine has turned the religious shape of Voudou into 'the voodoo' that trashy novels 'do so well'. For, Voudou is a cultural form ('a way of life'). Perhaps, given Haiti's isolation from the main thrust of Western European cultural norms, and white dominated US hegemony, it is astonishing that such a substantial and uniquely independent range of social mores should emerge. Yet, of course, Voudou has been exotically trivialised, infecting the easily suggestible western popular mind with weird and unfounded putrid fantasies — the 'zombie-ridden' tales so beloved by Hollywood.

It is surely in the adaptive power, described as syncretism, that we must come to admire most when regarding a people so long beleaguered. It is also where we can find an explanation of the ignorant, and infamous, remark attributed to the 1960s BBCTV controller who oversaw (and then downgraded) the original Jazz 625 programmes: “jazz is a weak, derivative music”. Here, we must ask about the nature and meaning of ‘derivative’. For, in my mind, the syncretic strategy that jazz exhibits is a remarkable aesthetic and social tool. And, we can contrast this with numerous examples within the so-called classical music tradition. Musical compositions which clearly owe their inspiration (one might say, are ’derived’) from mostly traditional, or folk sources. But rather than being part of a social process, the inspirational material has been collected, extracted, separated, distilled, and perhaps alienated, from its origins. These attributes and compositional methods are clearly identifiable in the work of Bartok, and the likes of Butterworth and Vaughan-Williams. Much of Messiaen’s music can be said to be ‘derived’ from bird-song; Taverner’s from Eastern Orthodox Christian liturgy; Reich’s from African drumming. While, Gershwin, Weill, Milhaud, Schnitke, and Bernstein all owed something to jazz. Need I say more? Having attempted to rebalance the impact of the word ‘derivative’ we must also adjust, or determine, the intended effect of the word ‘weak’.

Christopher Small enjoined us to remember that music is not ‘a thing’ but a phenomenon arising from  social relations. This he brought to our attention in the 1980s.[8] Since those times, however, commodification and a general market hegemony has all-but overwhelmed the general political discourse, to a point where it has been made to seem simply a fact of life. Small wonder (no pun intended) that young musicians maturing during the interlude since, are less cognisant of the root social realities of their creative lives. Nor, that they instinctively repel the alleged ‘social weakness’ in favour of market strength. One is more likely to find references, in tune with Small’s recommended ‘musicking’, from some of the more thoughtful improvisers, like guitarist Nathan Moore, who proposes improvisation as ‘social composition’. This kind of analysis acknowledges and strengthens the potential meaning of jazz. Whereas ‘hip commodity’ only lends itself to (or draws superficial authority from) a post-modern perspective. The choice of ‘weak’ or ‘strong’ in this debate arises from whatever hegemony one wishes to further. I think we can take it that the said BBC2 Controller of the early 1970s was of the emerging neoliberal disposition.

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[8] see bibliographical note at the end of this chapter

Thus, it is in free-jazz that we begin to see a retrenchment in regard to this (largely unconsciously adopted) accepted sovereignty of Western classical music. It is in the troublingly, expertly executed, arhythmic atonalities of Eric Dolphy that we hear an irrefutable African-American response to charges of primitivism in jazz. Is this the underlying sense of 'weak' we need to repudiate? I would have loved to have heard Eric and André Previn in duo!

While, in the music of Albert Ayler we sense a step back from the increasingly sophisticated (though arguably 'philosophically' weak) soft-bop that was, in effect, a preferred leisure music option for the professional classes, black and white. This soothing coolness helped persuade middle income people that all was well with the world. Ayler's monstrous howls, however, pulled listeners back to a an almost nightmarish version of the gospel ecstatic. Portraying an angry and agonisingly emotional resolve, and evoking a different, harsher world — still fearful in ordinary life, still without equitable social coexistence within US society: a race memory jolt for the wider black experience. This is the 'weak' music which the BBCTV moguls pulled the plug on. Imposing their view of it as sordid, amusical, ugly, unprofessional, and not (in their view) jazz at all. Was it a weakness they feared? More likely it was a baffling, uncompromising strength beyond their imaginations and their moral vista.

