

Being bop: how the press shaped the cult of bebop

Thomas Turner

School of History, Classics and Archaeology, Birkbeck College, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HX
thomasturner@live.co.uk

Abstract

As the 1940s turned into the 1950s the popular image of the jazz musician shifted. The patriotic soldier jazzmen and wholesome mass entertainers of the war years were replaced by a conception of the jazz musician as a deviant who refused to conform to conventional tastes. Focusing on *Down Beat* and *Metronome*, this essay examines how this image was created in the popular jazz press of the late 1940s. The way these publications responded to the music and words of the young black musicians at the forefront of bebop helped shape an image of the bebop musician as an individual who stood outside musical and social norms, and who stood in contrast to the more respectable elements of 1940s swing. Carried to others through the press, bebop's style and image served as a model antidote to the conformity of the early years of the Cold War, and as bebop was entrenched as the basis of post-war jazz, what had been associated with just one section of the jazz community soon became associated with its whole. In this way, the styles the press had associated with bebop ceased to define a subculture of black musicians but came to embody and express a certain discontent with mainstream American society.

Keywords: bebop; journalism; press; sociology; style; subculture

Of all the moments in jazz's first century, bebop is one of the most studied. A musical shift associated with the effects of war, the spread of radical black politics and the coming of age of a generation disenchanted with the status quo, it is hardly surprising that it has drawn the attention of those eager to study the widely acknowledged starting point of post-war jazz (see, for example, DeVaux 1997; Gabbard 1995; Lott 1988; Morgan and Horricks 1956; Newton 1961: 203–9; Shipton 2001: 403–640; Wilson 1966). Yet despite the writing available, little attention has focused on the role of the press, how it related to bebop's development, and how instrumental it was in shaping the cult that developed as bebop spread beyond its birthplace of New York. By the 1940s, jazz was supported by a well-established infrastructure, and the jazz press was an integral part of the jazz establishment. This comprised the network of venues across the country, radio stations, record companies, well-known musicians and

a cadre of mostly white critics who reported on developments. Two major publications, *Down Beat* and *Metronome*, provided a regular update to seasoned professionals and hopeful kids across the United States and beyond, and so it is important that their contribution and role in jazz's development be assessed.

The press was not a unified whole, however. *Down Beat* and *Metronome* were in direct competition, and seemed never to miss an opportunity to put the other down. The two differed in physical format, *Down Beat* a fortnightly news tabloid and *Metronome* a monthly magazine, as well as style and content, which reflected the divergent views of their editorial staff and their perceived readers. *Down Beat* had been established in Chicago in 1935 on the crest of the swing wave and had grown steadily as the music increased in popularity. Focusing on news and reviews of the large, often white, dance orchestras that criss-crossed the country, by 1939 it reached a circulation of 80,000 and represented a respectable modern face of jazz (*Down Beat* 2006). Its main rival, based in New York, had started life in 1885 as a classical review, but by the 1930s had extended its remit to include popular bands and contemporary music. Reviews were longer, and more space given to special and light-hearted pieces than in *Down Beat*, though both covered many of the same performers. Staffed by men who blurred the boundaries between critic, fan, producer and performer, these magazines acted as an intermediary between their mass readership and the musicians at the higher reaches of the jazz world. Presenting an insider's viewpoint, what they said about the music mattered. These were influential opinion formers, their words a semi-official commentary on the state of jazz. Who read these magazines, however, is more difficult to define. *Down Beat* styled itself 'The Musician's Paper', and judging by the advertising for reeds, instruments and other patented musical paraphernalia, it would seem fair to suggest that both aimed at the thousands of professional and amateur musicians playing in dance bands in the 1940s, as well as those who simply enjoyed the music. Similarly, though both publications made a point of racial toleration, the majority of the bands covered were overwhelmingly white, and it is perhaps fair to suggest that this mirrored their readership.

Metronome, especially during the 1940s, was more open to new developments and while *Down Beat* maintained its traditional focus on swing, it became an early champion of bebop, reflecting its hometown and the preferences of its editors. This, however, needs to be placed in context. During the 1940s jazz underwent a process of self-redefinition. Bebop's emergence

marked a point where jazz musicians began to shift away from popular tastes and to define their music as art, but during the late 1940s it was in no way certain that bebop would become the basis for future developments. Through the decade swing of one form or another continued as a going commercial concern, which the press reflected. Bebop was a relatively minor, if hugely influential, side development within the music business, so it should not be surprising to find how infrequently it featured in the press, even in the more pro-bop *Metronome*. For every one page that featured a bebop artist, there were perhaps three or four, possibly more, that did not.

