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# Haitian *Djaz* Diplomacy and the Cultural Politics of Musical Collaboration

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Music has never comprised a cornerstone of US diplomatic negotiations around the world. As John Brown states, "A neglected aspect of our cultural diplomacy—at least as our foreign interlocutors see it—has been the poverty, both quantitative and qualitative, of its artistic dimension."[1] Nevertheless, some renowned artists were sent abroad in the 1950s Cold War era, when the US State Department sought to win over emerging nations to the "Western" side.[2] Having the State Department officially express its support for jazz was seen as a major milestone for arts recognition, and it prompted *Down Beat* magazine to hail it "a Utopian dream come true."[3] The phrase "jazz diplomacy" most often refers to this Cold War effort on the part of the US government to promote an anticommunist message during the 1950s and 1960s.[4]

But there have been more recent applications of jazz as a cross-cultural diplomatic tool. Jazz takes on different forms according to the cultural context in which it is found, as practitioners redefine and reconstruct what it means to be a "jazz" musician. The Haitian Creole word "*djaz*" often signifies popular dance music and the bands that perform it. *Djaz* bands perform in styles with origins in Haiti and the broader African diaspora. *Djaz* is also ascribed moral-spiritual value. While many see it as a strong marker of cultural identity, some Haitians—especially conservative Protestant Christians—take exception to it on theological grounds, arguing that its associations with

secular dancing render it spiritually harmful. Among the things that fascinate me are the shifting meanings of *djaz* depending on who uses the term and for what purpose.[5] In this essay, I use "*djaz* diplomacy" to signal the active role that Haitian musicians play in renegotiating the meaning of "jazz" in contemporary local and global contexts.

On 12 January 2010, much of Port-au-Prince, including most church buildings, homes, and the National Palace, were devastated or severely damaged in a massive earthquake. Most of my fieldwork in Haiti took place prior to that catastrophic event, but I have since been back to Haiti several times, including a trip just five months after the earthquake to conduct music workshops in the provinces and a concert for members of a Baptist tent-church in the resettlement camp that was being overseen by actor Sean Penn. I was invited by pianist Aaron Goldberg, who had visited Haiti a year prior during the 2009 Festival and with whom I would return to Haiti for the 2011 International Port-au-Prince Jazz Festival (*Festival Entènasyonal Djaz Pòtoprens*). By examining this festival, along with the events leading up to it, I hope to shed light on the role of cultural politics and *djaz* diplomacy in the musical collaborations that cut across social, national, and theological boundaries.

Against the backdrop of simmering frustration over the apparent ineptitude of NGOs and foreign aid workers, *djaz* performances present valuable ethnographic case studies for understanding the role of musical appropriation and cultural diplomacy in the wake of an ongoing national disaster and humanitarian crisis. The International Jazz Festival in Port-au-Prince, in particular, serves as a showcase for cultural diversity and intercultural cooperation. From a US perspective, it is also a way of "telling America's story" to Haitians, albeit almost exclusively to members of the country's middle and upper classes. In a variety of other contexts, the cultural politics of musical performance intersects with concerns about Haitian authenticity, and controversies about the role of religion. Moreover, issues of foreign contamination become highly politicized when applied to Haiti's complex sociosonic landscape. Musicians are often faced with the challenge of negotiating competing discourses about the value of collaborating musically across socially and theologically constructed boundaries. In what ways do *djaz* performers in Haiti use their craft as a form of musical diplomacy to navigate these discourses? The Festival, in particular, provides a window into the nature of creative collaboration between Haiti and the United States. How do local Haitian perceptions of musical belonging and ownership influence stylistic decisions made in performance and broader expressions of cultural nationalism? Finally,



what does it mean to assert, in accordance with the Festival theme, that "Haiti is stronger with jazz"? And to what extent does this assertion resonate with historical narratives that ascribe specific cultural origins to jazz as a musical art form? These questions have guided the research that animates this essay.

I begin by providing historical context for musical exchange and diplomacy in Haiti, using the American occupation (1915–34) as a starting point from which to consider the cultural politics of collaboration between Haitian and African American artists, activists, and critics. I then explore *djaz* diplomacy from my perspective as a saxophonist performing with professional Haitian and North American musicians. In many respects, my coperformers and I served as musical diplomats by performing improvisatory musics shared by US- and Haitian-born artists. Musical diplomacy, as I conceive it, involves the critically important work of negotiation—of deploying creativity, skill, and tact to play both within and across social, theological, and national divides.[6] To what extent, I wonder, is musical collaboration across such ostensibly rigid conceptual boundaries possible? My work with popular dance band Tabou Combo serves as a case study for the incorporation and renegotiation of musical style. Throughout my time in Haiti, I have found that religious debates often shape *djaz* performances and the discourses that surround them. I suggest that these discourses parallel what has historically taken place in African American church contexts, where jazz was deemed culturally unrefined and sinful.

## NEGOTIATING DIASPORIC CONNECTIONS

When American Marines first arrived in Haiti in 1915, they encountered a social and musical landscape that differed in significant ways from their own. The all-white contingent of US troops brought with them racist preconceptions and showed little comprehension of Haiti's complex racial hierarchy. Given the prevailing attitudes of the US South during the early twentieth century, it is not surprising that they viewed all Haitians as inferior. The American occupation was condemned by Haitian and black US intellectuals as an affront to Haiti's hard-won sovereignty. Yet one interesting by-product of the occupation was the emergence of jazz introduced to urban Haitians by US troops. There were other avenues of influence as well. From the early twentieth century, many elite Haitians had begun sending their children abroad to study. Young Haitian musicians in Europe often found opportunities for cross-cultural collaboration and jazz improvisation. For example,

Haitian saxophonist Manfred Coxcito worked with African American violinist and bandleader Will Marion Cook in London in 1919.[7] Paris was also a significant source of jazz exposure, as Haitians educated there brought back to Haiti dances such as the Charleston, along with knowledge of black music styles from the United States, which had gained popularity among the French. Saxophonist Bertin Dépestre Salnave was a major figure. His group, Jazz de la Coupoule, was the first Haitian band to record.[8] Salnave found inspiration from New Orleans-born saxophonist Sidney Bechet, with whom he worked in London.[9] Haitian musicians who returned home brought back with them their knowledge of jazz styles and helped to disseminate them to local performers.