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Back to the free-wheeling, largely self-taught, experimentalists of 1960s Europe. Admiration, and emulation, had a competitive option: encapsulated in the brief and in-your-face homily — 'permission to disobey'. But the commanding narrative (of orthodoxy) was in no real mood to concede any ground, and, commercially-savvy successful black musicians saw no reason to look a gift-horse in the mouth. If 'white' establishment was willing to tolerate, and dance to, the mood music of the 'swinging' (1960s) era, then why refuse to engage with State Department organised tours to serve US soft geo-politics, or decline media accolades, and the rewards available through an accommodation with the market?

If bebop was the creative accommodation of jazz to establishment tropes, and if jazz-rock was trying-on the market for size, then free-jazz slammed-on the brakes and sounded the horns of dissent. A new mood descended upon the social and political atmosphere. No more Mr Soft-Bop. Syncretism was sinuously stretched. The more socially compliant and 'gentle' adaptivity was substituted in favour of awkward opposition. More strident demands, developed from a long-suffering and neglected constituency ensued, not only for due rights and opportunities, but for autonomy and agency. In other words, acceptance within the existing hegemony was not enough. Freedom of

expression and opportunity meant not just a possible place in the sunshine of a liberal capitalist complexity, but a right to exert a different set of social priorities, which were of a kind imagined in the practice of free-jazz. The subsequent and secondary effect of free-jazz's exhortation 'to disobey', was to make an impact upon musicians of the mostly social under-classes of the Euro-centric new and old worlds.

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Just as the new African-American renewal of popular music in Western societies began to yield to (and ultimately be compromised by) capitalism, a new vigorous, if not entirely self-aware, movement ensued. The sounds (negatively characterised as honks, squarks, squeals and screams) of free-jazz began to announce resistance. Western tonality, which bebop had mastered, essentially had flattened any residual memories of Africa. No matter how many album titles referenced the dark continent, the establishment hegemony embedded in tonality prevailed. Here, we should pause and ponder on the way the sound of free-jazz, and to a lesser extent free-improvisation, have been characterised (framed, named and shamed!) in primitive terms. No one can surely deny the impact that African-American music has had upon contemporary culture — in both popular and in (so-called) serious music. Meanwhile, the serious mien of the musician-scientists have, for this whole modern period of electricity, been trying to capture, understand, and utilise the outer and inner worlds of the microtonal, the splitting of notes, phasing, extremes in polyrhythms, and infinite gradations of texture. It is worth reflecting upon the fact that there are now (and have been for a long time) departments in universities, and specific experimental institutions, devoted to this work. The likes of IRCAM are enough to indicate a massive effort — modern technocratic music's equivalent of a moonshot, which has consumed huge financial resources and cultural credit — devoted to this task. Masked, as it is, within scientific rhetoric, these experiments are surely more than an excessive curiosity about a world of sound that exceeds — goes beyond — the confines of the tonal measures that evolved from Pythagorean thinking. For, there is little one can extract from the history, or ideology, ensuing from the institutions of formal establishment music, to suggest real sympathy, or encouragement, for these experiments. Where, and why, did the experimental impetus arise? Progressive modernism, as part of the zeitgeist, explains much about the emergent increasing stimulation for a scientific disposition towards intellectual discourse. Yet absent from these (often grandiose) efforts is the unifying element that is fundamental to the 'disrespected' squeals, squarks and honks i.e the atonality of the residual echoing sounds of Africa, and its free jazz inheritors: a social dimension.

Needless to say, such technocratic experiments and expositions may fail to convince established musical taste. Many conservatives find it inexplicable, and regrettable. But, it is the technical competence that impresses the modern western mind. At best, the modernism is tolerated. However, a recurring conservative critique of the 'new' music lingers as an aversion to its inhuman technocratic coldness. (Hence, the warm cosy appeal of the post-modern!) Meanwhile, free jazz, for all of its technical frailties, at least seemed to stay in touch with a wider range of human sensibilities — joy, energy, anger, doubt. It cannot be accused of being robotic.

