

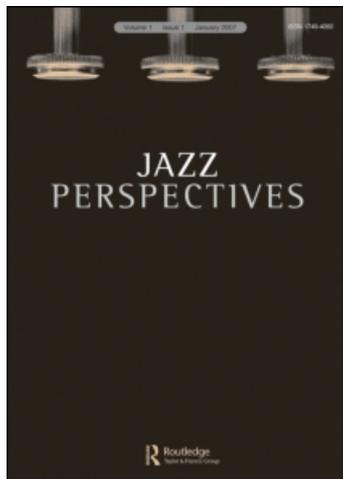
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# Emergency! Race and Genre in Tony Williams's Lifetime

Kevin Fellezs

*The two biggest groups, I thought, were Cream and Jimi Hendrix's band. But before that, I was in love with the Beatles. I was a real Beatles fanatic.*

Tony Williams<sup>1</sup>

*Well, jazz is such a bad word, and rock is such a bad word. All those things are so limiting, and commercial music is such a bad word, all the words are really bad. And there's another sound that's going to happen and that's what I want to be a part of.*

Tony Williams<sup>2</sup>

In 1969, African American drummer Tony Williams, white British guitarist John McLaughlin, and African American organist Larry Young (later, Khalid Yasin Abdul Aziz) jammed together for the first time, soon forming the early fusion band, Lifetime. In the years after the original Lifetime disbanded, Williams was asked repeatedly about his association with McLaughlin, who had subsequently achieved global stardom as leader of the archetypal fusion band, the Mahavishnu Orchestra. Williams, noting interviewers' lack of interest in Lifetime's largely forgotten organist, responded pointedly, "What about Larry Young? [H]e was the genius of that band," implicitly challenging the conventional narrative of fusion as a benighted musical genre performed by musicians who either lacked the skills to perform "real jazz" or, if competent as jazz performers, were cynically seeking the higher monetary rewards of rock music.<sup>3</sup> Lifetime used rock music to question and complicate the meanings jazz held as popular music as well as its emergence as art music.

Williams's question, as well as the music of his fusion band, Lifetime, contested the link between racialized bodies and genre, implying that McLaughlin's heightened visibility and critical acceptance ran along racialized, and not merely aesthetic, lines. Further, Williams perceived a racial component to the musical choices of their audience:

White people, when they go and want to listen to something, they listen to it to identify with it, just like everybody does ... You know, they ... want to see something that they feel they could be a part of; you know, they could be up there singing, that could be them up there playing the guitar.

<sup>1</sup> Ephland, "Tony Williams," 22.

<sup>2</sup> Pat Cox, "Tony Williams: An Interview Scenario," *Down Beat*, May 1970, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Ephland, 22.

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If they go see a black person, they can't do that, because they can't imagine themselves being black.<sup>4</sup>

Rather than take up the question of whether or not Williams was correct in this statement, I want to direct my inquiry towards the relationship between Williams's listening practices and the racial dynamics of genre on his own music making. When Williams recognized an affiliative correlation between audience member and band member, he was implicitly problematizing his own relationship to the Beatles. How did he identify with the Beatles? Did he think he could perform rock music because he was a "rocker" too, just like the Beatles? Can fusion be heard as a strategy by Williams to make visible the racial assumptions behind genre categories? Was it his desire to transform the racial logic of genre into something more representative of the diversity subsumed under rock's banner of (white) universalism, or, indeed, of jazz's "color blind" universalism as announced by jazz critics such as Leonard Feather, Martin Williams, and Gene Lees? While the idea of the jazz bandstand as a demonstration of democracy was an ideal, some jazz critics longed for the days before militant free jazz musicians polarized jazz audiences. These writers seemingly hoped to invoke a nostalgic return to a time when, as Leonard Feather put it, "blacks and whites congregated [at] Harlem rooms without fear of violence."<sup>5</sup> Was fusion—the "sound that's going to happen"—Williams's way of getting past all the "bad words"?

### "Different Worlds"

One of Williams's primary motivations for merging rock and jazz was to reach beyond normative genre categories, evincing the naked, perhaps naive, optimism fusion held for its early practitioners. In the late 1960s, after gaining international prominence in Miles Davis's "second quintet," Williams began to search for other young jazz musicians who shared his appreciation for rock musicians such as Jimi Hendrix and the Beatles. Only seventeen years of age when he began performing with Davis's band, Williams was partially responsible for incorporating elements of the "new thing" (free jazz) into Davis's music. But Williams also claimed his musical roots traversed both rock and jazz, admitting, "I had been listening to and enjoying Jimi Hendrix a lot. I also liked Cream and the MC5. My drumming had become more aggressive and that was the direction that I wanted to follow."<sup>6</sup> His confession resonated differently than previous generations of jazz musicians who were often able to express their admiration for non-jazz popular music without encountering the disapproval rock fans faced from jazz critics and fans. Significantly, Williams formed R&B/doo-wop groups during his youth. These groups were conceived

<sup>4</sup> Cox, "Tony Williams," 14.

<sup>5</sup> Leonard Feather, "Overview," *The Pleasures of Jazz* (New York: Horizon, 1976), 29. See also Gene Lees' *Cats of Any Color: Jazz, Black and White* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995) for a recent reiteration of jazz musicians' and fans' abilities to attenuate the color line through a mutual appreciation of jazz music.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in John McDermott, liner notes to Tony Williams Lifetime, *Spectrum: The Anthology*, Verve 314 537 075-2, 1997, compact disc.

along the lines of the Coasters and the Orioles, and included the performance of choreographed dance routines. Though Williams's singing in Lifetime may have surprised many of his jazz fans, he had notably been the lead singer for a group called the Monticellos.<sup>7</sup>

Williams was introduced to jazz through his father, the saxophonist Tillmon Williams, who not only played jazz recordings at home but also took the younger Williams on his rounds of jam sessions and professional club dates. Meanwhile, Tony Williams also enjoyed listening to Top 40 radio with his friends, singing and dancing with them in popular music groups, and, like many teenagers throughout the United States, he routinely viewed the nationally televised broadcasts of *Dick Clark's American Bandstand*. Though he would eventually merge rock and jazz, the two genres were discrete soundscapes during his youth, as Williams explained:

For a long time I realized that I had been living in two worlds. I was living in one world where I was making friends in grammar school and in high school, going to parties with them, listening to rock and hanging out on corners. And then I got a chance to go out with my father and play. I'd be with him and all the older musicians, his friends, and they took me into their scene and showed me what they had. *So, it was two worlds all the time for me.*<sup>8</sup>

Williams may certainly have been a unique musical talent, but his sound world—multiply located, temporally displaced, and technologically mediated—was not unlike most other post-WWII, American “baby boomer” music fans. Williams's access to music from a wide variety of places and periods partially defines the soundscape of his generation, and his ecumenical appreciation for the music of Billy Eckstine, Frank Sinatra, Max Roach, Art Blakey, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Igor Stravinsky, as well as the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, and the MC5, was considered routine connoisseurship. Moreover, economic interests, consumer curiosity, and the degree of displacement from “origin” to “consumption” often transformed the contexts of musical traditions or idioms for these young listeners.

But when Williams described his continuous crossing between various musical idioms as a result of modernity's profuse soundscape—“There's so much [music] that I can't remain narrow”<sup>9</sup>—he was not speaking merely as a consumer. When he was twelve years old, Williams sat in with drummer Art Blakey's band. As a seasoned drummer of fifteen, Williams had rapidly gained professional experience by performing mainstream jazz with older Boston musicians such as pianist Leroy Fallana and organist Johnny “Hammond” Smith. He was also simultaneously involved in more experimental music, recalling,

I started working with [saxophonist] Sam Rivers. We worked in the Club 47 in Cambridge [Massachusetts] and that's where we first met.... Sam and I and [The Boston Improvisational Ensemble] got together and we'd play. They'd put graphs up on the wall, and we'd play to that and then they'd put numbers up and we'd

<sup>7</sup> Stu Woods, “Tony Williams Interview,” *Jazz and Pop*, January 1970, 18.

<sup>8</sup> Emphasis added. *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

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play to that, and we'd play to a time clock, in all kinds of variations, different variations, and from that we went to other things.<sup>10\*</sup>

Williams later continued similar work with the notable experimental jazz musicians saxophonist Eric Dolphy and pianist Cecil Taylor, but, in 1962, Williams's first move away from his family home in Boston was to New York City as the drummer in alto saxophonist Jackie McLean's hard bop group.<sup>11</sup> Williams ended his short journeyman period a few months later when he joined Miles Davis's quintet, one of the most commercially and critically successful jazz groups of the time.