The occupation also took place during a time when the global recording industry was beginning to take off. Jazz records made in the United States and Europe were imported into Haiti and were played in dance clubs. With the growing popularity of jazz in Haiti, "the creolized form of the word jazz, *djaz*, came to signify any large dance band."[10] Over time, the popularity of the Haitian dance genre known as the *mereng* began to wane, as audiences and musicians gravitated toward the style and instrumentation of the African American bands gaining visibility in the United States and France. While it is tempting to view this development as evidence of the hegemony of African American jazz in Haiti, the progressive aspects of the Harlem Renaissance may have served as an incentive for Haitian intellectuals to align themselves with jazz. As Averill explains, the meaning of *djaz* "cannot be reduced to simple mimicry": "The power relations between the United States and Haiti during the occupation certainly helped to popularize American dance music, but Haitian partisans of jazz also seemed to be exploring an African-American musical kinship, a relationship between musics of 'diasporic intimacy.'"[11] Indeed, we might view the term *djaz* as emblematic of social and political actions that transcended both the domain of musical practice and the borders of the Haitian nation-state. Ethnomusicologist Michael Largey highlights the strong links between Haitian and African American composers, political activists, and cultural commentators. African American figures such as W. E. B. Du Bois, William Grant Still, James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, and Zora Neal Hurston saw Haiti as an inspiration for artistic creations and political stances that made reference to Haiti's history as the first black-led independent nation in the hemisphere. Many African Americans even viewed Haiti as an alternate "homeland" in the first half of the nineteenth century, and Jean Price-Mars's push for Haitian educational reform borrowed, in turn, from Booker T. Washington's ideas about technical education.[12] Many African American leaders were outspoken about what they deemed an unjust occupation of Haiti by US military forces. And the occupation coincided with a tremendous uptick in Black Nationalist activity in the United States, buoyed in part by the NAACP and influential figures such as Du Bois and Johnson. In 1920, Johnson spent three months in Haiti investigating the role of US troops there. He found a plethora of abuses and issued a report that advocated Haitian sovereignty and amplified the scathing critiques voiced by Haitians and African Americans. Johnson was particularly critical of the brutality of US Marines and what he called the "dollar diplomacy" of the United States, undergirded by a State Department policy invested in maintaining control of Haiti's National Bank.[13]



The influence of North American jazz was no less evident in post-occupation Haiti. Groups such as Jazz des Jeunes were part of a wave of "Vodou-Jazz ensembles" that had sprung up in Haiti in the post–World War II period. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, many other Haitian groups used the word "Jazz" in their titles. There were groups entitled Jazz Duverge, Jazz Hubert, Surprise-Jazz, Dynamique Jazz, and so forth.[14] Like their rival band, Orchestre Saïeh, Jazz des Jeunes drew on local styles while also incorporating the sound of big band jazz from the United States. Yet Jazz des Jeunes was known for embracing a nationalist ideology that opposed foreign influence, even while using the English-language spelling "jazz." Matthew Smith notes that Jazz des Jeunes built a reputation by "integrating traditional vodou rhythms into their musical structure."[15] Averill reports that the group "demeaned various competitors whom they saw as less authentic, less *natif natal* (native born)" and that they saw the use of traditional Vodou rhythms as a mark of Haitian authenticity.[16]

Negotiations of foreign style (*stil blan*) and national identity were a major characteristic of Haiti's popular music scene in the postwar era. Although both Jazz des Jeunes and Orchestre Saïeh revealed local and foreign musical influences, Averill writes that the latter group was "considered less authentic" because of their reliance on a North American sound ideal. The competition between Jazz des Jeunes and Orchestre Saïeh "encompassed conflicts of class, race, and authenticity."[17] In particular, Orchestre Saïeh was known for its "sophisticated" and "polished" arrangements and "lush jazz harmonies," which drew in more obvious ways from jazz ensembles in the United States. Orchestre Saïeh also gleaned information from African American jazz musicians such as saxophonist Budd Johnson and pianist Billy Taylor, whom the group's leader, Issa el Saïeh, brought to

Haiti to conduct workshops.[18] In his autobiography, Taylor notes that Saïeh was keen on "exposing the people of Haiti to the latest in American jazz... So we were playing in clubs and doing bebop clinics, and the people were very receptive and excited about it."[19] Reflecting on his 1949 trip to Haiti, Taylor also recounts an interesting bit of musical interplay between his African American drummer, Charlie Smith, and a local drummer named Tiroro: "It was the kind of percussive dialogue that you had to actually see to believe! The Haitian ignited the air with impossible rhythmic feats, and Charlie fired back with riveting explosives of his own. To be caught in the musical crossfire of these two geniuses was an excitement that I still have difficulty putting into words."[20] This "percussive dialogue" between Haitian and African American "jazz" musicians exemplifies the kinds of musical interplay that would continue to take place in subsequent decades until the present day.