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The words of the late Christopher Small describe the utopian (hoped for) social relations inherent in Western symphonic music, effectively:

"Thus, the participants in a symphony concert are bringing into existence, for the duration of the performance, an ideal industrial society, in which each individual is solitary and autonomous, tidy, disciplined and stable, punctual and reliable, the division of labour is clear, the relationships are impersonal and functional, and the whole is under the control of charismatic figure armed with clearly defined authority."[9]

Those words, of course, describe the ideal characteristics for a fully functioning industrial capitalist culture. And, we know the musicians concerned, and the audiences who attend such concerts, do not think of themselves in such terms. It is, I suggest, the hegemonic power of our current culture that persuades them otherwise. The successful executors of this music, and its perhaps sometimes entitled smug audiences are, of course, combined in a celebration of achievement. Their gratification is the emotional share-dividend of perceived success. Meanwhile, the real people involved in factory-life are usually more grumbly, and less content with their lot. And, less likely to go to symphony concerts. But we should not forget, or neglect, that free improvisation also has its ideal (utopian) social preferences. And, of course, while IRCAM and like institutions spent fortunes on setting up their gear, the one-man experimental laboratory that was Eric Dolphy was doing his stuff. And, others followed.

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[9] Christopher Small, *Music of the Common Tongue,* John Calder, 1994 p 68/9

## A brief historical reminder

The severe slave regime of early British colonies (especially) on the North American continent and Caribbean Islands, not only separated families but disconnected the regional, cultural, and social connectivities of tribe and language. These were vicious dissociating appliances of social control.

Concurrently; while the marauding slave traders were at work shipping West Africans to the plantations of the New World, the new land-grabbers in the British Isles were enclosing the commons and clearing the land of subsistence farmers, mainly for the development of sheep-farming. Thus, the Scottish Highlands were depopulated. Dispossessed families shipped off to the Americas, many selling themselves into indentured servitude, becoming servants or labourers. Although legally not slaves, their indentured status was controlled by contract. Their master/employer could sell the contract to another. It was reportedly a brutal and precarious existence, and, if the subject survived the term of the indenture, most would inevitably fall into an even greater uncertainty of physical being, finding themselves competing in a labour market swollen with cheaper African slaves. Surely, this is the origin of the residual 'poor white' resentment of black Americans. A running sore that ever-festers, especially in times of economic downturns and acute inequality.[10]

Yet, we note that those who took advantage of the defenceless, and the impoverishment of others, neatly ducked any sense of personal involvement. Remaining distanced from these assaults upon fellow human beings through joint-stock holdings or employing arms-length organisation: managers and overseers.[11] And then, to (mad) cap it all, the much heralded 'abolition of slavery', of which our distorted historical perspective lauds the 'white' hero in the shape of William Wilberforce. Slavery, however, was not summarily ended. It was (as it were) phased out. This to save the economic disruption of the burgeoning sugar, tobacco, and cotton industries. And, yes: compensation was paid. To the slave owners for their loss of property and potential wealth.

The new social relations emerging from the logic of capitalism was, of course, similarly applied, in thumb-screw fashion, to the industrial proletariat of early

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[10] A more nuanced appraisal of 'poor white' and black relationships, especially in the southern states of the USA, suggests that Jim Crow Laws (segregation) were enacted as much to create a divide between the two beleaguered communities rather than simply amplifying black disadvantage. There are accounts of joint rebellions of indentured whites and black slaves.

[11] This moral detachment persists through pension fund holdings masking social responsibility for poverty-wages and deleterious practices of crude capitalist enterprises.

British industrialisation, as Friedrich Engels frighteningly portrayed.[12] But, these cruel travesties did not compare to the constant brutality and dissociative violence visited upon millions of enslaved Africans (over hundreds of years) and their children, who still endure social prejudice and continued violation of their bodies.

Finally, bear in mind that British buccaneering activities (so exalted in our current frenzied Brexit narrative) were developing apace in the first Elizabethan period, with legally sanctioned chartered voyages of theft and slaving. This is how The Enlightenment was funded and the industrial revolution given its kick-start.