In 1963, the Blue Note Records founder Albert Lion offered Williams the chance to record, and his debut recording, titled *Lifetime*, was one of Blue Note's first avant-garde releases. This album lent Williams's steadily growing body of recorded work an impressive range, especially for someone not yet twenty years old. Williams composed all the music for the sessions, leading a band of older musicians that included Rivers and vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson. Despite his young age, Williams's commitment to a high standard of musicianship was noted by Miles Davis, who admitted, Williams "was the only guy in my band who ever told me, 'Man, why don't you practice!' I was missing notes and shit trying to keep up with his young ass."<sup>12</sup>

Though he dropped out of high school in order to join McLean's band, once settled in New York City, Williams contacted the Manhattan School of Music, inquiring after a teacher. He was referred to Monica Jakuch, who taught him European common-practice art music theory and harmony. Later, he privately studied twentieth-century theory and compositional techniques with Art Murphy. When Williams moved to California in the 1970s, he continued his music studies with Robert Stine, a music professor at the University of California at Berkeley (UCB). When Stine eventually left for a university post elsewhere, Williams continued his composition classes with Robert Greenberg, then a graduate student at UCB. He also studied briefly with Olly Wilson, the noted African American art music composer. At the end of his life, Williams was studying privately with David Sheinfeld, a former first violinist with the San Francisco Orchestra. In one of his last interviews, Williams explained his reasons for taking music lessons despite his professional status and critical acclaim:

I remember when I started taking serious compositional classes, people were always asking me why I was doing it. They seemed to believe that since I had a record out I didn't need to do anything else. I don't understand that attitude at all. To me,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> The McLean group was hired for a play titled "The Connection"; see Lee Underwood, "Tony Williams: Aspiring to a Lifetime of Leadership," *Down Beat*, June 1979, 21. Williams was the drummer on Eric Dolphy's recording, *Out to Lunch*, Blue Note 46524, 1964, LP; reissued as Blue Note 4163, 2004, compact disc. Cecil Taylor appears on a duet track, "Morgan's Motion," on Williams's *Joy of Flying*, Columbia 35705, 1979, LP; reissued as Sony 65473, 1997, compact disc.

<sup>12</sup> Miles Davis with Quincy Troupe, *Miles: The Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 274.

being a musician is like being a doctor. You've got to keep up with all the changes, and the more you learn about your profession, the better off you are.<sup>13</sup>

His equal interest in popular *and* “serious” music shaped the dialogical ground upon which Lifetime’s music was created, performatively mapping the correspondences as well as the incongruencies among various musical worlds. Yet, Williams’s ambivalent attitude towards the discrepant rankings among rock, jazz, and Western art music indicate some of the tensions he felt between popular tastes and broader aesthetic evaluations. On one hand, Williams held certain rock musicians in the same high regard as jazz and Western concert music musicians. On the other, he recognized the discursive formation of a number of cultural hierarchies, the dominant of which held the Western concert tradition to be the standard for musical evaluation. When Bill Milkowski asked whether his early association with Sam Rivers affected his decision to explore free jazz on his early recordings for Blue Note, Williams responded,

No, those [recordings] were coming out of my experience with a lot of things—my love for Ornette Coleman’s music at the time, Cecil Taylor’s music, Eric Dolphy—all the things that I had heard that I was really involved in. I was listening to a lot of [Bela] Bartók at that time, every day. [Karlheinz] Stockhausen and a lot of [Igor] Stravinsky, too. *So the influences were wide-ranging.*<sup>14</sup>

Williams’s efforts to master Western concert music illustrate his predicament: in order to legitimize his fusion music, Williams pointed to his familiarity with Western concert music as well as his participation in avant-garde music; but using Western art music as a standard proved to be problematic. Despite explicitly rationalizing Lifetime’s eclectic gathering of musical practices as a means to equalize an array of musical traditions, the band members’ music remained linked to older arguments dictating artistic rankings and evaluations imported from Western art music aesthetics—an aesthetic world unfamiliar, even arguably antagonistic, to non-Western and non-art music practices and practitioners. However, because Lifetime and other early fusion bands pursued their visions largely without commercial success throughout this period, they implicitly negated criticisms of any pandering to “lowered” musical tastes. Indeed, Williams’s explicit admiration for both Bartók and the Beatles simultaneously made him suspicious of, as well as vulnerable to, Western high art *and* pop music conceits.

## Crossings

On the surface, Lifetime resembled a typical “soul jazz” organ trio of the time. In the early 1960s, organists such as Jimmy Smith, Jack McDuff, Jimmy McGriff, and Shirley Scott combined elements from rhythm-and-blues (R&B) and jazz, helping to create a hybrid genre soon called “soul jazz,” and were among the

<sup>13</sup> Michael Point, “Tony Williams: The Final Interview,” *Down Beat*, April 1997, 24.

<sup>14</sup> Emphasis added. Milkowski, “Tony Williams: A Master’s Perspective,” *Modern Drummer*, July 1992, 24.

most popular acts in jazz among listening audiences, if slighted critically. While soul jazz artists troubled the conventional view of jazz as an increasingly complex idiom by their unabashedly candid “return” to the blues, fusion musicians challenged jazz conventions even more fundamentally by not only borrowing the “power drumming” (as described by Williams<sup>15</sup>) from rock but also the electric instrumentation and amplification systems as well, calling into question the centrality of “swing” rhythms and the primary position of acoustic instrumentation to jazz discourse as elucidated by writers as diverse as Amiri Baraka and Andre Hodeir.<sup>16</sup> As *Lifetime* was beginning to form, this issue ignited an exchange between Dan Morgenstern and Alan Heineman in the pages of *Down Beat* concerning the addition of rock groups (and, more notably, their fans) to the 1969 Newport Jazz Festival.<sup>17</sup> *Lifetime*'s fusion music also questioned the elevation of jazz to an art form as an unalloyed benefit, countering it with an explicit populist aesthetic and performative agenda; yet, as previously noted, Williams would later support his artistic choices, in part, by registering his proficiency with Western art music.

Williams's defensiveness in the second epigraph quotation above (“jazz is such a bad word, and rock is such a bad word,” etc.) was provoked by his awareness of the relative status of the various genres *Lifetime* was seeking to merge. Genre categories are “bad words,” in part, because they constrain musicians; still, ask any musician what music s/he composes or performs and s/he will most likely answer with genre names, even if used negatively or ironically. Performing their duty as discursive shorthand, genre names read less as empty, floating signifiers and more as active, invested signifying/signifyin(g) practices. Genre names are doubly powerful for being ambiguously reductive due to, in some part, the music industry's need to remain flexible to market trends and fluctuations. As such, genre terms

<sup>15</sup> In his interview with Bill Milkowski cited above, Williams, in describing the difference between his playing with Miles Davis and in *Lifetime*, stated unequivocally that when “I decided to leave Miles in 1968 ... I thought, ‘Gee, that would be a nice way to do it—organ, guitar and drums—but do it real aggressively, with a lot of rock ‘n’ roll kind of feeling, energy, power ... BAM!’” Emphasis added. Milkowski, “Tony Williams,” 70.

<sup>16</sup> See André Hodeir, *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence*, trans. David Noakes (New York: Grove, 1956); and LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: William Morrow, 1963). Two important writers, Albert Murray and Stanley Crouch, also had much to say about the state of jazz at this time. Though Murray did not single out rock music as having a directly deleterious effect on jazz, Crouch has been an outspoken critic of fusion. I would like to thank one of my anonymous readers for pointing out that though these writers were forming their ideas during the 1970s, their influence would become prominent in the decades after the first fusion artists came on the scene and, thus, does not represent an ideological position against which fusion musicians of this period engaged. However, the disparagement of rock by jazz critics and musicians at the time held grave implications for the critical reception of fusion.

<sup>17</sup> Dan Morgenstern and Alan Heineman, “Rock, Jazz, and Newport: An Exchange,” *Down Beat*, December 25, 1969, 22–23. While Hodeir and Jones/Baraka reference swing as a “strategically essentialist” mode of rhythmic acculturation, the exchange in *Down Beat* underscored the dichotomy drawn between “jazz as art” and rock as music for the “kindergarten.” To be fair, Morgenstern did not dismiss the entirety of rock music and, as stated in the text, he had opened up the editorial perspective of *Down Beat* to include rock musicians.

remain volatile signifiers, fueled by vernacular practices and music industry requirements.<sup>18</sup>

Beyond the question of genre cataloging though, music critics, listeners, and producers also use the often implicit racialization of various genres to deflect criticism or confirm artistic legitimacy as in the unending debates surrounding who can legitimately perform music seen as emerging from so-called minority cultures. (Such discussions are certainly not limited to racialized ideas concerning legitimate performers or performance styles, but I will limit my remarks to this particular aspect.) This racial code, if you will, thus recognizes or fails to recognize specific genre crossings, reserving special attention for the proscription of the types of performative bodies considered legitimate for the public performance of specific types of music.

As Ronald Radano cautions, “to talk about race and music means crossing boundaries, embracing the mixture of genre and repertory, and accepting that race is everywhere in music ... World music and postmodern hybridities have yet to eliminate racial barriers, and they show no signs of masking the conditions that give rise to racial differences.”<sup>19</sup> We can add fusion to Radano’s list of terms that have yet to unseat racialized ideologies. Yet, though Lifetime may not have broken the links between race and genre, Williams and his musical cohort helped forge a new idiom that made those links more visible, forcing a confrontation among critics, listeners, and musicians which resonated along the always-shifting borders of jazz and rock. It is in this context that it is helpful to remember that fusion musicians were not the first jazz artists to cross genres or to participate in non-jazz music. Importantly, jazz critics often cast fusion as a “crossover” attempt by jazz artists to enter the pop mainstream, an accusation resonating with all of the term’s implications.