With little documentation beyond personal memories, the beginnings of bebop are therefore notoriously hard to unearth (see Ellison 1964: 199–212). Understandably, press stories that accompanied the emergence of bebop have been picked over by scholars and form the basis of accounts of the music's birth that themselves underpin other, later accounts.¹ There is inevitably an element of familiarity to many of these sources, but nevertheless, they withstand re-examination in their original context, and reveal more than a simple account of events. Together *Down Beat* and *Metronome* shaped popular opinions about jazz; what they wrote about bebop moulded public reaction to the music and coloured popular perceptions of jazz musicians. The way bebop was represented defined an identity of the jazzman that was as much about style and attitude as it was music. What they said helped create the image of the jazzman as an exotic outsider that became common during the 1950s, and which became a badge of identity among certain sections of the jazz community.

By the end of the 1940s, then, jazz's position in the popular imagination had shifted. The hugely popular swing of men like Glenn Miller, Artie Shaw and Benny Goodman had been seen as wholesome dance music, balm for a nation in times of war or economic distress, but as jazz entered the 1950s it was becoming associated with undesirable, disreputable and deviant tendencies at the limits of mainstream society (see Erenberg 1989; Gitler 1985; Stowe 1994). Championed by the Beats, post-war jazz became the soundtrack to a subculture that existed on the margins (see Ross 1989: 67–88). This shift was captured in Howard Becker's 1951 article 'The Professional Dance Musician and His Audience', which went on to form one of two defining examples in his influential book *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. Drawing on his expe-

1. Interviews from *Metronome* and *Down Beat* were used as source material in Shapiro and Hentoff (1955), which has been used widely as a source book by later historians.

riences as a jobbing pianist while a student in Chicago during the late 1940s, he found that Chicago's aspiring young jazzmen rejected popular and commercial music tastes as part of a more wholesale renunciation of mainstream American society (Becker 1963: 83–4). As a young sociologist looking for a subculture worthy of investigation, however, it is revealing that Becker opted for the dance musician. There was an element of practicality in choosing a group that he had easy access to, but his choice suggests that ideas already existed that placed these musicians at the outer limits of social acceptability, whether by their own intention or not. Becker the sociologist would not have entered into a study of a group that he did not consider a subculture, after all. His analysis suggested that idiosyncratic, unruly behaviour differentiated musicians from conventional norms, and that jazz provided an alternative way of life as much as it did a musical style to perfect. The 'hip' jazzmen disdained social orthodoxies to live by their own codes of behaviour, while their 'square' audiences conformed to the pressures of respectability, refusing to deviate from culturally ordained paths of behaviour. He quotes an unidentified musician: 'I'm telling you, musicians are different from other people. They talk different, they act different, they look different. They're just not like other people, that's all' (Becker 1951: 137).

The use of jazz and the hip poses associated with it as symbols of alienation reach a pinnacle in Becker's example of the 'X-Avenue Boys', 'a clique of extreme jazzmen who reject the American culture *in toto*' (Becker 1951: 142). For this group of wealthy young white men, jazz is part of a lifestyle that deliberately opposes more orthodox conservative values:

They associated almost exclusively with other musicians and girls who sang or danced in the night clubs...and had little or no contact with the conventional world. They were described politically thus: 'They hate this form of government anyway and think it's real bad'. They were unremittingly critical of both business and labor, disillusioned with the economic structure, and completely cynical about the political process and contemporary political parties. Religion and marriage were rejected completely, as were American popular and serious culture, and their reading confined solely to the more esoteric *avant garde* writers and philosophers. In art and symphonic music they were interested also in the most esoteric developments. In every case they were quick to point out that their interests were not those of conventional society and that they were thereby differentiated from it (Becker 1951: 143).

So how was it that jazz had come to signify opposition to mainstream values when just a few years earlier soldier jazzmen like Miller and Shaw

had been models of dutiful American manhood, the music they played the populist sound of America? How had the jazz musician, once America's favourite entertainer, come to be regarded as a social deviant? The answer lies in what it was that was defined as 'jazz'. It is clear from Becker's brief descriptions that these men aped and admired the bebop of Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Bud Powell and others, not the popular swing that dominated the charts. Becker's hornmen solo away from the melody, and perhaps influenced by Max Roach, one of the drummers he encounters, 'don't play a beat at all. All he uses the bass drum for is accents' (Becker 1951: 138, 141). His research coincided with bebop's peak in popularity in the late 1940s, when it was receiving relatively intense press coverage and its musicians were topping end of year polls.² Yet the musicians Becker interviewed were not the stars who featured in the popular jazz press, but youngsters making a living in dance bands. Knowing this, we might consider whether the behaviour he recorded was spontaneous, or whether these musicians followed models of behaviour established by others to align themselves with those more prominent than themselves. As Charles Nanry has shown, later generations of less successful musicians, most especially those studied by sociologists, used a hypothetical reference group of idealized jazzmen to define themselves and were caught up in a myth that was associated with only a small segment of those who identified themselves as jazz musicians (Nanry 1972: 171–2; see also Cameron 1954; Gleason 1958: 195–203; Leonard 1962, 1975; Merriam and Mack 1960).