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So, one of the double-take utterances made in the 2020 ‘Jazz 626 – the British Jazz Explosion’, was the claim: ‘that everything going on in the world today is going on in jazz’. I think I got some of the intended upbeat references. But it was the painful unintended allusions that resonated most. The accelerating social and economic depredations of global capitalism. Emergent authoritarian regimes. The continuing cultural dumbing-down. Sharpened racial and social prejudice. Global-warming denial. The tainted politics: with its lies, distortions, and dissembling. Hunger, even in (so-called) first world countries. This is what is going on in the world. But, it is perhaps churlish of me not to also hope for more optimistic signs, and maybe the strong international and inter-racial acclamation that ‘Black Live Matter’ is one of the bright spots to which the 2020 ‘Jazz 625 ‘commentator was alluding. Celebratory and self-congratulating it was — maybe they had found a bit of sunshine in the gloom. But, the programme as a whole was a mite too complacent and full of itself for my liking. A bit more focus on the realities of life for the majority of peoples of the world — as well as a more deliberate focus upon black history — would have been appropriate.

Racism, though, has many deceptive disguises. The chief of which is the perniciously questionable narrative of its biological basis. Given the minimal biological differences there are, say, between Homo Sapiens and chimpanzees, it seems perverse to base a cultural hierarchy of social and economic entitlement upon minor differences of eye, hair, or skin colour. All (so-called) races of human beings have to wake up to the underlying socio-political barriers erected between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’.

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[12] Friedrich Engels, The Co*ndition of the Working Class in England*

A personal reference, to the confused twists that the (so-called) racial equality can inflict upon human existence, can be found in the (albeit minor) inconvenience of an early experience of AMM. Openly registering our debt and solidarity with the responses made by musicians of the beleaguered black experience of the USA, AMM forged its own anti-establishment responses within 1960s British cultural constraints. These, I would argue, have since sharpened greatly due to the effects of global neoliberalism. But, our radical credentials were clearly audible. The jazz critic, John Fordham, with candour, accuracy, as well as humorous realism, described AMM as “a thumbscrew of a band”. Clearly there was no comfortable accommodation with contemporary tastes (that so often camouflages prevailing social mores and political imperatives). Our cultural place was outside of the acceptable norms. We were laying out (if with the naive energy of youth) our rejection of what was expected of creative life. Which is much more circumscribed by cultural conformity than one might expect — people cling on to what they ‘think’ they know! This ‘conformity’ is still disguised in the fashionable flash of the post-modern.

Victor Schonfield was AMM’s early and active principal supporter. Additionally, he championed the 1960s U.S. black radical musicians; organising first concerts in the UK for Ornette Coleman and Sun Ra. However, during the energetic, but thankless, task of promoting AMM, he was to note two major cultural deficiencies that impeded his efforts. The musicians of AMM were not American and not black.

What are the underlying conditions that caused this perverse response? It might be taken as a welcome equalisation, or levelling-up, in cultural championing.
I fear there is just as likely to be an under-handed form of discrimination going on. Circa 2020: this is perhaps the moment of crisis we now identify as the cultural wars of political confusion sown by the narrative of ‘racial realism’ — which gulls ‘the easily persuadable’ for socio-political purposes. Such unproven theories are often subtly favoured, and fester into, populist cultural norms. Knee-jerk responses (to ‘taking the knee’ for example) not only by those who feel fortified by white supremacist tropes, but also by an all-too-flabby liberalism. Which usually responds by doling out emergency rations of positive discrimination. This is easier, and strategically defensive, than tackling the problem of enduring class prejudice.

Unfortunately, for our young south London friends that featured most prominently in the recent (2020) BBC TV programme, ‘Jazz 625 -The British Jazz Explosion’, this is what is happening. And, also unfortunately (although

understandably) they have colluded with this deceptive exploitation. For sure, the pressure of campaigns like ‘Black Lives Matter’ force the institutions of the establishment to bend a little in any storm of public indignation. But I sense, in the demeanour and the proclamations of these representatives of a British black minority community, that too many notes of accommodation are being played with said establishment.

Their stance is more obviously supine than the  rhetoric of their bebop heroes. One of my readings of the bebop revolution is the indisputable innovative and technical excellence of their work. The music spoke volumes. Nevertheless, it was success within the existing template of Western classical music orthodoxy, which in my opinion, they carried with an aplomb few conventional classical musicians would dare attempt. But, like it or not, modern jazz is a sub-genre of Western classical music, if also a superlative example of syncretism at its most expeditious. However, in direct relation to the 2020 ‘Jazz 625 —The British Jazz Explosion’ programme, one musician referred to the interplay that exists between his jazz and classical music expositions. This could be read two ways: one, “I am as good as any regular classically trained musician” — fair enough. Or, as a somewhat needy (i.e. emotionally required) validation, achieved by association to the senior host musical foundation. It does appear to be trying to ride two horses at once.