While New Orleans is often described as the birthplace of jazz, scholars have long noted the influence of musical styles not only from elsewhere in the United States, but also from a variety of Caribbean cultural spaces. Pianist Jelly Roll Morton (1890–1941), who claimed to be the inventor of jazz, was of Haitian descent and had strong family ties to the practice of Vodou. Born Ferdinand Joseph Lamothe, Morton brought his spiritual sensibilities into his musical compositions. As Douglas Daniels writes, Morton "kept alive... Haitian and West African dance traditions" through his music.[21] While the myth of a single line of development from New Orleans to the rest of the world persists in some circles, the historical ties and geographical proximity to events and places in the so-called New World require that we place jazz in a much broader analytical context. John Storm Roberts also notes the likelihood of Haitian cultural influence on blacks in the United States. He notes "the existence of locale creole songs with clear links to the French-speaking Caribbean" and argues that Haitians migrating to the United States in the nineteenth century contributed to the "Caribbeanization of Franco-New Orleans music."[22] Thus, despite the difficulty I had establishing bonds via a shared African diasporic identity, I recognize like others the potential of *djaz* to form a bridge between African American and Haitian musical communities.

A 2013 article in the *Miami Herald* announced, "If New Orleans is the city where jazz was born, then Haiti is the place where it is being reborn but with a distinct Caribbean flavor. Called Creole jazz, it often joins traditional Vodou rhythms, conga drums and classical jazz chords."[23] The article served to announce the 2013 Port-au-Prince



International Jazz Festival, which would be headlined by African American saxophonist, and New Orleans native, Branford Marsalis.[24] Marsalis was, in many respects, a fitting choice for the festival because of his New Orleans roots. He embodies the global and African diasporic connections the festival organizers sought to highlight. First held in 2007, the festival is heralded as a bridge to the world, a way of improving Haiti's cultural visibility and promoting Haiti as both a giver and receiver of valuable musical resources. Similarly, the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival has foregrounded African diasporic connections, particularly those that exist between Louisiana and Haiti. Commenting on the 1996 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, Richard Brent Turner notes that it "re-creates the spiritual and musical connections between Haiti and Louisiana by showcasing the music and culture of Haiti in its first International Pavilion."[25] One of the curious things about the *Miami Herald* article and similar writings is that it casts jazz in Haiti as a forgotten musical treasure—as an artifact that is only recently being "reborn" but with a "distinct Caribbean flavor." Yet as we have seen, neither jazz (as the term is used to denote African American derived improvisatory genres such as bebop and swing), nor *djaz* (referring to Haitianized versions of the same) represent a new phenomenon in Haiti. Indeed, jazz and *djaz* have long histories in Haiti and the United States, and they have also been somewhat controversial forms of expressive culture. In many cases, to perform them is to make a theological statement or to construct a moral divide based on musical sound and the contexts of its performance. Throughout my fieldwork, I discovered Haitian musicians who strived to negotiate stylistic preferences with the demands of their Christian faith. Controversies surrounding *djaz* in Haiti often stem from attempts to reconcile the music's ties to "authentic" Haitian identity with its associations with a lifestyle that church leaders describe as unbecoming of a Christian believer. It is to this aspect of *djaz* negotiations that I now turn.

## PARALLEL CONTROVERSIES: NEGOTIATING SONIC THEOLOGIES IN THE UNITED STATES AND HAITI

I remember well the surprise I felt the first time I learned that jazz was a less than desirable form of music in Christian church settings. I was told that by continuing to embrace jazz, I would be living outside of God's will. "Music is worship," one preacher matter-of-factly declared, "so don't listen to jazz and don't have anything to do with it." In

his view, music could only serve one of two functions: it either glorified God, or it amounted to devil worship. To my chagrin, jazz fit in the latter category. Although I knew that some Christians considered certain genres of secular music unhealthy, I'd never expected labels such as "sin" and "devil worship" to be applied to the jazz music I considered a high art form. Such sentiments are by no means unusual in African American Protestant churches, where preachers sometimes claim that certain rhythms, melodies, and timbres are inappropriate or sinful because of their similarity to sounds associated with nightclubs. There is, in fact, a long history of perceived incompatibility between the music of black churches in the United States and genres such as jazz and blues, jazz, R&B, and rap, which some churchgoers label "the devil's music." Writing about the social experiences of early-twentieth-century blues artists in the United States, Giles Oakley says that "for a large portion of the [African American] community, the blues was still the devil's music, the music of immorality, licentiousness, eroticism, whisky-drinking, juke joints, low-life, violence, a source of corruption and the harbinger of social disruption."[26] To this day, within the realm of sacred black musical expression, debates often center on what Timothy Rommen refers to as "the ethics of style," as musical performances incorporate an ever-widening pool of expressive resources.[27]

When I moved to New York in 1994, I began working as a saxophonist in jazz groups as well as in the horn sections of Haitian *djaz* bands playing a form of dance music known as *konpa*.[28] During this phase of my career, I began to think seriously about the intradiasporic relationships between Haitians and African Americans. As I pursued a deeper study of Haitian music and culture, I took note of the emotional impact that *konpa* had on those who attended concerts and festivals. This genre, which "has become a symbol for Haitians in Haiti and the diaspora," emerged following the rock-and-roll craze that swept the globe in the 1960s, when dance bands began to downsize and call themselves *mini-djaz*.[29] I would eventually discover that it is negotiated and reconstructed in a variety of ways.

