

Some observations (in no particular order):

Folio's article on polyrhythm in jazz was informative in that it accounted for many of the stylistic characteristics and differences I hear in these three musician's playing and in their compositions. At the end of the article (132–133), she outlines these findings and indicates that different types of polyrhythm are reflective of different artists. While I was initially skeptical of these assignments, I believe Folio is using them generally and probably would admit that you could find each of her three types in all of these musician's playing, though to varying degrees. Both of Folio's articles directed attention to rhythm, which is such an integral part of good jazz, and this attention shows that Folio is keenly aware of its importance.

I do, however, have some questions and observations about her initial definitions and principles. (1) Folio defines polyrhythm in the same way that Maury Yeston does in *The Stratification of Musical Rhythm*. But in that book, Yeston deals exclusively with "classical" music (for lack of a better term). How does the different metrical environment, which is characterized by a completely different accentual pattern, alter our perception and analyses of polyrhythmic passages in jazz. I suspect that it doesn't change this perception very much. To me, it seems that off-beat accents in jazz are mostly, in Lerdahl and Jackendoff's terminology, *phenomenal*. Cadences, harmonic changes, and phrase beginnings generally occur on strong beats such that the *metrical* accents are still on 1 and 3. However, these accents are so much more mutable in jazz as they are dependent on the rhythm section, who can choose to follow or dictate whichever metrical context it wishes. At times, it seems that this mutability could greatly change our perception of polyrhythm.

(2) At times, I am uncomfortable with the notion that polyrhythm and tension are in a *one-to-one* relation. Folio expertly addresses the issue about perception of polyrhythm (as questioned by people like Justin London) by emphasizing that no matter “what can be perceived,” polyrhythms create “tension, an anticipation for resolution, and a sense of forward momentum. (111)” While I think she is generally right, I am not sure this is *always* the case. Personally, I find very complex polyrhythms, particularly those of the Type C variety (polytempo), to “flatten out” a metrical context such that I do not so much feel any increased tension, only metrical or tempo confusion. For instance, in Coleman’s “Lonely Woman,” the trumpet/saxophone, and the rhythm section seem to be co-existing in completely different tempi and metric worlds. When listening to them play, I don’t necessarily miss them playing in time together or even anticipate a coming reestablishment of straight-ahead 4/4. (If anything, I tend to ignore one strand and listen only to the most prominent.) Standard 3:2 polyrhythms, like those common in “hemiola cadences” in Baroque music, create tension because the half notes are heard *against* the established triple meter. In complex polyrhythms, neither strand seems to have any authority over the other, and I think that as a result, the tension is greatly diminished.

Samuel Floyd’s article very adeptly captured the cultural situation of jazz. Though I haven’t been a practicing jazz musician for a couple of years, I feel that many of the ideas that Floyd discussed are still very prevalent parts of jazz playing. In particular, community is an essential feature of the idiom that is brought out in his references to the “ring shout.” Floyd (and Gushee) comment on jazz as it relates to oral genres, like the African-American “Toast” and I see many similarities. Within jazz, rhetorically and figuratively “commenting on” or Signifyin(g)

upon other performers or performances is somewhat responsible for the growth of the idiom. (iTunes lists over 150 different recordings of, or comments upon, the standard jazz tune “All the Things You Are.”)

Despite Floyd’s often provocative observations about jazz and its relationship to African-American culture, I found his analytical observations quite uninteresting. Perhaps this is a personal bias against semiotic types of analysis, but I simply didn’t feel that Floyd’s approach emphasized the individuality of the pieces in question. To me, this is especially problematic as Floyd says that his approach is critical and interpretive. About “Black Bottom Stomp,” Floyd says the piece “is fraught with the referentiality that Gates describes as ‘semantic value,’ exemplifying (1) how performers contribute to the success of a performance with musical statements, assertions, allegations, questings, requestings, implications, mockings, and concurrences that result in the ‘telling effect’ . . . and (2) what black performers mean when they say that they “tell a story” when they improvise.” But, isn’t most good jazz like this? In my mind, this semiotic approach has the effect of identifying passages that Signify without detailing how these passage are connected and what exactly the Signifyin(g) relationship is and how it is projected. In his discussion of the Still’s “African-American Symphony,” Floyd follows Orin Moe, who says that the work is a “blues-dominated symphony rather than symphonically dominated blues” in which “the black materials fundamentally alter the inherited shape of the symphony” as the composer “bends the forms to control much of the musical flow.” In itself, the comment is very interesting but should require a substantial analytical investment. Instead, Floyd proceeds with a semiotic analysis that identifies the presence or lack of blues Signifyin(g) in passages from the symphony. Such an analysis can hardly get to the core of a statement as robust as that proposed by Orin Moe.