Whatever the case, we can conclude that music is a significant vehicle for the development of identity: i.e. ‘self-invention’. If so then the musician who avows fidelity and respect to music with African-American roots, must tread carefully while negotiating with the ideological power of music that owes allegiance to the feigned neutrality of Western classical/industrialism. They risk being seduced, or are in a confused and compromised mind-set. One could expect some kind of psychological crisis. But, I suspect the subjects concerned here (and their like) actually feel privileged — this is the seductive power, the allure of assimilation. In which case, the only way conflict can be resolved is by having dual musical identities. Using whichever passport is the most useful at the time. I think this would equate to ‘opportunism’. Or, maybe a mild form of schizophrenia — tempered perhaps by the satisfaction of a perceived professional fulfilment.

This, I would argue, is as far as any symmetry between these musicians and the bebop innovators will stretch. They need an external authority to substantiate their position, and, this is precisely why they have found a welcoming and patronising accommodation with the conveners of British establishment standards: in this case the BBC. It would be useful for all to

contrast this treatment with how the BBC related to the historic concert given by the Albert Ayler Quintet in 1966.[13]

This position, whether consciously advanced or not, is the kind of toadying to authority which the 'free-jazz' progenitors, i.e. black American radical jazz musicians, would not have tolerated. Given the current 'Black Lives Matter' activism, one would have expected that respect and admiration would be afforded to the likes of Albert Ayler, Eric Dolphy, Ornette Coleman, Archie Shepp, or the more recent work of Charles Gayle and the William Parker alumni. These black American musicians espoused a much more active (and awkward to authority) 'civil rights' and/or alternative socio-cultural moral stance than many of the bebop generation. Why are the black heroes of free-jazz not as venerated, when they are also much closer historically and, I suggest, socially and politically? Whatever the alleged crudity of free-jazz, it reverberates more to the social, rhythmic and tonal idioms redolent of the African heritage.

One fears that the current self-proclaimed 'British Jazz Explosion' is more of a marketing invention. Happy to ally itself to radical tropes, but perhaps not quite so willing to walk the walk. I'm afraid all these conclusions arise in the preferred name of the said programme: 'Jazz 625' (2020 style). In other words: it strikes a sentimental retrospective pose. It also reveals a supine accommodation with the British elite establishment, whose cultural priorities are geared to keep the social realities exactly as they are.

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The history of jazz is fragmented, often partisan and sometimes confused. And, inevitably — as within this narrative — a broad brush has been applied. This obscures some of its discrete parts. Highly prized jazz moments are unique. There is a largely unspoken and valued paradox inherent in this situation, because the uniqueness of an individual's voice — say, Sonny Rollins' instantly recognisable saxophone sound — is cherished for its individuality, its aesthetic and social continuity. This is but one example where the two-haired brush stroke (as required for a miniature painting) is required in our depiction of this music. What this aesthetic duopoly reveals is the twin-imperatives which underlie the African-American experience. It resonates with the strategies for survival that black communities have always needed in the USA. Of course, I am aware of the examples of compromises that can be thrown at my account. The possibility of market success is ever-tempting. It

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[13] see supplementary on-line chapter, 'Unholy Ghosts — conspiracy theories and Albert Ayler'. This can be accessed through marchlessrecordings.com

contorts individual aspiration just as it can distort social cohesion. However, the jazz story contrasts (in my mind) more positively, than the hyper-individualistic ideology that posits and promotes competitive (dog-eat-dog) success over and above social considerations. This is the dominant counter-story that is promoted so actively in our current economic-political culture. Thus successful executions of music from the Western classical music repertoire, are valued most for their disciplined adherence to a prescribed outcome. What is applauded initially is fidelity towards the composition, which itself mirrors the anticipated ideal social construct, so preferred by our socio-economic betters.  Any idiosyncrasy is only ever tolerated in those few who have already proved themselves to be masters of the essential discipline of interpretation (of the masterplan).