Based in and around New York City, Tabou Combo is one of the most famous dance bands to emerge from Duvalier-era Haiti. The band almost always used young North American horn players to supplement their core membership, which had remained mostly intact since the group's inception in the late 1960s. In the mid-1990s, I began playing saxophone and writing horn arrangements for this renowned group, after having spent a couple of years working with Phantoms, one of many *nouvel jenerasyon* (new generation) *djaz* bands also based in the Haitian diaspora. By the time I visited Haiti with Tabou Combo, I



was accustomed to the music's infectious rhythm and the enthusiastic fans who recognized Tabou Combo as international superstars. While working with Tabou Combo, I noticed that the band's leaders often expressed an affinity for the jazz I knew best, especially bebop-style melodic lines, and they wanted me to implement that style into the horn lines I was composing and arranging for the band while we were on tour. They admired the virtuosity of African American jazz masters such as Charlie Parker and John Coltrane, and strived to set themselves apart from other *konpa* bands by showcasing the strength of their rhythmic groove and also horn section arrangements that were more sophisticated than those typically used by Haitian dance bands.[30]

Yves Joseph, one of Tabou Combo's founders, has noted, "We've always been influenced by all different kinds of music... Because our goal is to be international. We've always been criticized by the purists of compas music, saying that Tabou Combo is like more of a rock-compas band, and this is exactly what we want, to put us into the international map."[31] It is interesting that the critiques Tabou Combo faced in the 1970s are so reminiscent of those launched against Orchestre Saïeh three decades prior. In both cases, the incorporation of foreign styles led some observers to challenge the "purity" and "authenticity" of the bands. Once the members of Tabou arrived in the United States in the early 1970s, the influence of African American popular music became more profound. As Joseph continues,

> If you pick up a Tabou Combo record from 1974, '75, you're gonna listen to a lot of James Brown... Because we were influenced very much by the James Brown era. To tell the truth, we always follow like a parallel track with the American music. For example, we didn't have horns at first; horns came around Earth, Wind & Fire and the Commodores era.[32]

The stylistic influence of these bands is also discernible on Tabou's album covers from the 1970s and early 1980s, notably *Tabou Combo Superstars* (1978) and *Bolero Jouc Li Jou* (1981).

During tours with Tabou Combo, I observed some experiential similarities between charismatic Christian worship services and the concerts in which we played. In both situations, participants place a premium on lively musical expression, generating energy or "heat" that marks the success of the event. In the most intense moments, the heat flowing from the performers to the crowd and among all those who danced and sang along was capable of producing spiritual manifestations. Some band members once told me that a Vodou spirit manifested itself

during a concert in the late 1990s. During other *konpa* concerts, I have witnessed participants lose control of themselves to the point that they had to be restrained or carried away by other audience members. As I observed audience behavior while playing in Tabou Combo's horn section, I often reflected on the claim made by some Christians that music and worship are inseparable. Disagreeing with characterizations of secular music as "devil worship," I had chosen rather to view *konpa* concerts as simple entertainment. But could secular *konpa* be spiritually neutral? Already struggling with these types of issues throughout my performing career, I found that they took on a heightened relevance once I began conducting ethnomusicological research in Haiti. My dissertation research took me there to explore music in Christian churches and the debates over musical style. As it turned out, a referential slipperiness between jazz, as characterized by African American performers such as Parker and Coltrane, and *djaz*, as it refers to the Haitian dance music known as *konpa* or to the bands that perform it, became a common source of discussion. Within many Protestant churches, *djaz* evokes controversy. Objections, usually voiced by pastors, are based on the fact that *konpa* is played in nightclubs where "unholy" behaviors, such as drinking, smoking, social dancing, and fornicating, are believed to find support. However, "American" musical forms such as jazz tend not to be stigmatized. As I will explain, sometimes value, rather than stigma, is attached to genres perceived to be of foreign origin. There are, in fact, some Christians who will accept jazz (from the United States) but reject *djaz* (from Haiti).

Tensions surrounding sonic locality are inextricably tied to understandings of spiritual power. This is, in part, because of the popularity of so-called Vodou-Jazz groups, such as Foula, which emerged in the 1980s and merged the rhythms of Carnival music and Vodou ceremonies with the commercialized popular dance music.[33] Consequently, such music creates a cultural and ethical dilemma for Haitians who profess allegiance to Protestant Christianity or see themselves religiously at odds with Vodou. Haitian Christians with whom I have spoken also frown upon *konpa* featuring lewd lyrics that encourage some listeners to dance in sexually provocative ways. I would say there is a nervousness regarding songs that carry with them an "attractive power"—an appeal to move one's body freely and to "let yourself go" (*lage kò'w*). Some, however, object strongly to *konpa* even when played as an instrumental genre or used to support Christian lyrics during church services. During a church service I attended in 2004, the pastor severely chastised those who profess to be Christians but surreptitiously listen to *djaz* bands. His sermon reminded church members



of a biblical mandate to avoid conforming to the fads and fashions of "the world" (*lemonn*). The pastor lamented the fact that he would sometimes walk by a Christian's home and hear *djaz* instead of *mizik evanjelik* (gospel music). For many leaders, the *konpa* rhythm of *djaz* thus indexes worldliness and unrighteous living. Some pastors even insist that *konpa* "is not a rhythm of the Body [of Christ]" (*"se pa yon rit ko a"*) and chastise church musicians who play it. However, there are also Christians who disagree with these viewpoints and feel that *konpa* can work in a church setting provided the dance rhythm does not become a distraction to the gospel message. Knowing that the status of *konpa* is controversial among Pentecostals, I have generally avoided discussing my prior involvement with Tabou Combo whenever I have found myself in a church context. I have felt less awkward talking about my experience playing African American jazz, which, unlike *konpa*, does not index worldliness or make Haitian Christians uncomfortable.[34] In churches where *konpa* is forbidden, congregational singing may be accompanied by jazz-influenced musics from the United States. Timothy Rommen discusses a similar phenomenon in his ethnomusicological study of Protestant Christianity in Trinidad. The "negotiation of proximity," as he terms it, involves the processes through which churchgoers develop a preference for musical styles that are farthest from them.[35] Discussing similar controversies, Rommen explains that some genres are "situated much too close to home to remain unfettered and uncomplicated."[36] By contrast, North American gospel songs remain "fundamentally Other" despite their integration into Trinidadian religious culture. Unlike gospelypso, which is "implicated in the messiness of everyday life," gospel choruses from abroad maintain a distanced position that ultimately makes them easier to incorporate into worship services.[37]