In his trenchant analysis of race in popular music, Barry Shank argues convincingly that the complexities of race are judgment calls on the part of listeners “who, in the process of discrimination, are always responding to extra-musical social and political considerations as well as the music ‘itself’.”<sup>20</sup> Shank also interrogates the various meanings for “crossover,” from integrative promise to cultural dilution, finally demonstrating that both views may be too limiting due to the fluidity of both

<sup>18</sup> For lengthier discussions of genre and the implications of genre categories on critical and popular discourse, see Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), particularly the chapter, “Genre Rules,” 75–98; Michael Coyle and Jon Dolan, “Modeling Authenticity, Authenticating Commercial Models,” in *Reading Rock and Roll: Authenticity, Appropriation, Aesthetics*, eds. Kevin J. H. Dettmar and William Richey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Keith Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2003); and, particularly germane to this article, Christopher Washburne’s “Does Kenny G Play Bad Jazz? A Case Study,” in *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> Ron Radano, “Introduction,” in *Music and the Racial Imagination*, eds. Ron Radano and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 37.

<sup>20</sup> Barry Shank, “From Rice to Ice: The Face of Race in Rock and Pop,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, eds. Simon Frith, Will Straw, and John Street (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 263.

racialized ideologies and musical formations. However, Shank rightly suggests that “crossing over” has the potential to complicate racialized thinking in order that musical meaning is not hijacked by racial determinants by audiences who inhabit divergent listening contexts, each creating often radically different interpretations of “what the music means.”

In fact, as Shank, Reebee Garofalo, and other scholars have noted, the music industry term, “crossover,” describes the movement of musicians in a subsidiary market marked by race (such as when, for example, R&B artists “cross over” to mainstream success in the pop market). In other words, African American musicians, having proven their commercial appeal in markets targeting African American consumers, might then attempt to “cross over” to (white) mainstream success (or, more accurately, be promoted by their record labels to the mainstream market). As scholars such as Garofalo point out, white musicians competed mainly in the mainstream pop market—with the term “mainstream pop” itself being a generic euphemism for the market for white consumers. In the 1950s, for instance, white performers and their management rarely saw any reason to invest capital and effort into cultivating a black audience, who could readily hear them on national radio and television broadcasts. Thus, for example, the sales figures for Willie Mae “Big Mama” Thornton’s 1953 hit R&B single, “Hound Dog,” marketed as a race record to African American audiences, fell short of Elvis Presley’s 1956 cover version sales, marketed as he was to a national popular music audience. As rock ‘n’ roll was transformed into rock (following a trajectory described by Garofalo), the rise in rock’s cultural capital, and its concomitant racialization as a “white music,” went hand-in-hand with broader aesthetic and cultural divisions to which the increasing absence of black rock musicians became another tragic, if unsurprising, adjunct.<sup>21</sup>

Yet exceptional black musicians continued to impact rock music in revolutionary ways—try to think of rock music, particularly hard rock, without Jimi Hendrix and his exemplary guitar technique, his use of technology, and his fashion style. In a similar sense, much of contemporary popular music would sound drastically different without Latin or gay dance/club subcultural influences and creative energies. The continuing use of euphemistic terms such as “urban contemporary” to designate racially inflected market segments indicates the ongoing efforts to

<sup>21</sup> See Reebee Garofalo, “Crossing Over: From Black Rhythm & Blues to White Rock ‘n’ Roll” in *R&B, Rhythm and Business: The Political Economy of Black Music*, ed. Norman Kelley (New York: Akashic, 2002). Also, Shank quotes from Charles Hamm’s article, “The Fourth Audience” (*Popular Music* 1 [1981]: 123–141), where Hamm notes that “the rise of rock ‘n’ roll in the 1950s marked the first and the last time that a single recording could top all three of the music industry’s culturally (that is racially) distinguished charts.” Shank, “From Rice to Ice,” 265. Notably, it was exclusively white rock and roll performers who accomplished this feat: Elvis Presley, the Everly Brothers, Johnny Horton, and Jerry Lee Lewis. The three charts are Country and Western (white), R&B (black), and Popular (white). An interesting article that notes the relationship between “crossover” and “cover version” can be found in Michael Coyle’s “Hijacked Hits and Antic Authenticity: Cover Songs, Race, and Postwar Marketing,” in *Rock Over the Edge: Transformations in Popular Music Culture*, eds. Roger Beebe, Ben Saunders, and Denise Fulbrook (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 133–160.

market particular artists into specific genres (in this case, “urban contemporary” refers to a radio format of modern R&B and/or hip hop music targeting a primarily black audience).

Jazz musicians have always had open ears, using other idioms as inspiration for their own innovations. But while an early jazz musician like Ferdinand “Jelly Roll” Morton could boast about his familiarity with classical music, Tony Williams was not seeking to align jazz with high culture. Rather, he was linking jazz to a musical genre—rock—that was problematic, particularly for African American jazz musicians. First, though I agree with Bernard Gendron—who asserts that rock, rather than jazz, was increasingly displacing cultural hierarchies among the literati and artistic avant-garde by the late 1960s—jazz musicians and critics were concurrently promoting jazz as art music and castigating rock as mere commercial pabulum.<sup>22</sup> Second, jazz was heard by many jazz critics and musicians as the embodiment of a color-blind American democracy in sound, a “classical music” created in an autonomous art space devoid of racial and ethnic affiliations.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, because rock music was identified with white popular audiences in the late 1960s, when Williams chose to merge jazz sensibilities to rock, he highlighted the relationship between race and genre.<sup>24</sup> He and other black fusion artists, such as Miles Davis and Herbie Hancock, grappled directly with the fact that genres evolve, mutate, develop into, and re-coalesce into new categories in relation to the prompts and responses of the music industry or a listening audience.<sup>25</sup>

For their part, the members of Lifetime merged elements borrowed and transformed from jazz aesthetics and rock music, attempting to move beyond the black/white binarism through which critical jazz discourse often framed discussions of ownership, authority and belonging in relation to either genre or aesthetic

<sup>22</sup> See Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Grover Sales, *Jazz: America's Classical Music* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1984). For contemporaneous writings, there is Martin Williams's *The Jazz Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), particularly his discussion of Duke Ellington. By the late 1960s, jazz musicians had begun to speak publicly of jazz as an art music in interviews. This stance can be seen in the comments of a number of the interviewees in Arthur Taylor's *Notes and Tones: Musician-to-Musician Interviews* (New York: Perigree Books, 1977; reprint, New York: Da Capo, 1993) or in Bill Dixon's *Down Beat* column during this period.

<sup>24</sup> Besides Garofalo's “Crossing Over,” cited above, see Keith Negus, “Identities,” in *Popular Music in Theory: An Introduction* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1996); and Maureen Mahon's provocative *Right to Rock: The Black Rock Coalition and the Cultural Politics of Race* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). Mahon's contention that black rock musicians were ignored by the music industry because of normative ideas concerning black musicians and their generic “place” resonates here.

<sup>25</sup> See Steve Pond's *Head Hunters: The Making of Jazz's First Platinum Album* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005) for a careful consideration of the effects of race on Herbie Hancock's musical performatives in his own fusion music of the 1970s. Pond's investigation of the dynamics of public relations, advertising, and other music industry practices on the reception and dissemination of Hancock's *Head Hunters* recording ably dissects the too often mystified role of commercial considerations on musical productions. In this study, I am primarily interested in the discursive moves of Tony Williams in a limited time period, but I would like the reader to keep in mind the relationship between music industry practices and “common sense” ideas about genre categories.

approach.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, Lifetime's performances embodied the contradictions in the conventional assignments between race and genre. Additionally, Williams's attraction to late 1960s psychedelic rock made his transition from Miles Davis's drummer to fusion pioneer problematic, even for sympathetic jazz listeners.

By including fellow black rock artist Jimi Hendrix alongside the Beatles and Cream in his roster of favorite, even influential, rock musicians, Williams reminds us of the influence and foundational music of African American rock 'n' roll musicians such as "Little Richard" Penniman, Charles "Chuck" Berry, and Antoine "Fats Domino" Dominique, forcing us to re-examine rock's relationship to black vernacular and popular music practices and spaces. In addition, Williams's explicit naming of particular rock artists also indicated the non-arbitrary nature in his decisions to use—or not use—various elements from rock and jazz.