This also raises questions about Becker's analysis, which is not as straightforward as it may seem at face value. As a musician and insider to the group he was studying, he reinforces the same ideas as his interviewees. Like those he wrote about, he is keen to emphasize or exaggerate the differences between the jazzman and the rest of society, and perpetuates, even glamorizes, his rebel image. The popular myths that seem to have influenced the behaviour of the young musicians seem also to have coloured the image he presents, with Becker as much involved in the process of identity creation and definition as his interviewees. However much Becker the musician and sociologist or his subjects may have wanted jazz musicians to be divorced from conventional society, later analysis

2. *Metronome* readers voted Gillespie's band Band of the Year, and Parker Influence of the Year in polls at the end of 1947 (*Metronome*, January 1948: 17–18; *Metronome*, January 1948: 22). *Down Beat* polls placed Parker second in the alto saxophone category, Gillespie third in the soloist category, Howard McGhee third in the trumpet category and Sarah Vaughn as the best female singer (*Down Beat*, December 31, 1947: 12).

has suggested that this is unlikely to have been the case (Harvey 1967: 34–42; Hughes 1974: 82–4; Martin 2005: 5–13; Nanry 1972: 171–4). Yet the questions remain: how had jazz musicians come to be regarded as outsiders worthy of sociological inquiry, and why had they started to define themselves in these terms? To find the answer, an investigation of the press and its reaction to bebop in the mid- to late-forties can be instructive. By looking at what was written it is possible to see how this imagined reference group might have materialized, and how post-war jazz became linked to social rebellion.

When the first bebop records started to filter out at the tail end of the war, the style was already fully formed. Wartime restrictions on shellac, the principal ingredient of 78 rpm records, the musicians' union recording ban between 1942 and 1944, and a public thirst for morale-boosting swing had ensured that its birth took place well off the radar of popular culture (see DeVeaux 1988). When the frenetic music developed by young musicians in after-hours jam sessions in Harlem nightclubs did arrive, the initial reaction of the press was generally incomprehension bordering on scorn. Identified most commonly at first with Dizzy Gillespie, the new style was both welcomed as an unusual break from the norm and derided as an over-flashy fad that endangered more established styles. In *Down Beat* it sat awkwardly with the categories used to classify reviews—Hot Jazz, Swing, Dance, Vocal and Novelty—and reviewers tempered their appreciation for musical exploration with distaste, making little secret of their dislike of the music (Lott 1988: 602). Gillespie's 'rather over-exhibitionistic style' was described in 1945 as 'too frantic to be worthwhile, though noteworthy for being a bit of fresh air in the otherwise too stagnant swing music of today' (*Down Beat*, December 15, 1945: 8; *Down Beat*, August 1, 1945: 8). Charlie Parker's 'Billie's Bounce'/'Now's The Time' were described the following year as 'excellent examples of...the bad taste and ill advised fanaticism to Dizzy's uninhibited style... This is the sort of stuff that has thrown innumerable impressionable young musicians out of stride, that has harmed many of them irreparably' (*Down Beat*, April 22, 1946: 15).

Reviews were only a small part of bebop's presence in the jazz press, however, and sat alongside news and opinion pieces. *Down Beat* seemed to associate it with forces that threatened not just the existence of what they considered true jazz, but also the physical and moral well-being of jazz fans. A news piece in 1946, headlined 'Zombies Put Kiss of Death on 52nd St. Jazz', criticized the hipsters associated with bebop, which by then had begun to feature in the clubs on 'Swing Street', and blamed them for

the street's decline as a jazz centre.³ For anyone keen to revolt against conventional society, however, the description of the 'zombies' could be read as a rebel hipster's instruction manual:

They come with their zoot suits, long haircuts, reefers and 'zombie' jive to night spots that feature top jazz talent. Soon they become the 'atmosphere' that pervades the spots. They...generally upset the morale of promising musicians with inflationary flattery. Keep the zombies away...they are lousing up jazz (*Down Beat*, February 25, 1946: 3).