A very similar phenomenon occurs among some Christians in Haiti, where local styles, such as *konpa*, are more likely to be viewed as a negative influence. Part and parcel of the "messiness of everyday life," *konpa*'s proximity renders *djaz* a greater threat, while musical genres, such as "jazz," which are believed to hail from abroad, are less ethically complicated and more easily embraced. It is as though their distance renders them inoffensive even if they are deemed problematic in their country of origin. Yet despite starkly contrasting perspectives on music as it relates to spiritual truth, Haitians of all religious persuasions find ways to express pride in their nation's history and strength in the face of hardship. Perhaps in the spirit of religious diplomacy, they recognize differences of worldview without sacrificing their ability to come together as Haitians sharing similar sets of cultural experiences.

Theologies of sound often emerge in *djaz* and jazz performance as musicians and audiences position musical styles in relation to conceptions of the divine. Katherine Hagedorn posits that "talk about music reveals deeply embedded ideologies about identity and territoriality—literally one's place in the world."[38] Her "theology of sound" refers to "how the function of sound is theorized by musicians and adherents within a religious context, such that 'divinely targeted sound,' as well as discourse about that sound, maps the experience of divine transcendence onto a human grid."[39] During my 2010 trip with a group led by pianist Aaron Goldberg, we performed in a tent-church for a group of Protestant congregants drawn from throughout the camp. In my conversation with the pastor beforehand, I ran by him a list of the songs we'd rehearsed—a few of which were instrumental versions of Haitian folk songs that made use of local rhythms. It was quickly clear to me that we would have to modify our set list, and we did so, sticking with our normal fare of jazz standards and an arrangement of a popular church tune. There was no problem with the *djaz* style of our music since that style was already prominent in the church. However, folk songs that hinted at non-Christian forms of spirituality posed a problem, so we honored the pastor's wishes and opted not to perform them.

The concert was well received and at its conclusion, it morphed into a worship service that was as lively as any I had experienced in Haiti up to that point. This did not take me completely by surprise, since the pastor had also clued me in to the fact that he was still working hard to adapt his worship services to the needs and expectations of a newly resituated and recontextualized church. It turned out that despite the words "*l'Eglise Baptiste*" (Baptist Church) printed on the outside of the tent, the congregation comprised members from different sections of the city and from different church backgrounds. The most energetic and uptempo songs appealed to those of Pentecostal persuasion, especially to the youth who made up the majority of those in the church and in the camp. Perhaps this tent city, like so many others in Haiti, challenges us to think about the cultural politics of making music within a landscape that has shifted dramatically and continues to shift metaphorically along musical and theological lines.

## THE INTERNATIONAL PORT-AU-PRINCE JAZZ FESTIVAL

After the attack on New York City's World Trade Center on 11 September 2001, the US government deployed its military forces to combat the threat of terrorist activity believed to be flourishing in



various parts of the world. More recent years have seen a stronger emphasis on "public diplomacy" as a tool for reshaping perceptions of the United States abroad.[40] Such perceptions matter even in less "threatening" Caribbean locales. For example, some analysts voiced concerns that the absence of a sustained humanitarian response following Haiti's 2010 earthquake could sully the image of the United States or even prompt terrorism to spring up there as it did in Afghanistan in the 1980s.[41] But US concerns about Haiti have mostly centered on domestic safety and the need to quell violence associated with the kidnapping and murder of Haitians and US citizens visiting the country. While the Caribbean in general is rarely considered a serious threat to US interests, recent efforts on the part of both jazz musicians and also the US Embassy in Port-au-Prince represent the ongoing work to portray the United States in a favorable light and to have a positive influence on Haiti and its artistic development. My recent jazz performances in Haiti, especially the Port-au-Prince Jazz Festival, prompt me to think through the *djaz* diplomacy that unfolds as musicians, religious leaders, and other cultural commentators negotiate music's role in constructing national identity. The Port-au-Prince Jazz Festival provides an interesting case study for examining mutual influences between Haiti and the United States, as jazz and *djaz* are reconstructed on and off stage and controversies stem from the appropriation of "foreign" musical styles.