Williams voiced the same motivations for merging rock and jazz as guitarist Larry Coryell, who traced fusion's origins to an equal appreciation for the music of both John Coltrane and the Rolling Stones by young jazz musicians, both musicians viewing fusion as the union of rock music's expressive energies and accessibility with jazz's more formal complexities and performative demands.<sup>27</sup> In a manner similar to scholar Travis Jackson's recent characterization of saxophonist David Murray and drummer Steve McCall's reorientation of a jazz "tradition," Williams read the past of jazz *and* rock-'n'-roll/rock in a way "that escapes the confines of seeing tradition as static or compelling relentless innovation in favor of seeing it as an opening of the way to both the past and the future."<sup>28</sup> Similarly, in his blending of the two traditions, Williams helped pave the way toward new ways of hearing and performing jazz and rock. Still, fusion musicians would have to gain a popular audience before they could transform listening habits, genre categories, or music industry practices.

In fact, Lifetime initially puzzled jazz audiences as well as jazz critics. In a 1970 interview, writer Stu Woods reminded Williams of a Lifetime performance when, following an intensely played set, the audience just sat there, stunned, responding wanly with "some timid applause." Williams, acknowledging the audience's muted response, replied with an anecdote of his own, recalling a concert where he "was off the bandstand before they started clapping. I was at the bar getting a glass of water and then the applause started. That was really a bring-down."<sup>29</sup> The energy with

<sup>26</sup> I am thinking here of a long history of debates within jazz regarding authentic practitioners of the music. These debates range from Original Dixieland Jazz Band leader Nick La Rocca's claim that African Americans had nothing to do with the creation of jazz to British critic Stuart Nicholson's recent assertions that the future of jazz is located in Northern Europe. There have been a sizable cohort of critics and writers who have made various assertions regarding African American claims as authentic jazz practitioners, ranging from the essentialist views of early jazz observers such as Alexander Ansermet, to more recent claims for the imprimatur of African American culture from critic Stanley Crouch. My article is not focused on this particular argument at this point except to note that fusion musicians, like jazz musicians of other eras, were compelled to address the issue of authenticity and authority in their musical practices.

<sup>27</sup> Coryell is quoted in Stuart Nicholson, *Jazz Rock: A History* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1998), 29.

<sup>28</sup> Travis Jackson, "'Always New and Centuries Old': Jazz, Poetry and Tradition as Creative Adaptation," in *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies*, eds. Robert G. O'Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 369.

<sup>29</sup> Woods, "Tony Williams," 19.

which Lifetime forced the issue of volume, rock's aggressive style, and the use of electric and amplified instruments stood in marked juxtaposition to conventional jazz music and Lifetime's challenge clearly overwhelmed jazz audiences of the time.

And so, Lifetime hoped, the audiences would begin to change in tune with the music. In a 1970 *Melody Maker* interview, writer Richard Williams noted that when he went to hear Lifetime at Ungano's, "the place was packed with young people who looked like rock fans." When asked about his motivations for playing venues more closely associated with rock, Tony Williams countered,

The music hits the kids at the level that they get tired of crap. So many rock groups sound the same—trite, terrible, and just plain silly, man. And people, whether they know it or not, want to hear something better. At Ungano's it's a different audience from, say, a place like [the jazz club] Slug's.<sup>30</sup>

Here, Williams is positioning Lifetime—and, by extension, fusion writ large—as a music for rock fans searching "to hear something better." Jazz fans were not necessarily Lifetime's target audience. Williams's early disappointments with jazz audiences were not simply a preoccupation with *popularity* but indicated his *populist* concern about re-engaging a popular audience of his peers. As mainstream jazz moved into the cocktail lounges of Las Vegas and Atlantic City, as well as the tourist clubs of Manhattan, jazz came to be perceived by fusion musicians as relinquishing much of its social vitality to rock. On the other hand, mainstream and avant-garde jazz artists initiated tenuous connections to elite culture as they gained arts council funding, concert hall engagements, and, later, academic posts, moving jazz further along a path that Williams described in 1976:

Twenty years ago, jazz was being made for a very happy audience and writers and scholars who didn't play music came along and told people that this music was an art form. That's fine, because that's what many of the musicians wanted it to be regarded as. But what it did was to make everyone conscious of it as an art form. The same thing that happened to classical music almost happened to jazz; *it almost became sterile with people playing only for very elite purposes*. The approach was no longer human at times. What's happening now is that it's becoming more human. Most people don't know anything about the technical possibilities inherent in playing jazz—and they don't want to know.<sup>31</sup>

Communicating to a youthful audience was a key part of Lifetime's aesthetic program and the band members' unapologetic efforts to attract young audiences were initiated at a time when, as noted above, jazz musicians were beginning to slowly gain inroads to cultural and institutional legitimacy.<sup>32</sup> Fusion musicians'

<sup>30</sup> Richard Williams, "Williams and His Electric Rhythms," *Melody Maker*, August 1970, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Emphasis added. Vernon Gibbs, "Tony Williams: Report on a Musical Lifetime," *Down Beat*, January 1976, 17.

<sup>32</sup> For a careful investigation into the contradictions between free jazz rhetoric and the efforts of free jazz artists to gain institutional support, see Iain Anderson, "Jazz Outside the Marketplace: Free Improvisation and Nonprofit Sponsorship of the Arts, 1965–1980," *American Music* 20 (Summer 2002): 131–167. John Gennari's recent *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) focuses on the way in which jazz critics participated in various historical shifts in jazz's perception by listeners and the broader general public. In particular, the chapter, "Swinging in a High-Class Groove: Mainstreaming Jazz in Lenox and Newport," investigates the strategies for raising jazz music's cultural status before the appearance of fusion.

efforts to regain popular appeal for jazz, particularly among young people who did not necessarily identify themselves as jazz fans, were met with indifference or antipathy by two otherwise distinct groups. One group—which was represented by jazz critics such as Martin Williams, Ira Gitler, and others associated with *Down Beat* and similar mainstream jazz-oriented publications—remained committed to viewing jazz music as either an art music or as part of a broad stream of African American vernacular practices. On this particular issue, they were joined by the second group, which was comprised of Afrocentric or black nationalist jazz critics and musicians such as Bill Dixon, Archie Shepp, and Charles Mingus. These two circles each claimed to be untainted by commercial interests, and they were each equally sensitive to any implications of exploiting jazz musicians for corporate interests.

Yet, to give one example, when faced with the dominance of white musicians in the mainstream market, bebop musicians in the 1940s, according to the music historian Scott DeVeaux, responded with “an attempt to reconstitute jazz—or more precisely, the specialized idiom of the improvising virtuoso—in such a way as to give its black creators the greatest professional autonomy *within* the marketplace.”<sup>33</sup> Bebop musicians, in other words, were not exclusively—or even, perhaps, primarily—concerned with their status as artists in the public sphere. They were, in fact, motivated in part by economic concerns as well as a sensitivity to their positions as artists *qua* entertainers. Moreover, critics’ very own record collections betray any pretense about music’s innate status as an art form uninfluenced by commercial interests. As a recording, music is transformed from a cultural practice into a highly mediated, mass produced, globally distributed commercial product, a process which mitigates music’s status as an autonomous art practice. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the recurring debates within jazz regarding the dialectic between art and commerce—an entrenched cultural argument that swing, bebop, and cool jazz musicians all confronted at one time or another—were being revitalized by Williams and his young cohort of fusion musicians.<sup>34</sup>

## Rock Art

Despite the validation that his studies of Western concert music may have granted him, Williams heard rock music as a primary source of artistic freedom, personal expression, and aesthetic pleasure. After leaving one of the world’s most high-profile mainstream jazz groups, Williams was insistent about his need to create a different kind of music. He titled Lifetime’s debut 1970 recording, *Emergency!*, because it was “an emergency for me to leave Miles,” and, more importantly, to mark his desire to

<sup>33</sup> Emphasis in the original. Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 27.

<sup>34</sup> For a cogent discussion of the shifts in journalists’ perspectives on jazz (touched on briefly here), see Lewis Porter, *Jazz: A Century of Change* (New York: Schirmer, 1997). Also, see Paul Lopes, *The Rise of a Jazz Art World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), for an incisive discussion of the critical discourse weighing the merits of jazz between art and commerce throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

“play an emerging music that was my own.”<sup>35</sup> After all, as he asked rhetorically throughout interviews of the time, hadn’t he already been the drummer in one of the best acoustic jazz quintets? He decided to form an organ trio but with markedly different musical goals than the ones soul jazz organ trios had pursued:

I use electric instruments because it’s there; *it’s another sound*. I can’t play the same thing all the time; after playing with Herbie [Hancock] and Wayne [Shorter], I can’t play with any horn player right now. After playing with Miles there aren’t any trumpet players for me to listen to right now, so I go somewhere else for something else. I try to be stimulated.<sup>36</sup>

As noted previously, one of the key aesthetic motivations for Williams’s electric “turn” was his fondness for Hendrix, Cream, and the MC5, thus indicating the distance between his professional jazz efforts and his private listening habits. Lifetime’s aesthetic was forged in the very “contradictions” between jazz and rock, partially shaping the ways in which fusion measured, and attempted to bridge, that gulf. For Williams as well as other young jazz musicians, their readily acknowledged artistic debt to contemporary rock music marked them as participants in a discussion borrowed from rock aesthetics, which, as Keir Keightley argues,

involves the making of distinctions within mass culture, rather than the older problem of distinguishing mass from elite or vernacular cultures. *Rock’s values and judgements produce a highly stratified conception of popular music*, in which minute distinctions are seen to take on life and death significance. Taking popular music seriously, as something “more” than mere entertainment or distraction, has been a crucial feature of rock culture since its emergence [in the 1960s].<sup>37</sup>