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Taking a broad view of the long march toward social justice, we must be vigilant enough to notice the stratagems of the ruling authority. For, it is interesting to note (in 2020) how members of the most right-wing government and establishment that Britain has possibly ever had, are keen to mouth respect (if not active support) for ‘Black Lives Matter’. Just as they found themselves embarrassingly at the wrong end of public opinion over Marcus Rashford’s ‘food for children’ campaign, which, I note, was not hung on a black sectional banner. Although, of course, given that many in the black population are also part of the wider impoverished classes, black children would benefit from such action.

The majority of black members of our population are  descendants of the most cruelly served parts of the universal underclass. Their history is enshrined (and one might justly claim: besmirched) by their names. And, as far as the British experience is concerned, they share in the long march for social justice that stretches back to The Peasants’ Revolt, the Tolpuddle Martyrs, the Peterloo Massacre, slave revolts in the British West Indies and the distorted travesty of slave abolition, and beyond. This is the history Boris Johnson deflects from our attention with his bogus exaltation of ‘Great’ Britain’s glorious imperial past. Johnson is, of course, one of many liars and swindlers who wish to deceive. They suppress the wider, infinitely more diverse, national historical narrative while they gerrymander constituency boundaries, and suppress voting by demanding hitherto unnecessary proof of identity. The kind that would probably have disenfranchised my mother who, having never been abroad, did not possess a passport. And, they do this partly by making the hitherto passive and ordinary British people (the un-entitled) complicit in their fore-lock tugging social conspiracy. Think of the

callously cloaked contempt, and brass-necked nerve, of rewarding, social or cultural excellence, to the descendants of slaves, by offering them The Order of the British Empire! An audacious act of artificial assimilation, in which 'the honoured' is ritually pacified with a phantom place within a pretend social construct of mutuality. It's a kind of anaesthetised neutering, in which the subject is mocked with bogus bonhomie. But OBEs, and other like soporific social blandishments, should not be consigned to the putrid dustbin of British history. No: they should be kept as clearly labelled exhibits. To forget is to allow a slippery chameleonic hierarchy to continue throttling (kneeing on the neck of) justifiable claims for social equality and economic parity, necessary for emotional equilibrium and a fulfilled social life.

Along with the meaningless tropes of an honours system are the further traps of positive discrimination. These can be metered out according to the most pressing political skirmishes of the time. They come in smug bundles in whatever shape satisfies the easily placated egos of eager supplicants. They may be educational or cultural bursaries. Appointments to 'advisory' boards. Each of these are strategies to make the recipient feel part of the system, 'a valued member of society'. They feed vanity. And, are 'positive discriminatory' tools which effectively divide the most compliant recipient from the founding, nurturing part of a neighbourhood, community or cultural association, that is (allegedly) being so honoured. The effect, of course, is to distance and separate the successful candidates from the roots of their social or cultural endeavour (a strategy remarkably similar to the dissociative tools applied by the New World slavers). Given validation by a cadre of commissioners who (and despite protestations to the contrary) despise the new winners of the positive discrimination lottery. The real treasure is shared out elsewhere. Meanwhile, the 'apparent' (and often much publicised) gains, by a newly privileged sector of society, are angrily denounced by flag-shagging nationalists, as a loss for the amorphous rump they claim to represent. This all ends up as a loss all round. Except of course for the permanent ring-masters of this socio-political debacle which names itself 'Great Britain'.

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Let me end this naming, blaming farrago with an examination of one of the biggest naming frauds of all.

For the Romans, who eventually conquered the Britons, there were two centres of population for the unruly tribe they brought into *Pax Romana* (in which Britons were initially enslaved and then co-opted into the Roman Empire). These geographical locations are now referred to as Brittany and the

British Isles. This distinction informed the medieval historian Geoffrey of Monmouth to use the terms *Britannia minor* and *Britannia majo*r to distinguish Brittany from Britain.[14]

Thus we return to the great naming game. It is the tub-thumping grandiloquence of Boris Johnson's 'Great' as in imperialist grandeur, or, is it simply 'great' as in the larger of two related geo-political regions which, in the albeit distant past, had become a manacled nation? But then, what's in a name? More importantly, are the British people any freer now that they have 'taken back control'? Rule Britannia.