For several generations, the Widmaier family has been extremely influential in promoting music in Haiti and in exposing Haitian audiences to jazz sounds from at home and abroad. Joel Widmaier and his wife Milena Sandler founded the Port-au-Prince Jazz Festival in 2007. With his brother, Mushy Widmaier, Joel founded the band, Zèklè, and got established on the Haitian musical scene in the early 1980s.[42] Joel and Mushy's grandfather, Ricardo Widmaier, founded a radio station in the mid-1930s and made the first local recording of a Haitian band, Jazz Guignard.[43] Joel's father, Herby Widmaier, was a major player on Haiti's music scene during the 1960s, a decade during which rock-and-roll and jazz from the United States were in fashion. Herby was musical director of the Starlettes, a vocal group that was criticized for its reliance on "pop-jazz vocal combos... such as the Hi-Lo's and the Four Freshman, although their repertoire was weighted toward indigenous music."[44] Herby Widmaier also worked with the *mini-djaz* band Ibo Combo as they strived to "modernize" *konpa* "with jazz settings, jazz solos, and with a studied sophistication reminiscent of bossa nova."[45] Mini-*djaz* ensembles were scaled-down *konpa* ensembles featuring guitar, bass, drums, and percussion, along

with the occasional saxophone. The move to modernize mini-*djaz* in the 1960s involved infusing pieces with more complex chordal harmonies and adding improvised solo sections. Although this modernization impulse was no doubt attractive to musicians seeking to expand their stylistic repertories, Widmaier's jazz borrowings caused consternation in some anti-American camps. "What remains of essence," one writer complained, "in the expression of the Haitian soul that won't be diluted in the universality of the too-academic inspiration of this young innovator?"[46] Such critiques were especially sharp as "aggressive nationalism contributed to the pressure for the young groups to Haitianize their repertoire, to avoid becoming culturally 'contaminated' by foreign powers."[47]

Since its inception in 2007, the Port-au-Prince Jazz Festival has featured various "jazz" groups, cast as representative of their countries of origin, sequentially taking the stage. In a 2012 interview, Joel Widmaier commented that the various embassies, which contribute $10,000–$20,000 per performing ensemble, "are very proud to present their bands like their flags." He joked, "This is the only project they have where they can be together and not political."[48] After-hours jam sessions provided additional opportunities for musicians from different countries to interact and play together on the same bandstand. Events such as these allow audiences to "hear" musical, social, and transnational collaboration and appropriation. On one level, the Festival theme, "Haiti is stronger with jazz," problematically casts jazz as a foreign (that is, non-Haitian) contribution. On the other hand, the theme represents what Paul Gilroy describes as "the playful diasporic intimacy that has been a marked feature of transnational black Atlantic creativity."[49] Perhaps this occurs as Haitian performers and audiences reclaim jazz as a local product. At stake in this process are local and foreign imaginings of Haiti's creative contributions to the global stage and a critical reassessment of US-Haiti musical exchange.

Falling under the auspices of the Cultural Affairs Section of the US Embassy's Office of Public Diplomacy in Port-au-Prince, the festival is part of broader efforts to increase cultural understanding between Haiti and other nations. As is stated on the US Embassy's website,

> The Cultural Section partners with Haitian civil society through cultural, academic, and governmental institutions and local NGOs to engage in programs that promotes [*sic*] mutual understanding between Haitians and Americans. Our programs foster the sharing of information on US society, values and expertise with interested Haitian audiences through professional, academic and cultural exchange programs. These programs, which are at the heart of the section's work, seek to promote the free exchange of information and ideas, capacity building, and to increase understanding between the citizens of the United States and other countries.[50]



Cultural exchange is thus one of the section's primary objectives, as it "assists local partners with planning of major cultural programs, for instance the International Jazz Festival of Port au Prince."[51] "Local partners" include the embassies of other nations, such as Germany, Brazil, Canada, Mexico, Spain, and France, each of which sponsored a musical group for the 2011 Festival.

What, I wondered, were the ramifications of the US Embassy's significant investment in the festival in terms of how "jazz" is constructed in the Festival and in the many off-stage spaces in which the term "*djaz*" denotes popular music of either Haitian or US origin? As I reflected on our performance during the ensuing months, I wondered whether Aaron Goldberg, our group's leader, had been encouraged to choose songs or perform them in a way that reflected Caribbean influence. When I asked him about this recently, Goldberg told me he was granted complete creative control. "No one tried to influence me musically in any way. Everything we did, I chose to do. We could have played a totally straight-ahead swinging set, or funk, or jazz rara or hip-hop, it was up to me/us."[52] I also asked Goldberg about the specific objective he had for his festival appearance. He explained,

> My goals were to play the best music I could, to learn as much as I could about Haiti in the short time we were there, to try to have a positive influence on Haitian society and young musicians more specifically (in our workshops for example) and to share a little bit of American/NYC jazz culture as well as attempt to harmonize it with Haitian musical culture—as the two obviously share a common African root as well as many more recent cross-pollinating influences.[53]

This US Embassy-sponsored trip entailed jazz improvisation workshops at musical schools throughout the country and a culminating concert in Port-au-Prince during the last night of the festival. In my conversations with students and teachers at the workshops, I ascertained that in Haitian Creole the festival theme, *Ayiti pi djanm ak jazz* (Haiti is stronger with jazz), registered as a recognition of the potential benefits of international artistic collaboration, as well as a call to embrace indigenous musical forms.

In some ways, our performance at the festival took full advantage to the terminological slipperiness between *djaz* and jazz. Some might argue that distinctions between the two are collapsed in performance. However, we performed with the expectation that audiences would be keenly aware of stylistic differences between creolized jazz (or *djaz*) and its North American counterpart. For our performance, Goldberg decided to feature an up-and-coming Haitian vocalist named Kephny Eliacin, who sang the Ellington/Strayhorn classic piece "Satin Doll." Kephny is a passionate student of jazz, and prides himself in his ability to reproduce an authentic jazz vocal sound with perceived origins in the United States. But our group also performed pieces that fall stylistically outside of conventional "straight ahead" jazz. In fact, Goldberg solicited suggestions from each band member regarding songs that might provide fodder for jazz improvisation with a distinctly local flavor. We ultimately decided to foreground instrumental pieces that derived from Haiti, and to use rhythmic grooves that would register as familiar to the local audience, while drawing on our expertise as jazz musicians to create solo improvisations. The Haitian folk song "Kote Moun Yo," made popular nationally by the group Jazz des Jeunes in the 1940s and 1950s, proved to be a crowd favorite both at the festival and also during our workshops throughout the country. "Kote Moun Yo" probably derives from *rara*, a processional street music genre dating back to at least the nineteenth century.