Such intra-rock discussions displaced the high/low cultural wars by rejecting the assumptions holding one set of art practices “above” others. Rock audiences of the late 1960s largely rejected earlier entertainment ideals, valuing, for example, authenticity above showmanship. Though this was largely rhetorical—witness the emergence of psychedelic light shows and other manifestations of rock spectacle—these discursive moves occurred largely out of earshot of the symphony hall and the jazz club. Williams, for his part, participated in these intra-rock polemics when he discussed his preference for the Beatles or Jimi Hendrix (as opposed to naming, for instance, the country-rock group, the Byrds, or a more mainstream popular group such as the Association). As Steve Waksman, Robert Walser, and Theodore Grayck convincingly argue, rock artists of the 1960s such as Hendrix had helped transform what had been viewed by music critics and scholars as a teen entertainment idiom, rock ‘n’ roll, into a more serious musical endeavor, rock. These musicians facilitated this transformation by addressing increasingly mature themes, incorporating

<sup>35</sup> McDermott, liner notes to *Spectrum: The Anthology*. Tony Williams Lifetime, *Emergency!*, Polydor 25/3001, 1969, LP; reissued as Universal 5106, 2003, compact disc.

<sup>36</sup> Emphasis added. Arthur Taylor, “Tony Williams,” in Taylor, *Notes and Tones*, 161.

<sup>37</sup> Emphasis added. Keir Keightley, “Reconsidering Rock,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, eds. Simon Frith, Will Straw, and John Street (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 109–110.

sophisticated musical techniques (including elements grafted from the avant-garde art music world), and, in Hendrix's case in particular, exhibiting an instrumental virtuosity in an otherwise largely non-virtuosic musical tradition (for the most part, rock discourse on authenticity stresses a certain lack of technique but, like any other idiom, maintains various internal markers to register technical competence).<sup>38</sup>

Evaluating differences in popular music culture mirrored the distinctions jazz critics hoped to prevail for jazz over other types of popular music, elevating jazz into a type of "classical music," privileging or discrediting different styles of jazz thought to detract from, in their view, an unimpeachable goal. Again, Williams's own ambivalence was marked by his commitment to private classical music theory and composition lessons and his attraction to rock music's expressive powers and non-elitist appeal.

As Waksman, Grayck, Walser, and Gendron argue, the Beatles and Hendrix represented a nascent aesthetic sophistication in rock music—if not exactly on par with Euro-American art music masters (at least in the eyes of high-culture adherents), then certainly "more than" pop. As they and other rock musicians began to self-consciously position themselves as "legitimate" artists, their moves were reinforced by rock journalists such as Robert Christgau, Greil Marcus, and Lester Bangs, each of whom treated rock music to serious analysis, as well as a burgeoning rock discourse constructed by *Rolling Stone*, *Creem*, *Crawdaddy*, and numerous other trade publications that emphasized rock's critical, even intellectual, aspects. Still, many of the jazz musicians with whom Williams was playing at the time were dismissive of his interest in pop and rock music, thereby partially motivating his departure from Davis's band. Williams was clear about one of the reasons his professional peers remained unconvinced about the value of rock music:

Well, it's because I'm a big fan of the Beatles. When I say that, people get nuts. I had this Beatles poster in my apartment years ago and people would come and visit and they'd see this poster and say, "Man, why do you have *that* on your wall?" You know, I'm supposed to be this "jazzier," and I'm listening to the Beatles. But the thing is, it's the context that people don't want to deal with. When the Beatles hit, I was still 17, 18 years old. That was part of my generation's music.<sup>39</sup>

His peers in the jazz world were older, not "part of Williams's generation," and his efforts to recognize rock music as having artistic value were often rejected by them. At the time, the jazz and rock worlds seemed so distant—at least from a jazz musician's perspective—that many of Williams's jazz contemporaries rejected offers to join him in his fusion explorations. For example, African American guitarist Sonny Sharrock,

<sup>38</sup> For a detailed investigation of changes in the aesthetics of rock, particularly as rock was articulated to be distinct from "rock 'n' roll," see Theodore Grayck, *Rhythm and Noise: An Aesthetics of Rock* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1996). Steve Waksman's *Instruments of Desire* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) is a noteworthy account of the ways in which race, technology, and aesthetics articulated rock music as a politics of pleasure, as well as the ways in which some of its adherents' aesthetic and political agendas helped construct an intellectual basis for the rise in critical appreciation during the late 1960s.

<sup>39</sup> Milkowski, "Tony Williams," 69–70.

who was a mere five years older than Williams, turned down an offer to be in Lifetime with the reply that he didn't play rock.<sup>40</sup> For the most part, jazz musicians had been feeling the encroachment of rock musicians on their former dominance of the popular music market and found little comfort in Williams's efforts to reconcile jazz and rock music. Ron Carter, Williams's former partner in Miles Davis's rhythm section, voiced some of these concerns in a 1969 conversation with drummer Art Taylor. I quote Carter at length in order to indicate the range of concerns some jazz musicians held at the time with regard to rock. According to Carter,

In my research I have found that most of the current rock beats are nothing but very poorly executed New Orleans jazz drumming ... [I]f you listen to the record [drummer Billy Higgins] made, *The Sidewinder*, with [trumpeter] Lee Morgan, it sounds like a rock beat. It is not rock. It is only classified as rock for the commercial value of the term. The guitar players who make jazz records or the jazz bands who hire guitar players to get a rock flavor are playing all rhythm-and-blues licks, which is not rock. Rock today, as the public knows, is nothing but watered down, original B. B. King and Blind Lemon Jefferson. The original field hollers that were stolen by Alan Lomax and released on Vanguard Records in the fifties, jail cries that they played, the seven-bar and thirteen-bar blues, Leadbelly and all those cats, are being transferred into white rock bands. All they do is play it louder and much poorer for commercial reasons. I feel that jazz players are not playing rock as the market understands it, but that's what they are going into due to the commercial potential of the term *rock*.<sup>41</sup>

Carter's views regarding fusion musicians' economic motivations and their lack of jazz skills, partially derived from his definitions of rock, R&B, and jazz, is an example of the contentious debates of the time between older and younger jazz musicians. For Carter and many jazz musicians of the time, economic values trumped the social values Williams noted when he pointed to the Beatles as an indicator of the then-current connections between youth culture, psychedelic rock, and countercultural values.<sup>42</sup> However, the central arguments centered on the economic—jazz discourse maintained the view that fusion musicians were little more than musical mercenaries with more interest in earning money than preserving artistic integrity. Yet, as Waksman and others argue, rock music of the late 1960s grew increasingly linked to countercultural political thought, and in a close resemblance to the more overtly politicized rock musicians he admired, Williams's efforts to meld jazz and rock were motivated by aesthetic and social concerns as well as economic ones.

When asked why he chose a career in jazz although he grew up a rock fan, Williams was explicit about his decision:

The reason ... is because in 1954 and '55, the only interesting things about playing music were in jazz. Jazz was more adventurous. In 1954, you had the Everly Brothers, who I loved; Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers; you had Elvis

<sup>40</sup> Sonny Sharrock was born on August 27, 1940. Tony Williams was born on December 12, 1945.

<sup>41</sup> Emphasis in the original. Taylor, "Tony Williams," 58.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Williams's interview in Woods, "Tony Williams."

[Presley], you had all these kinds of things in the pop world. But there were no *bands*. Drumming was not something that was *exciting* in that kind of music.<sup>43</sup>

It can be argued that economic considerations also helped propel Williams towards a career in jazz rather than rock, as might have easily happened given his early rock band experiences and interest in the Beatles and Hendrix. Importantly, his father's network of jazz musicians, club owners, and other players in a local jazz scene helped to facilitate his early professional formation as a jazz musician. For all his activity as a young rock musician, he and his rock band mates were less professionally organized, less connected to the professional music industry, and less likely to find gainful employment.

Still, by the time he formed Lifetime, Williams pointed to various rock artists' music in terms of musicianship and complexity: the Beatles, along with their producer, George Martin, drew on a wide variety of musical idioms, including Western art music, older styles of British and American popular music as well as more obvious rock influences such as the blues, R&B, gospel, and country and western; Jimi Hendrix's mastery of the blues did not preclude him from becoming a pioneering guitarist who became famous for his experiments with feedback, distortion, and sound-manipulating devices (like the wah-wah pedal and fuzz box), along with his penchant for aggressive dissonance and volume; and Cream was a band of rock virtuosos who signaled the arrival of a growing number of technically proficient rock musicians (especially if one recalls bassist Jack Bruce's professional apprenticeship in straight-ahead jazz groups). Growing contingents of rock musicians were drawing on a number of aesthetic and musical traditions, ultimately gaining some measure of critical legitimacy for their efforts. As a professional musician whose categorization as a black jazz musician held specific sets of meanings in economic as well as aesthetic terms, Williams was hoping to draw from rock's set of discursive gains while shouldering concerns about artistic value and the racialized implications of transgenre mergings.