Bebop was also blamed for jazz's decline by its most prominent superstar—Louis Armstrong—and as one of bebop's most high-profile critics *Down Beat* seized on his words. In April 1948 the paper printed a conversation with fellow old-timers Mezz Mezzrow and Barney Bigard in which he denounced bebop as 'the modern malice' and blamed the downfall of 52nd Street jazz on 'all them young cats...with their horns wrapped in a stocking' (*Down Beat*, April 7, 1946: 2–3). Coming from the elder statesmen of the jazz establishment, and reported in one of its pillars, comments like these reinforced bebop's position at the margins of the respectable, even within the jazz world. Perhaps even more damning, a front-page piece in *Down Beat* in 1947, 'Sympho Man Seeks Be-Bop—Bopped!', implied a link between bebop and the criminal underbelly of society. It described how Dr Otto Klemperer, 'famed sympho stick waver' and head of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, had been 'slugged and robbed by a couple of hoodlums masquerading as jazz fans' as he tried to find the after-hours spot in the city's 'Sepia section' at which Parker and Howard McGhee were performing (*Down Beat*, April 9, 1947: 1). Linking bebop to undesirable, deviant behaviour, the paper implicitly suggested that it was the antithesis of the respectable music embodied by bandleaders like Shaw, Miller and Goodman and no place for a man like Klemperer.

Yet just as prominence was granted to those seeking to criticize bop, the print press, more than any other format, also gave voice to bebop musicians. Although live broadcasts from New York clubs hosted by jive-talking hipsters like Symphony Sid could initiate listeners into some of the other elements associated with bebop, radio, a medium that *Metronome* editor Leonard Feather described as 'notoriously slow to progress', focused on the music rather than what musicians said or did (*Metronome*, January 1945: 16). Film

3. It should be noted, however, that two years previously *Down Beat* had welcomed Gillespie's arrival on 52nd Street (*Down Beat*, February 1, 1944: 1).

was similarly lacking, with only a few musical shorts of Gillespie and his bands recorded during 1947 and 1948 (Vail 1993: 76). Although they offered viewers a glimpse of the performers, they provided little insight beyond the music itself. The press, however, was a different entity. As a textual and visual medium, magazines provided a vehicle to expand upon the music and could provide readers with an extra layer of meaning. With description difficult, *Down Beat* admitted Gillespie's music was 'hardly describable through the medium of the printed word without recourse to highly technical terminology', the music was muted and musicians, critics or images were left to do the talking (*Down Beat*, February 11, 1946: 15).

Young bop musicians seized this opportunity and used regular interviews to make clear their views on music, art and life, providing an example for anyone keen to follow their lead. Most obvious was their refusal to accept the social limitations that had constrained an earlier generation of black musicians, and their demand that they be considered as more than entertainers. Many were united by a desire for their artistic worth to be taken seriously and a refusal to kowtow to white society. As Miles Davis later said, 'I wanted to be accepted as a good musician and that didn't call for no grinning, but just being able to play the horn good... Max and [Thelonious] Monk felt like that, and J. J. [Johnson] and Bud Powell too' (Davis 1990: 73). But while it provided a common bond, this sentiment conflicted with an older generation who had worked within the expectations of white society, helping explain the opposition of men like Armstrong, who Gillespie denounced as an Uncle Tom. Gillespie was scathing in his criticism of the Dixieland revival, which catered to white record collectors who had unearthed some of the (literally) toothless pioneers of early New Orleans jazz, and used a *Metronome* blindfold test in early 1947 to express his views and define his identity outside of popular conceptions. Mezzrow and Sidney Bechet's 'Gone Away Blues' prompted a vicious attack:

What *is* that? ... That must have been made in 1900... No harmonic structure here; two beats; bad rhythm, nothing happening; just utter simplicity, but how simple can you get? You can get a little boy eight years old to play that simple. I can't see how a man can spend his time learning to play a horn, maybe put in 30, 40 years at it, and then waste his time playing absolutely nothing. It doesn't make sense. No stars (*Metronome*, January 1947: 32).

Moreover, his assertion further down the page that Armstrong was not an influence on his playing implicitly challenged those who sought to draw a developmental line from New Orleans through swing to newer forms of

jazz. Gillespie's confusion reflected his belief that jazz should push forward to explore new territory, and was linked to his generation's refusal to play to the expectations of white audiences. Men like Bechet, playing the hot jazz of the Dixieland revival, were simply debasing themselves, minstrels for white patrons. On the other hand, it is likely that Gillespie was knowingly playing up to his image as a young rebel eager to smash conventions. Just as there was a certain knowing irony to his outlandish preference for horn-rims, berets and a goatee (even though he defended all three as being purely practical), it is possible that in his public pronouncements too Gillespie satirized popular expectations. Certainly his comrade-in-arms Parker was more diplomatic in his blindfold test eighteen months later, declaring somewhat grudgingly, 'I like Dixieland, in a way; I mean, I can listen to it—it's still music', though he too distanced himself from it (*Metronome*, August 1948: 14). Yet whatever the reasons behind statements like these, they helped define the public image of both bebop and Gillespie as its figurehead.