In addition to his performance at the Port-au-Prince Jazz Festival, Goldberg has remained connected to Haiti's jazz scene. As part of the celebration on 30 April 2013 of the International Day of Jazz, he performed a concert at the Garden Studio in Port-au-Prince. He was joined by several Haitian jazz artists, including Vanessa Jacquemin, Claude Carré, John Thomas Bern, Alex Jacquemin, Richard Barbot, and Joel Widmaier. UNESCO created this special day "to raise awareness in the international community regarding jazz's virtues as an educational tool, as a vehicle for peace, unity, dialogue, and for enhanced cooperation between peoples."[54]

Although I was in Haiti on this occasion primarily as a festival performer with Goldberg's band, I found myself drawn to ethnomusicological concerns centered on the discourses of *djaz*. More than simply evidence of phonetically or semantically inspired word play, the multivalent terms "*djaz*" and "jazz" index a Haitian cultural identity experienced as both local and transnational. Perhaps these terms represent a way in which Haitians step into a cosmopolitan space to underscore vital connections to sources of economic support, especially from the United States. Moreover, the festival, along with the workshops that preceded it, is a means through which debates are reinvigorated about the meanings and origins of *djaz* and jazz in Haitian and broader African diasporic contexts.



## CONCLUSION

In the foregoing pages, I have tried to evoke the diasporic and global connections manifested through acts of social and musical collaboration. The ties between Haiti and the United States are especially significant to me on personal and professional levels. An exploration of the jazz-*djaz* relationship, including what some observers term "Haitian jazz," represents a newer turn in my scholarly career, but it is one that I have felt drawn to since the late 1990s. Perhaps it is my way of continuing to bring the past into the present as I work out my own sense of identity and connection to both the African American musical communities I call home and also their wider diasporic spheres. I am an African American without any proven family connection to Haiti, but I have been asked, on more occasions than I can recount, to explain my ethnic, racial, and national identities in response to assumptions that a kin-based relationship is what draws me to Haiti. Despite these assumptions, and despite my personal desire to experience "diasporic intimacy," it is usually the case that a strong sense of national identity ("We are Haitian; you are American") holds sway in my interactions with Haitians both in Haiti and in the United States. Yet as we have seen, the history of jazz music in Haiti lends support to the argument for creative connections between African Americans and those of Caribbean descent.

Those creative connections felt particularly strong during my post-earthquake trips to Haiti. Tents and rubble were constant reminders of the unspeakable tragedy that had displaced so many men, women, and children in the capital. Yet I was more compelled than ever to reaffirm our common humanity—or at least to try. Music was for me a tool of this reaffirmation. By drawing from the vast repertoire of Haitian traditional and gospel songs, we were able to exercise our improvisatory skills within a sonic context familiar to the Haitian attendees of the 2010 workshops and the 2011 Jazz Festival. This attempt to infuse our performance and pedagogy with a local color was an acknowledgment of shared roots and what Aaron Goldberg called "cross-pollinating influences" in music. The comments by Aaron Goldberg regarding his goals for performance are thus illustrative. He expressed a desire both to learn about Haiti and also to "share a little bit of American/NYC jazz culture." This idea of give-and-take, of cross-cultural dialogue,

resonates well with the notion of diplomacy as the creative deployment of skill to negotiate across social divides. And in the case of our work at the festival and in workshops, improvised music making, whether understood as *djaz* or jazz, provided a common (play)ground of sorts. The activities of performing and teaching jazz were mutually inspiring, particularly when Haitian musicians such as Kephny Eliacin joined us on stage, or when a seemingly introverted student displayed unexpected panache during one of our workshop exercises.[55]

When I think of diplomacy in its conventional sense, in the context of international relations, I picture high-ranking governmental officials negotiating a treaty to end a war or perhaps demarcate a political boundary. This is, of course, a far cry from the type of *djaz* diplomacy I have described. Rather, as a performer and teacher, I play across the social, cultural, theological, and national divides. I hope I at least prompt diverse listeners to find value in the shared experience of improvised music making. Musical diplomacy may not collapse the boundaries separating these ideological realms, but may encourage more playful passage between them.

## NOTES

1. John Brown, "Arts Diplomacy: The Neglected Aspect of Cultural Diplomacy," in *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy,* ed. Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor (New York: Routledge, 2009), 57.
2. In addition to the State Department tours of the 1950s, recent efforts at musical diplomacy include the American Music Abroad program sponsored by the US State Department and the Association of American Voices.
3. Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 111.
4. See Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); and Lisa E. Davenport, *Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting America in the Cold War Era* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009).
5. When its Anglicized spelling ("jazz") is employed in Haiti, the pronunciation remains the same, but it is often taken to mean an improvisatory style of music associated with US-based artists such as Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, and others. The initial consonant sound of the word "jazz" is written "dj" in *Kreyòl*, thus complicating oral and written usages of the term.
6. I nod here to Benjamin Brinner's ethnography, *Playing across a Divide: Israeli-Palestinian Musical Encounters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), which examines musical collaboration between late-twentieth-century Israelis and Palestinians.