Importantly, Williams's initial motivations for performing jazz (i.e., its greater aesthetic and technical sophistication) had been transferred to rock. By citing his appreciation for the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, and Cream (in the epigraph quotation for this article), Williams was challenging the notion of the superiority of jazz over other popular music in musical terms, and, by drawing inspiration from a "white" music, he helped to position fusion music as a powerfully syncretic force. Such moves were countered by contemporary mainstream critical jazz writings. For example, echoing the discursive posture of mainstream jazz critics of the time, Dan Morgenstern, editor of *Down Beat* in 1969, wrote about the year's Newport Jazz Festival: "Hopefully, the loyal jazz fans have not been alienated. A good program should bring them back next

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<sup>43</sup> Emphasis in the original. Ephland, "Tony Williams," 22.

year. By all means, spice it up with valid things, like real blues and r&b, but leave rock where it belongs: in the circus or the kindergarten.”<sup>44</sup>

But, as mentioned earlier, when Williams began his fusion experiments in the late 1960s, rock musicians were reshaping popular music by expressing more than adolescent themes and obsessions in their music, and rock was gaining cultural capital in ways jazz music had only begun to acquire itself, while simultaneously eclipsing jazz in the marketplace. Though it is true that jazz artists such as Quincy Jones kept mainstream jazz ubiquitous in movie and television scores, and that a growing minority of jazz artists found increasing institutional support in this era, thus eventually gaining critical legitimacy in the academy (even if kept at an arm’s distance from “legitimate” music), the music industry and popular audiences turned a deaf ear to many jazz musicians’ creative work while jazz critics often lamented jazz’s imminent passing. Rock was displacing jazz from its mezzanine position in the dominant cultural hierarchy, not by “rising ‘higher’ than high-cultural music— [rock] is still ranked lower—but by making [high-cultural music] less culturally relevant,” and jazz musicians were noting the economic impact.<sup>45</sup> While most jazz musicians rarely believed they would become wealthy pop stars, I want to note here the effects of rock music’s rise in cultural capital on jazz musicians’ economic status. This linkage was not only apparent to jazz musicians but was felt by the jazz world writ large.<sup>46</sup>

Recognizing rock musicians’ increasing cultural reach, as well as acknowledging publishing market realities, *Down Beat* soon featured rock musicians in cover stories and interviews as well as rock recordings and live shows in its review sections. Still, a certain hesitancy can be noted when Morgenstern opened up *Down Beat*’s editorial policy in the June 29, 1967 issue, writing that the magazine “without reducing its coverage of jazz, will expand its editorial perspective to include *the musically valid aspects of the rock scene*.”<sup>47</sup> Ironically, Morgenstern viewed jazz’s entry into the

<sup>44</sup> Morgenstern and Heineman, “Rock, Jazz,” 45. Additionally, the adverse reactions by some jazz critics following the 1969 Newport Jazz Festival were focused mostly on rock fans, who rioted and destroyed much of the festival’s main grounds, rather than directed to rock musicians themselves. However, my point remains, namely, that jazz critics maintained jazz was a more complex musical idiom and deserved to be valued above rock.

<sup>45</sup> Gendron, *Between Montmartre*, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Here, I am undeniably indebted to Pierre Bourdieu’s idea of cultural capital, particularly in the sense of material value increasing as a corollary to raises in symbolic value of a given cultural product or process. See Pierre, Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984). Gennari traces jazz critics’ concerns about jazz in the 1960s in the chapter, “The Shock of the New: Black Freedom, the Counterculture, and 1960s Jazz Criticism,” in Gennari, *Blowin’ Hot and Cool*. In this book, Gennari explores at length the polemics surrounding free jazz. Also, see Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain’t: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), for a detailed study of jazz musicians’ own participation in the efforts to give jazz music greater cultural prestige. Notably, fusion is not discussed at any length in either book. This is not to detract from the value of either book but, rather, to point out the continuing absence of fusion from discussions within jazz studies. See Christopher Washburne’s insightful essay, “Does Kenny G Play Bad Jazz?,” for more on this subject.

<sup>47</sup> Emphasis added. Dan Morgenstern, “A Message to Our Readers,” *Down Beat*, June 1967, 13.

rarified space of high art as foreclosing jazz's ability to be a "social force ... [which once] taught us how to live in peace and harmony with each other" at a time when mainstream jazz had been positioned as a democratic space by observers such as Andre Hodeir even as that ideal was being contested by writers such as Amiri Baraka (a.k.a. LeRoi Jones).<sup>48</sup> This was by no means the only view but it was held as an ideal by mainstream jazz discourse of the time, a perspective that fit neatly into contemporary liberal politics. This point of view reflected the integrationist appeals of the late 1960s by critics and fans who felt increasingly defensive in their appreciation for jazz music and musicians of all skin colors, particularly in the face of growing black nationalism in certain jazz circles.<sup>49</sup>

But positioning jazz as art music tends to erase black jazz musicians' struggles for artistic recognition as the arguments used to support jazz's move up the cultural hierarchy were often based on an assumption of the bandstand as a space of de-racinated meritocracy, thereby effectively eliding discussions about black participation in high culture (indeed, ignoring high modernist culture as partially constituted by black artists and aesthetics). Yet racial biases off the bandstand continued to dictate the terms of critical value, institutional legitimation, and economic compensation for jazz musicians positioned in particular racialized ways (e.g., economic differentials for black and white band leaders or musicians).<sup>50</sup>

Both fusion and free jazz artists recognized this situation but used different strategies to overcome their marginalization. Moreover, claims of jazz's status as an art music elides the ways in which jazz music remained connected to the marketplace, dependent on recording technologies and mass market distribution circuits—it had not yet become sponsored by commissions and grants in the manner of art music. On the other hand, art status allowed jazz musicians' continued disbarment from elite positions, for the most part, even within the institutions that arbitrated the distribution and compensation for these musicians' music (recordings, public performances). Fundamentally, this view downplayed the racialized logic of Western aesthetics, a subterranean current in popular music discourse, whether jazz or rock. On their side, rock musicians were linking their music to a broad range of social and political issues by 1970 and were being figured by rock discourse as political subjects

<sup>48</sup> Dan Morgenstern and Heineman, "Rock, Jazz," 23. Also, see André Hodeir, *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence* (New York: Grove, 1956), particularly the chapter, "The Essence." For a contrasting view, see LeRoi Jones (a.k.a. Amiri Baraka), *Black Music* (New York: Morrow, 1967).

<sup>49</sup> See the comments made by Julian "Cannonball" Adderley, Dave Brubeck, John "Dizzy" Gillespie, Ralph J. Gleason, Stan Kenton, Charles Mingus, Gerry Mulligan, George Russell, and Gunther Schuller in a roundtable discussion organized by Playboy magazine for its February 1964 issue, reprinted as the chapter, "A Jazz Summit Meeting," in *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History*, ed. Robert Walser (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). Almost every author who has turned to jazz has written about the complexity of the race issue in jazz during the 1960s and the range of attitudes about the relationship of racialized thinking to jazz has reflected this widespread attention.

<sup>50</sup> See DeVeaux, *Birth of Bebop*, especially pp. 17–29, for a trenchant review of the ways in jazz's position as an art music obscured the racial terms under which jazz musicians, critics, and listeners produced, critiqued, and listened to the music.

brandishing a slate of radical challenges to normative collective and individual identity.

### Loud Electric Rhythms

Another reason for jazz critics' and fans' antipathy towards fusion can be understood in light of Williams's description of rock drumming: "So anyway, the energy of the music is happening, but it's rock & roll.... [and] because I'm a drummer, I'm attracted more to [rock's] power kind of drumming, and the emotional kind of drumming."<sup>51</sup> Williams and the other members of Lifetime borrowed aesthetic values from rock in order to energize the band's musical explorations. One set of values the band adopted was electric, amplified power and an extroverted emotionality figured largely through loud volumes and displays of technical virtuosity. As Grayck argues, rock's rhythms are "neither primitive nor simple, nor primordial nor mechanical. The poverty of Western thinking about rhythm, coupled with common prejudices and stereotypes about popular culture, obscures the diversity and role of rhythm in rock music."<sup>52</sup> In other words, rather than abandoning jazz's complexity, Williams was trading in one way of addressing rhythm for another, no less complex manner of drumming. This view, however, was not one shared by jazz musicians and critics at the time, as Ron Carter's remarks above indicate.