Similarly apparent was the considered intellectualism displayed by the musicians of the bop generation. Reflecting increases in educational opportunities for black children before the war, many were defiantly serious and rejected the public clowning of men like Armstrong. Parker may have been infamous for his offstage carousing, drug addiction and refusal to live by the rules of 'square' society, but in conversation with *Metronome* and *Down Beat*, he was studiously intellectual. Providing a model that would be followed by the X-Avenue Boys, he heaped praise on composers not usually associated with jazz. As with Gillespie, a *Metronome* blindfold test provided an opportunity for Parker to share his wider views. Correctly identifying Stravinsky's 'The Song of The Nightingale' he stated, 'That's music at its best. I like all of Stravinsky—and Prokofiev, Hindemith, Ravel, Debussy...and, of course, Wagner and Bach. Give that all the stars you've got!' (*Metronome*, August 1948: 14). Lennie Tristano would later say that Parker 'wanted to be recognised as an artist, not as an entertainer... He wanted to be recognised by composers' (Reisner 1962: 224). Knowing this, it is easier to understand why he so frequently drew parallels between himself, and his generation, and classical music. In an interview in summer 1947, he declared, 'it used to be so cruel to the musicians, just the way it is today—they say that when Beethoven was on his deathbed he shook his fist at the world; they just didn't understand. Nobody in his own time really dug anything he wrote' (*Metronome*, August 1947: 43). And in September 1949, *Down Beat* reported that, 'The closest Parker will come to an exact, technical description of what may happen

[to his music] is to say that he would like to emulate the precise, complex harmonic structures of Hindemith' (*Down Beat*, September 9, 1949: 1). If his behaviour was marked by a refusal to accept the limitations of society, so too, by likening himself to classical composers, Parker's cultural values broke with stereotypes that limited black musicians and placed jazz at a lower level in the hierarchy of the arts. Imposing himself into the classical musical tradition, he tore down distinctions between black and white music, and deliberately deviated from conventional understandings that limited black, and jazz, musicians.

In this Parker was not alone. Max Roach, described by *Down Beat* as 'bespectacled, scholarly looking Max', was similarly antithetical to expectations of the jazz performer and the polar opposite of showboating swing drummers like Buddy Rich and Gene Krupa (*Down Beat*, June 3, 1949: 6). Extolling the advantages of education, 'there's something to learn all the time', in interviews in 1948 and 1949 he, like Parker, turned conversation away from discussions simply about jazz in favour of his wider interests: 'We wanted to know what he thought of contemporary jazz musicians and jazz in general, but he kept veering off to the Russian modernists, Villa-Lobos, Schönberg's atonalism, and his enthusiasms were, like himself and his work, meticulous, ordered and carefully reasoned' (*Down Beat*, June 3, 1949: 6; *Metronome*, November 1948: 28).

Similarly, in a piece introducing the very young Miles Davis and Leo Parker to *Metronome* readers, Barry Ulanov wrote, '[They are] kids...but they're serious. And to them, as to their friends, being serious is half the battle. They divide all musicians into two groups, the "serious cats" and the "jokers"' (*Metronome*, July 1947: 19).⁴ It was clear that the young musicians who created bebop had established new standards by which they measured themselves and others, and that these standards had little to do with popular trends. As Ulanov reported, 'By their standards there are very few of the former [serious cats] and phonograph records full of the latter [jokers]' (*Metronome*, July 1947: 19).

Defining themselves against common preconceptions and prevailing trends, bebop musicians refused to allow themselves to be defined by others. It followed logically that many were deeply ambivalent about attempts to name and classify their music. Although he would later embrace the label, Gillespie stated in 1947 that he 'never use[d] the term bebop or rebop' (*Metronome*, January 1947: 41). Many viewed it as an

4. Davis was then 21, Parker 22.

attempt to denigrate the music. Parker, who stubbornly resisted attempts at categorization, told *Metronome*, 'let's not call it bebop. Let's call it music. People get so used to hearing jazz for so many years, finally somebody said "Let's have something different" and some new ideas began to evolve. Then people brand it "bebop" and try to crush it' (*Metronome*, August 1947: 44). Powell was similarly suspicious. Recognizing that the name did not reflect the values the musicians wanted to convey, he described it in terms that evoked images of slavery: 'It's unfortunate that our music has been shackled with the name "bop"... I wish it had been given a name more in keeping with the seriousness of purpose that stimulates invention in this form' (*Down Beat*, June 15, 1951: 16).

Like the black radicals in the nascent Nation of Islam who rejected their 'slave names', by publicly refusing the name their music had been given, young bebop musicians established themselves in symbolic opposition to a white dominated establishment that sought to categorize them. It is in this context that Parker's controversial 1949 *Down Beat* interview should be read. Under the front-page headline, 'No Bop Roots in Jazz: Parker', the paper reported:

'Bop is no love-child of jazz', says Charlie Parker. The creator of bop... told us that he felt that 'bop is something entirely separate and apart' from the older tradition; that it drew little from jazz and has no roots in it... 'It's just music', he said. 'It's trying to play clean and looking for the pretty notes' (*Down Beat*, September 9, 1949: 1).