7. John Chilton, *Sidney Bechet: The Wizard of Jazz* (London: Da Capo Press, 1996), 41.
8. Gage Averill, *A Day for the Hunter, a Day for the Prey: Popular Music and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 37.
9. Chilton, *Sidney Bechet,* 53.
10. Averill, *Day for the Hunter,* 38.
11. Ibid.
12. Michael Largey, *Vodou Nation: Haitian Art Music and Cultural Nationalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 36 and 47.
13. Leon Pamphile, *Haitians and African Americans: A Heritage of Tragedy and Hope* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 110.
14. Ibid., 37.
15. Matthew J. Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934–1957* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 60.
16. Averill, *Day for the Hunter,* 58–9. This sentiment is expressed in the lyrics of the Jazz des Jeunes song, "Anciens jeunes" (Ancient Youth); see ibid., 59.
17. Ibid., 61.
18. Ibid., 60.
19. Billy Taylor, with Teresa L. Reed, *The Jazz Life of Dr. Billy Taylor* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 31.
20. Ibid.
21. Douglas Henry Daniels, "Vodun and Jazz: 'Jelly Roll' Morton and Lester 'Pres' Young—Substance and Shadow," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 9/1 (2003): 117.
22. John Storm Roberts, *Latin Jazz: The First of the Fusions, 1880s to Today* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1999).
23. Jacqueline Charles, "Branford Marsalis Headlines Haiti Jazz Festival," *Miami Herald,* 17 January 2013.
24. The *Miami Herald* also points out that Branford Marsalis was originally slated to appear at the Festival two years prior. His cancellation, allegedly due to "political upheaval" related to upcoming presidential elections, is what led the US Embassy to invite a performance by pianist Aaron Goldberg. Since I'd just traveled to Haiti with Goldberg the previous year, he asked whether I'd like to rejoin him for the 2011 festival concert and series of workshops throughout the country.
25. Richard Brent Turner, *Jazz Religion, the Second Line, and Black New Orleans* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 38.
26. Giles Oakley, *The Devil's Music: A History of the Blues* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), 196–7.
27. Timothy Rommen, *"Mek Some Noise": Gospel Music and the Ethics of Style in Trinidad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
28. My stints with Haitian *konpa* bands began in February 1994 and continued steadily until September 1997, when I cut back on my saxophone

playing in order to focus on my increasing obligations in school and church. For a succinct history of Haitian *konpa*, see Gage Averill, "Toujou Sou Konpa: Issues of Change and Interchange in Haitian Popular Dance Music," in *Zouk: World Music in the West Indies*, ed. Jocelyne Guilbault (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 68.

29. Gage Averill, "'Se Kreyol Nou ye'/'We're Creole': Musical Discourse in Haitian Identities," in *Music and Black Ethnicity: The Caribbean and South America*, ed. Gerard Behague (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 89.
30. A good example of this style of horn section arrangement may be found in the song, "Son La Ri" (Tabou Combo, *360 Degrees*, Musicrama B000003Q7A, 1997, compact disc).
31. Yves Joseph, interview with Elijah Wald, "Tabou Combo Takes Compas to the World," *Boston Globe*, 10 July 1998, in Elijah Wald, *Global Minstrels: Voices of World Music* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 56.
32. Ibid.
33. See Averill, *Day for the Hunter*, for a thorough historical overview of Vodou-Jazz and related genres.
34. Likewise, I do not often mention my gigs with jazz, blues, and R&B artists among churchgoers in the United States; see Melvin L. Butler, "Dancing around Dancehall: Pentecostalism, Popular Culture, and Musical Practice in Transnational Jamaica and Haiti," in *Constructing Vernacular Culture in the Trans-Caribbean*, ed. Holger Henke, Karl-Heinz Magister, and Alissa Trotz (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 95.
35. Timothy Rommen, "Nationalism and the Soul: Gospelypso as Independence," *Black Music Research Journal* 22 (2002): 37.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Katherine J. Hagedorn, "Toward a Theology of Sound: Drum Talk, *Oricha* Worship, and Other Ecstatic Phenomena," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 34/2 (Spring 2006).
39. Ibid., 35.
40. See R. S. Zaharna, "Obama, US Public Diplomacy and the Islamic World," *World Politics Review*, 16 March 2009, http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/3450/obama-u-s-public-diplomacy-and-the-islamic-world, along with Nancy Snow's essay, "Valuing Exchange of Persons in Public Diplomacy," in *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, ed. Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor (New York: Routledge, 2008), 239.
41. See, for example, Simon Sinek, "Could Haiti Become a Terrorist Haven? Only America Can Decide," *Huffington Post*, 21 January 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/simon-sinek/could-haiti-become-a-terr_b_430926.html.
42. Averill, *Day for the Hunter*, 123.
43. Ibid., 51.



44. Ibid., 98.
45. Ibid., 100.
46. Georges Fidélia, "Le Carnaval 1965," *Le Nouvelliste*, 28 February 1965, 1, cited in ibid., 98.
47. Ibid., 99.
48. See Jacqueline Charles, "Politics Set Aside for Haiti's International Jazz Festival," *PopMatters*, 23 January 2012, http://www.popmatters.com/article/153656-politics-set-aside-for-haitis-international-jazz-festival.
49. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 16.
50. "Cultural Affairs," Embassy of the United States at Port au Prince, Haiti, accessed 28 October 2013, http://haiti.usembassy.gov/culturalsection.html.
51. Ibid.
52. Aaron Goldberg, email message to the author, 29 October 2013.
53. Ibid.
54. "International Jazz Day 2014," UNESCO, accessed 26 October 2013, http://www.unesco.org/new/en/jazz-day.
55. These workshop exercises typically gave Haitian students the opportunity to take turns improvising solos over a 12-bar blues form. We also worked with students on developing a jazz vocabulary and practicing ear training techniques by having them attempt to echo musical phrases played by a band member.