**bibliographical note**

Anyone who picks up a pen to (hopefully) write something sensible knows they owe much to what others have written. I guess we all have books that have influenced our deliberations. In my case, apart from the thoughts of Cornelius Cardew, there are four authors I feel have set my moral and intellectual compass. They are: the late American historian Eugene Genovese, noted for his studies of the American South and slavery; the biologist Edward Wilson, in particular his unification of knowledge thesis: 'Concillience', the all-to-few writings of John Blacking; and (perhaps particularly) the books of Christopher Small (1927 – 2011), especially his 'Music of the Common Tongue'.

I knew Christopher, a New Zealander who lived in London. He taught liberal studies at the then Ealing Technical College (now, I assume, part of the University of West London). Unlike my contemporary John Stevens, I was not one of his pupils but Christopher — despite the difference of age — was a quietly supportive presence to many in the early nascent days of London's experimental improvising community. We are all (even if we didn't know it) his musicking progenies. I have, albeit imperfectly, imbued and inherited many of Christopher's insights, and relished his confirmatory scholarship. I exhort you all to read, or re-read, his two wonderful books, *Music, Society and Eduction a*nd *Music of the Common Tongue.* All I can claim to have done is to bring certain features of the analysis he quietly, but passionately, shared with us all, up to date a bit. For, I rather think that the political narrative, since he pondered on these things, is now more negatively extreme than he could have imagined. Hence, there is more responsibility on those of us who fear for the future, but who continue to argue and music our way towards a more

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[14] Geoffrey of Monmouth (c. 1095 – c. 1155) was a British cleric and regarded as one of the major figures in the development of British historiography.

equitable social condition. All that I have contributed to the discussion, hitherto (especially regarding the history and influence of African-American music), is but a minor supportive footnote to Christopher's work. I just hope that I have been as good a free musicking example as he hoped we might be.

— end.
Eddie Prévost
June 2021

after-thought

What's in a name?

By the end of the Second World War British imperialist pretensions were finally called-out. Economic exhaustion through war effort; the demands for de-colonisation, and national independence; and for a new socio-economic settlement at home (i.e. The Welfare State). A much altered geopolitical situation in a nuclear age. These things argued for divestment, rather than advancement, or even protection, of empire. Jingoism was little more than a drunken, puerile wail in the face of glaring past inhumanities, and uncertain future realities. Such a volte-face was necessary with economic self-interest pushing British politics to accept a new, and (if possible) a face-saving, settlement to replace the old imperial tropes. It also contained a more empathic mood, an optimistic and civilising compact, in this new world order. This, to project and protect a Western liberal settlement that a British conservative conscience might just find palatable.

This, perhaps embodied in the development of the British Commonwealth, might be reasonably be framed as 'ethical egotism'. In other words, charity on a international scale, that is morally self-rewarding. This might also be an occasion, for non-British commentators, to feel the velvet touch of British hypocrisy.

There have, of course, been numerous examples of recidivist responses to 'loss of empire', manifested in Thatcherism and, more recently, by Brexit, with its attendant release from reason in international relations. Meanwhile, Britain still struggles with knee-jerk racism. Which holds, even in the face of attempts to assimilate, and accommodate social justice, especially for ex-imperial subjects who live (and thrive) in 'the motherland'. Here one wonders at the short-sightedness, or reluctance, of our ruling elite, to accept the realigned social realities. Somehow, (camouflaged, or suppressed) a nagging racial

bias continues to disturb any sense of social equilibrium. How else can one explain the offering of ‘imperial’ insignia of social honours to those with likely slave heritage? Is it an unwillingness to forego imperial dreams? For, it beggars belief that the founding narrative of the post-imperial attitudes, which we were led to believe informed the new equalities within a British Commonwealth, did not extend to its emblematic accoutrements. Given, the relative ease of converting the jingoistic celebration of ‘Empire Day’ into ‘Commonwealth Day’, why not ‘Orders of the British Commonwealth’?

Narratives should follow fact as well as aspiration. Empire is no longer a reality. Whereas, the concept of ‘Commonwealth’ still requires succour to sustain a more positive objective within the current (and evolving) social settlement.

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