A second set of values Lifetime borrowed from rock was the effect of technology and a willingness to use whatever tools technological advances in recording and sound reproduction had to offer musicians. Moreover, in contrast to jazz critics who often criticized electric instrumentation as emotionally "cold," Williams's interest in electric instrumentation was visceral:

I started hearing a lot of electricity. The first thing I can remember ... was Jimi Hendrix's first record, and the sound of it ... with all that electricity ... I mean, not presence electricity, but *the amplified electricity, the sound of the guitars, and that started to excite me, and I wanted to hear more of that.*<sup>53</sup>

Williams's excitement—desire hyperventilating at the sound of electric guitars—registered itself in a time-honored rock 'n' roll way: by cranking up the volume. As previously observed, Lifetime performed at volume levels uncomfortable for many jazz fans. The liner notes to Lifetime's second recording, *Turn It Over*, emphasized the role volume performed in the burgeoning fusion aesthetic by stating in bold capital letters, "PLAY THIS LOUD" and "PLAY THIS VERY LOUD." Williams and his fellow band mates utilized volume in order to announce their break from normative jazz aesthetics, incorporating rock's electric amplification and sound modifying technologies and signaling their excitement about fusion music. Moreover, Williams's intentionally hard-to-decipher liner notes stood in marked

<sup>51</sup> Ephland, "Tony Williams," 22.

<sup>52</sup> Grayck, *Rhythm and Noise*, 147.

<sup>53</sup> Emphasis added. Cox, "Tony Williams," 14.

contrast to listening to the recording at loud volume—an indication that the music mattered more than the writing. Conventionally, liner notes and credits are written to give information rather than obscure it. By intentionally printing the credits in a difficult-to-read manner while highlighting the volume at which the recording should be played, Williams (who is listed as one of the graphic designers) challenged many period listeners' practices of reading liner notes as part of the act of music consumption. With this liner note design, Williams (and/or his record company) seems to suggest that it is relatively unimportant to know who is playing or what they are playing, but it *is* important to “play this record very loud.”

This appeal to loud volume also registered the band's commitment to a politics of pleasure similar to the one enunciated by the MC5, which has been compellingly analyzed by Steve Waksman. Briefly, the MC5 called on rock audiences to abandon bourgeois rationality's distrust of the body through the use of volume, noise, and electric instrumentation in rock performance spectacles. Similarly, *Lifetime* also used loud volume as an audible signifier focusing attention back on the body. However, unlike the MC5's stated purpose of liberating white bodies from bourgeois convention, *Lifetime*'s loud volume and use of noise served as a locus of unresolved tensions in terms of the ownership and individual autonomy of black musicians' creative works. As Williams noted in a 1979 interview,

[Critics and fans own] these records of me with Miles [Davis], for example, and they gave me their approval, so I “belong” to them on those records. I'm up there in their special section, and they go up and pick me out. They've *bought* me, so to speak. Well, if they feel that way about the music, then they resent it if you change.<sup>54</sup>

Williams's reference here to being “bought” and, by extension, “owned” by consumers, resonates audibly against the historical backdrop of African American slavery in the United States, underscoring the constraints of genre on musicians. His attention to audience “approval” betrays the terms of the relationship and one way to assert artistic autonomy was to play music no one wanted to hear at volumes no one could not help *but* hear.

Yet musicians received mixed blessings with the emergence of recording and sound reproduction technologies. On one hand, musicians were able to reach potentially larger audiences by dislocating bodily presence from musical performance, effectively “performing” through recordings. This benefit had economic as well as aesthetic demands and rewards. As the number of recordings superseded live performances circulating in the marketplace, on the other hand, musicians were increasingly locked into particular ways of performing music. One need only think of current listening habits dominated by reproductive processes rather than live performances to recognize the economic implications for a professional touring musician.

<sup>54</sup> Emphasis in the original. Underwood, “Tony Williams,” 54.

Musically, Lifetime's second album, the 1970 *Turn It Over*, was an even more confrontational recording than its 1969 predecessor, *Emergency!*, performatively critiquing both listeners' and critics' assumptions of ownership in all its figurative and sonic excesses.<sup>55</sup> *Turn It Over* outlined an openly aggressive turn by the band towards their critics as well as signaling their interest in a new audience of rock fans. As Williams admitted later, the recording was partly a reflection of the social turmoil of the time:

Most people forget [the social and political upheavals of the early 1970s] when they talk about [Lifetime] or even the state of jazz at that time. There was a lot of tension and anxiety about what we were doing. Our music wasn't always accepted and it was tough to deal with that. *The title was about turning over society.* It was my version of [the rock group, MC5's] *Kick Out the Jams*. The album art [on *Talk It Over*] was black, the liner notes were very hard to read—it was just aggressively antagonistic. That was the whole idea behind that record.<sup>56</sup>

As a fan of the MC5, Williams was conceivably aware of this band's association with white radical group, the White Panthers. The White Panthers, a group modeled somewhat loosely on the Black Panthers (declaring, for instance, in their own manifesto their "full endorsement and support of Black Panther's 10-point Program"), espoused a radical, anarchic political position as evidenced on the inner sleeve of the MC5's debut album, the 1969 *Kick Out the Jams*.<sup>57</sup> John Sinclair, credited with "Guidance" on creating this album, wrote the liner notes and was the most articulate voice in delineating the MC5's politics. He was well-known in the rock music world as a political activist—some would say a provocateur—and he was sentenced to ten years in a federal penitentiary for possession of two marijuana cigarettes. A fan of free jazz as well as hard rock, Sinclair continued to write free jazz and rock record reviews from Marquette Prison in Michigan. One article was a manifesto entitled "Self Determination Music" wherein he outlined some of the social and creative implications for musical production in a system in which musicians owned the means of producing and distributing their creative work. Here, he also demarcated an "authentic" revolutionary music opposed to a commercial mainstream. While his ideas were not entirely singular in the early 1970s, his influence, along with the MC5, struck a resonant chord with the nascent punk rock movement that emerged later in the decade. His slogan, "music is revolution," also connected with the political aims of African American free jazz artists and he was often connecting hard rock, free jazz, and revolutionary politics in his radical political writings.

Williams's own revolutionary leanings were far less direct or explicit. His politics, if an aesthetic ideal can be so described, were directed primarily towards Lifetime's

<sup>55</sup> Tony Williams Lifetime, *Turn It Over*, Polydor 244021, LP; reissued as Polygram 539118, compact disc.

<sup>56</sup> Emphasis added. McDermott, liner notes to Tony Williams Lifetime, *Spectrum*.

<sup>57</sup> MC5, *Kick Out the Jams*, Elektra 74042, LP; reissued as Warner.Esp 7559740422, 2000, compact disc.

musical hybridization. Lifetime was never a politicized band in the manner of the MC5 (or, indeed, the Beatles), subsuming their political views in an aesthetic and discursive contestation of normative musical practices, categories, and institutions. In this way, Lifetime presaged the so-called identity politics of the late 1970s, abandoning the large-scale revolutionary aims of some radical groups for the more limited agenda of reshaping social relationships in local, intimate spaces while increasingly aware of global connections and histories. They modeled Stuart Hall's "new ethnicity" *avant la lettre*, embracing an idiosyncratically affiliative and contingent identity.<sup>58</sup> In other words, Williams, McLaughlin, and Young recognized the disparate discursive histories of rock and jazz yet chose to combine them imaginatively, creating a sound that displayed the links as well as the contrasts between the two idioms.

Williams was in fact pessimistic about political solutions and processes, admitting when asked about "all the strife going on with his people" that "we're not going to see [positive social change]; we're going to be long dead. All we can do is hang in there and keep fighting."<sup>59</sup> Despite this point of view, however, Williams went on to state unequivocally, "I don't play political music. Music is hipper than that. When cats in the press ask, 'Does your music express your people's conflicts? I say no, it's just there. Anything I do politically is too personal. I don't need to use my music to do that. That's cheating. I really don't dig political music, using music.'<sup>60</sup>

Williams uttered these words at a time (the mid-1970s) when musical contemporaries on either side of the jazz/non-jazz borders were challenging the division between musical and political activities. Jazz artists such as Charles Mingus and Archie Shepp offered social and political commentary along with their music while musician-led organizations such as the Association for the Advancement of Creative Music, Sun Ra's Arkestra, and Charlie Haden's Liberation Orchestra exemplified alternative social formations. Rock musicians such as Sly and the Family Stone, Jimi Hendrix, and the MC5 were explicit about their radical political and social views and donated public performances to political organizations.

In what manner did Lifetime mean to "turn over society"? Williams, McLaughlin, and Young highlighted how volatile interracial and transcultural mixture remained (in spite of advances in U.S. public policy such as the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964) without explicit political platforms or manifestoes, but, rather, through embodying transcultural mixture as members of a racially integrated band. In the politically charged cultural landscape of a post-Civil Rights America, hiring McLaughlin (and later, white English bassist Jack Bruce), proved controversial. As a white Englishman deeply involved with Williams's music, McLaughlin provided a lightning rod for the debates surrounding black creativity and the desires of black

<sup>58</sup> See Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities," in *Race, Culture and Difference*, eds. A. Rattansi and J. Donald (London: Sage, 1992). Briefly, Hall's use of "ethnicity" emphasizes the construction of identity rather than, for example, the use of "race," as a biologically determined category that fixes identity, thereby opening up the possibilities for as-yet unrealized hybrid identities, or "new ethnicities."