Deliberately provocative, by claiming bebop existed separately from the jazz tradition, Parker reinforced its position outside the norms of the jazz mainstream, which had become dominated by the popular swing of white bandleaders. This time Gillespie was more diplomatic, stressing in an interview soon after that while bebop was a radical departure it was nevertheless part of a line that stretched back to New Orleans (*Down Beat*, October 7, 1949: 1). For Parker, however, his music was something new, unbound by the social and musical limitations that had tainted jazz in the swing era.

Yet while bebop musicians were eager to stress their seriousness, many press stories still exaggerated their eccentricity, fuelling the tales about the strange behaviour of the new breed of jazz musicians that were admired by Becker's interviewees (Becker 1951: 137–8). Numerous, frequently reproduced photographs of 'mad trumpet-man' Gillespie captured his 'characteristic hat, spectacles, goatee and slouch' and helped create a bop uniform that *Down Beat* parodied in cartoons (*Down Beat*, May 21,

1947: 15).⁵ Similarly, Parker was often shown in crumpled casual-wear that marked him apart from the sharp-suited entertainers of the swing era. When Blue Note Records caught up with the elusive Monk in late 1947, *Down Beat* helped create an aura of otherworldly mystery around his behaviour, placing him firmly outside conventional norms. Recounting their difficulty tracking Monk down and noting his sartorial preference for 'goatee, beret and heavy shell glasses...done half in gold', the paper quoted the manager of Minton's, Teddy Hill, on Monk's unusual working methods:

He's so absorbed in his task he's almost mysterious. Maybe he's on his way to meet you. An idea comes to him. He begins to work on it. Mop! Two days go by and he's still at it. He's forgotten all about you and everything else but that idea (*Down Beat*, September 24, 1947: 2).

In a second feature the following year, the paper did little to dispel their clichéd picture of an unconventional artist struck by inspiration, 'Ninety per cent of his time is spent at the piano, anybody's piano, sometimes for a week without sleep. Away from the keyboard he is usually asleep three days and nights at a time' (*Down Beat*, February 11, 1948: 11). The accompanying photographs of Monk wearing massive dark glasses and a dishevelled suit only served to increase his strangeness. In this way, a much larger audience were made aware of his ambivalence towards conventional social norms, and of his dedication to his art over everyday concerns. The eccentric, deviant behaviour that he was associated with, and his disdain for the routines of regular life, became a model that could be imitated by other aspiring bop musicians, or by those who simply refused to accept the rules of the mainstream.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the popular press, curious about the new subculture developing within jazz, was drawn to bebop almost as soon as it emerged. *Down Beat* reported in November 1945 that, 'Life Mag is interested in doing a pictorial layout on Gillespie...but seem to be at a loss for words' (*Down Beat*, November 15, 1945: 2). It took another three years for words to be found and the feature to become reality, but when it was published in October 1948 it brought bebop, in image and description if not sound, to American families who might never otherwise have encountered the radical musicians of Harlem. Similar to the magazine's occasional ethnographic pieces, the four-page feature reinforced bebop's exotic and

5. Bebop cartoons by Anderson appeared in *Down Beat* during 1948.

unconventional image. Opening with a full-page photograph of Gillespie mid-flow, his cheeks bulging to gigantic proportions, *Life* parodied the jive-talk of bebop musicians:

The biggest bebopper in the jazz world today is the muffin-cheeked trumpeter...who is shown in the act of becoming highly 'cool'. In the lingo of bebop this means that John Birks ('Dizzy') Gillespie is blowing a very hot trumpet. A 'killer' (i.e., he knocks the fans dead), he is obviously far 'gone' (lost in his music) as his neck swells from a normal size 16 to a bop size 20. Bebop is the new school of dischordant, offbeat jazz... (*Life*, October 11, 1948: 139).

This was hardly a serious investigation of the music, but it helped spread bebop's style to a far wider audience than the jazz press. The musicians featured, however, were complicit in the creation of the strange image that confronted uninitiated *Life* readers. The piece featured a step-by-step guide to a hilariously complex 'bebop handshake' between Gillespie and Benny Carter that Gillespie later described as 'a bunch of horseplay we went through so they could pretend we were something weird' (Gillespie 1980: 343):

Bebop greeting begins as Gillespie hails Benny Carter with 'Bells, man! Where you been?'

The sign of 'the flattened fifth', a note common in bop, is flashed by both men.

The shout 'Eel-ya-dah!' which sounds like bebop triplet notes, is next.

The grip establishes friendship, ends the ritual. Beboppers can now converse (*Life*, October 11, 1948: 139).

The accompanying pages showed photographs of Gillespie supposedly bowing to Mecca and 'frenzied drummer' Chano Pozo 'shouting incoherently [in] a bop transport' (*Life*, October 11, 1948: 141–2). Though Gillespie later regretted the session, especially the way he played with Islamic symbolism, it nevertheless helped create an image that stood in contrast to the wholesome Americana *Life* usually featured (Gillespie 1980: 343). Gillespie and his fellow musicians came to represent a way of life that was radically different from the conservative social and religious norms of late 1940s America.

Within the jazz world a series of inexpensive books that claimed to expose the intricacies of the subculture similarly brought the attitudes of

bebop musicians to readers. Advertised in *Down Beat* and *Metronome*, these included George Robinson's *How to Play Be-Bop*, sold for '\$1.50 postpaid in the USA', and Nard Griffin's *To Be or Not to Bop*, which *Down Beat* claimed should 'serve as a good handbook for the devotee of bebop' (*Down Beat*, March 25, 1949: 16; *Down Beat*, September 8, 1948: 20). Most influential was Leonard Feather's *Inside Bebop*, published in 1949. Claiming to be by 'America's No. 1 Be-Bop Authority', it built on Feather's knowledge of bebop's early development to offer readers an insider's view suffused with the romance Feather found in jazz (*Down Beat*, May 20, 1949: 6). A white expatriate Englishman, his portrait called on the myth of the unconventional artist persevering until public hostility turned to popular acclaim. In his version of events, bebop musicians, 'branded as outlaws, rebels or just plain nuts', are outsiders with a vision that others could not understand, pushing on regardless of criticism, oblivious to the demands of those outside their circle (Feather 1949: 4). Late-night jam sessions in the dilapidated backrooms of Harlem nightclubs provide sanctuary from public rejection and stand in stark contrast to the swish hotels that hosted the big swing orchestras of the late-thirties and early-forties (Feather 1949: 6-7). In Feather's eyes, beboppers simply ignore social conventions where they conflict with their own aims; these are men 'to whom playing and talking and thinking meant more than eating and drinking' (Feather 1949: 26). The book was influential. Its account of bebop's early years formed the basis of several later works, prompting Feather to complain that his words were the most plagiarized in jazz (Feather 1977: Introduction).⁶ With technical and musical illustrations, and a portrayal of the bebop life, it made bebop available to readers in a similar manner to *Life*. Not only spreading the musical style, books like Feather's fuelled the myths behind the bebop cult that developed in the late forties, and helped create popular versions of the sartorial and linguistic styles associated with the music. Even more than the occasional news report, they offered instruction in how the ideal hipster should behave. Sitting alongside the jazz press, they enabled disillusioned but ordinary young men across the country to copy the attitudes and behaviour of men like Gillespie, Parker and Monk to differentiate themselves from those around them.

That this was happening by the late-forties is suggested by coverage in *Down Beat* and *Metronome*. The radicalism of bebop's style clearly reso-

6. That Feather's *Inside Bebop* was re-titled *Inside Jazz* when reprinted in 1977 is indicative of the influence it, and bebop, had in creating a perceived identity of the jazzman.

nated with elements of white youth left cold by the sterility of the postwar, pre-rock 'n' roll, pop market, with its crooners and fading swing orchestras. An exciting new sound identified with urban African-American musicians, it offered a rebellious contrast to the comfortable middle-class suburban ideals and increasing conformity that were descending on Cold War society. Fans were quick to adopt the hipster style that the press associated with Gillespie and others, and as the process took hold in 1948 *Metronome* reported with glee that:

All over America, young boppers who had never worn a hat donned the Dizzy cap: young boppers, who had never been able to raise a sufficient hirsute covering to prove their age, struggled with chin fuzz in an attempt to build the Gillespie goatee: young boppers with their own little bands began to lead from the waist and the rump; some, with perfectly good eyesight, affected the heavy spectacles (*Metronome*, January 1948: 17–18).

Two years earlier, and on the other side of the fence, *Down Beat* had viewed the same 'Dizzy effect' with alarm:

[H]is followers have been trying to act like Dizzy...! Musicians wear goatee beards because Dizzy wears a goatee beard; musicians wear...ridiculous little hats...because Dizzy wears one; musicians have started to laugh in a loud, broken way because that's the way Dizzy laughs; musicians now stand with a figure 'S' posture, copying Dizzy who appears too apathetic to stand erect—and so on down the list. Surely this *copycatism* does nothing for the Dizzy fan (*Down Beat*, February 11, 1946: 14).

The paper regarded bebop, and especially the hip social codes that went with it, as a corrupting influence that endangered the spirit of jazz and alienated it from mainstream popularity. *Down Beat*, voice of the respectable middle ground, perhaps recognized that bebop was taking jazz down a path away from the mainstream respectability and popular success it had won during the 1930s back toward the less salubrious reputation it had during the 1920s. Moreover, the success of bebop came at a time when the large swing orchestras were in a state of steady decline, with musicians in less well-known bands finding it difficult to find employment. As audiences deserted big bands in favour of small groups, the rawer sound of rhythm 'n' blues, or other leisure activities like television, bebop's emphasis on small bands of virtuoso insiders only made life harder for the legions of journeyman musicians who made up the readership of *Down Beat*. It is unsurprising, then, that musical developments,

which had far wider personal economic effects, should have been viewed with suspicion by the overwhelmingly swing-focused music profession in the 1940s. When Gillespie suggested in 1948 that young musicians needed to learn the more orthodox rudiments of music, rather than focusing simply on bebop, *Down Beat* pounced and printed his comments as front-page news, reassuring support for their conservative position from the leading bebopper himself (*Down Beat*, November 17, 1948: 1). Bebop was regarded as a force that threatened to taint the name of all jazz musicians, as had been suggested when it was blamed for 52nd Street's decline. On the flip-side to this, there may have been an element of self-interest to *Metronome's* promotion of bebop, given Feather's involvement with it as a record producer, concert promoter and occasional musician. Yet even they found space for voices critical of those fans who were more interested in hipster attitudes than developing the music. Perhaps unwittingly contributing to the spread of the bebop stereotype, Lennie Tristano complained in 1947:

These young boppers spend most of their time acquiring pseudo-hip affectations... A typical manifestation peculiar to them is their *effort* to appear completely relaxed... They gaze indifferently at the uninitiate through drooping lids, muttering, 'It's cool, Daddy-o' (*Metronome*, June 1947: 16).

One of the earliest indications that young musicians were copying their more successful counterparts can be found in a news item headlined, 'Jazzmen Endanger Jobs by Stupid Actions', reported from Chicago by *Down Beat* in 1946 (*Down Beat*, April 8, 1946: 3). Raising the tantalizing possibility that *Down Beat* had stumbled across the same musicians as Becker, perhaps even the X-Avenue Boys, it recounted the case 'of an excellent four-piece combo that was given their notice at a Loop drinkery on practically opening night' because, 'Few ballads were heard, fewer current hits. Requests were grinned off. Rhumbas—gad no, how square!' Here we see the beginnings of the pattern Becker found, aspirant jazzmen who disliked and refused to play the commercial music their patrons wanted and who were set apart by their attitude toward mainstream tastes. Linking this to bebop, the paper advised musicians to, 'play with a reasonable facsimile of the melody. Play a lot of pretty jazz, not the Gillespie-type stuff 'cause *you* probably don't know what Gillespie is all about, let alone the squares'. By opting for the radical sound of bebop over the popular ballads, hits and rhumbas that their audiences wanted, these young musicians deliberately and consciously placed themselves outside mainstream society. Of course

it is all but impossible to know whether these were the X-Avenue Boys but it is hard not to see the similarity. In both cases we see how bebop, as it spread, became about more than simply musical tastes, and became closely tied to unconventional behaviour.

So, as bebop's popularity grew, what initially was a reaction by young black musicians against restrictive social and musical conventions came to denote social non-conformism in general (Jones 1963: 187–8). White fans who adopted the attitudes of the bebop hipster deliberately rejected the mainstream of American society, their behaviour indicative of a conscious non-conformity. The rebellious poses they struck, however, were based on images that had developed in the press, in particular *Down Beat* and *Metronome*, and it was through these publications that they spread across the country. Without them, bebop would have remained a radical musical movement, but lacking the primary means by which its wider cultural values were transmitted, it would not have come to symbolize a rejection of the mainstream in quite the way Becker found and reinforced. Young musicians might still have imitated what they heard on records, but would have found it more difficult to fix an idealized picture against which to identify themselves. The image they did find was the creation of jazz critics, who, concerned about the apparent decline of jazz and finding it difficult to assimilate bebop into their conception of the music, pushed it to the boundaries of the respectable music scene, and of young black musicians who used the press as a means to communicate their radical philosophy and reinforce their difference from previous generations. Throughout the decade the press focused overwhelmingly on popular swing; when bebop appeared it was an unconventional alternative to more established styles. To fully comprehend the growth of the cult of bebop in the late-forties, it is necessary to not only understand the revolutionary nature of the music played by Parker and Gillespie, but also to understand the music press that introduced them to a wide audience. Choosing what, and how, events in the jazz world were portrayed, the press in the 1940s played a crucial role in shaping trends and, in the case of bebop, created a cultural style that would soon be adopted by disillusioned young men and women across America.

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