<sup>59</sup> Taylor, "Tony Williams," 163.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

artists such as Williams to lay claim to broader, even universal, aesthetic legitimization and audience appeal. Williams heard about the guitarist through bassist Dave Holland, who knew McLaughlin from their time spent sharing bandstands in England.<sup>61</sup> Later, Williams claimed McLaughlin “was the best around at the time [and] ... I knew he had [the] capability to play exactly what I was looking for.”<sup>62</sup> The electric guitarist, whose style was influenced by John Coltrane as well as blues guitarist Muddy Waters, fit in well with Williams’s agenda to distance himself from mainstream jazz music as well as give voice to the “excitement” he heard in Hendrix.

Instead of critical acclaim, however, Williams faced the same questions confronted by both his former employer, Miles Davis, as well as Hendrix, about leading a racially mixed band. Neither the rock nor jazz worlds seemed comfortable with the racial politics of mixed band membership, especially if the leader of the band was black. Williams confessed,

Somebody came back to me and said, “What are you doing about white guys in your band?” That’s such a drag, because like I told other people, it’s such a thing now, I’m really in the middle of everything. On one side, I’ve got black militants, you know, and it should be all black, and the rock musicians don’t really consider us rock. You know, we’re not trying to be rock. They think we’re trying to play up to them, and we’re not. And I’m not trying to get away from jazz because I want to make money, and that’s not it either. I’ve got all these things coming down on me.<sup>63</sup>

Williams was obviously distressed about the reaction to Lifetime by black nationalists as well as white and black jazz critics and audiences. When black nationalists confronted Williams about hiring white musicians, it revealed how audiences had internalized these constructs regarding the correspondences between idiom and musician, supporting Williams’s claims about the relationship between race and genre, audience and musician. Ironically, McLaughlin’s explosive fretwork provided much of Lifetime’s emotional heat, and the dramatic dialogue he and Williams shared carried over into McLaughlin’s later collaborations with Mahavishnu Orchestra drummer, Billy Cobham. Lifetime’s eager embrace of a “post-ethnic” aesthetic was a way in which the band members tried to reconfigure racial and ethnic difference(s), though, at the time, their efforts were anathema to black nationalists and cultural conservatives alike.

Musically, where *Emergency!* was psychedelic in orientation with compositions such as “Where” and “Vashkar,” *Turn It Over*’s “Right On” and “A Famous Blues” restated Lifetime’s affinity for hard rock in unequivocal terms. The opening tracks, versions of Chick Corea’s “To Whom It May Concern—Them” and “To Whom It May Concern—Us,” were arranged to immediately alert listeners to Lifetime’s

<sup>61</sup> McLaughlin was so little known to the jazz world in 1969 that his name was misspelled as “McGlocklin” in an October 16, 1969, *Down Beat* review by Alan Heineman of a Lifetime show at the Jazz Workshop in Boston.

<sup>62</sup> Gibbs, “Tony Williams,” 17.

<sup>63</sup> Cox, “Tony Williams,” 33.

unapologetic moves towards rock. McLaughlin's guitar tone and choice of solo material did not reference jazz guitarists such as Charlie Christian or Tal Farlow so much as contemporaneous rock guitarists such as Jimi Hendrix, if rendered in a different harmonic context. For example, Williams's composition, "Right On," highlighted the ways in which rock and jazz could meet as Williams goaded McLaughlin and Young into increasingly frenzied choruses.

Their version of the Antonio Carlos Jobim bossa nova composition, "Once I Loved," displayed Lifetime's merging of rock and experimental music. While Larry Young holds sustained notes in the upper register of the organ and McLaughlin inserts intermittent chords, Williams only provides vocals on this track. It ends abruptly, sounding as if the song was ended more by happenstance—the end of a tape reel, perhaps?—than by intent. A listener might hear this as a sonic foregrounding of Lifetime's own premature ending, if not a premonition of Larry Young's disappearance from jazz history. To return, "Once I Loved" is followed by "Vuelta Abajo," a Williams composition which immediately places Lifetime back in a sonic space familiar to Cream fans with its bass riffing, guitar histrionics, and volatile drumming. The next track, McLaughlin's "A Famous Blues," with its barely audible whispered vocal track running beneath the lead vocals, conjured psychedelia once again and Williams's solo midway through the piece showcased the leader's technical skills. As fusion contested the assumptions in the relationship between genres and audiences, it is small wonder that Lifetime's record label, Polydor, failed to market the band successfully, promoting Lifetime to a jazz audience who were indifferent and often hostile to the band's fusion agenda.

In the end, Williams was explicit about how Lifetime's fusion agenda might be conceived as a way of "turning society over," arguing, "[I plan] to show people that the music isn't dead. Try to bring back the vitality that has been lost. They've made jazz an art form, put it in concert halls, made it intellectual, and that's one way they killed it. So did the rock [critics]."<sup>64</sup> In effect, Williams was arguing that even as rock became more "intellectual," it risked losing its vitality to affect people along the way. Similar to the MC5 or Hendrix, Lifetime suggested that a politics of pleasure and an aesthetics of noise might prove equally challenging to critical hegemony as overt political action.

Williams's disappointment with the reaction by critics and long-time fans of his work with Miles Davis was "painful," but he was uncompromising about his decision "for not staying in musical areas that *they* felt comfortable with."<sup>65</sup> Lifetime signaled Williams's frustrations about the borders between various musical genres, as he explained in an interview soon after *Turn It Over's* release,

Five years from now I may just walk on stage and saw a chair in half. Right now I'm using electricity and rhythms that make me feel good. If I didn't feel good I'd never play—I certainly wouldn't play just because somebody wanted to hear me. When what I play stops feeling good, I'm not going to continue.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Taylor, "Tony Williams," 163.

<sup>65</sup> Emphasis in the original. Underwood, "Tony Williams," 54.

<sup>66</sup> Richard Williams, "Williams and His Electric Rhythms," 12.

He admitted elsewhere that he had turned down offers to record because he “didn’t want to make records just for the sake of making records, for the romantic feeling of being in the studio,” emphasizing a personal criteria for his music.<sup>67</sup> Yet the feeling of being “vilified,” as he described it, was difficult to alleviate and Lifetime became louder, more aggressive, more, well, rock-like in their attempt to “kick out the jams.”

Lifetime’s alignment with the aggressive styles of psychedelic and hard rock was underlined by the 1970 addition of English bassist, Jack Bruce, whose membership in the successful rock group, Cream, seemed, initially, to promise the possibilities of crossing over to a rock audience. But the management struggles between various band members’ support teams, particularly Robert Stigwood’s handling of Bruce, began to wear on the cohesion of the group musically. After another two recordings, Williams disbanded Lifetime and effectively retired from the music business for three years.<sup>68</sup> Another problem, according to Williams, was his own indecisive leadership: “Everyone started to have their own idea as to what the band should be. As young as I was, I didn’t have the experience to recognize that. I should have fought to maintain my original vision.”<sup>69</sup> Eventually, Williams abandoned the use of Lifetime as a band moniker entirely, noting a personal as well as professional loss: “It just wasn’t the same without Larry Young. He was the heart of Lifetime.”<sup>70</sup>

## Conclusion

While certainly not the first multiracial band, as one of the first groups to be explicit in its attempts to merge rock and jazz sensibilities, Lifetime enacted the transcultural collaborative practice that would partially define fusion. Lifetime can be heard performing this dialogical signifying in McLaughlin’s composition, “Where.” In this track, each instrument maintains equal interest in the overall musical texture, and the rock and jazz elements freely mix in the phrasing of the music. The composition’s three verses allow the musical instruments “to speak” with the barest of accompaniment to Williams’s vocals, providing a sense of lightness and space and underscoring the softly enunciated lyrics. Each verse asks of a future—where are you/they/I going?—as well as a past—where do you/they/I come from?—sung deliberately and unhurriedly.

As each short verse ends, the instruments continue, providing the answer to Williams’s recurring interrogation into our pasts and our futures. In the last verse,

<sup>67</sup> Cox, “Tony Williams,” 14.

<sup>68</sup> In the interview with Vernon Gibbs cited above, Williams is asked about Bruce’s possible role in breaking up Lifetime. Williams responded, “No musical differences, it was just business that came into it. His people naturally wanted to have control over [the band, but] that would have meant me canceling my people. Even though [my management] weren’t equipped and we were having problems because of them, I didn’t think it was the right thing to do.” Gibbs, “Tony Williams,” 17. Williams also mentions this situation in the 1992 interview with Bill Milkowski (Milkowski, “Tony Williams”).

<sup>69</sup> McDermott, liner notes to Tony Williams Lifetime, *Spectrum*.

<sup>70</sup> Milkowski, “Tony Williams,” 74.

after he sings, "Where am I going? / Where have I come from? / If anyone asks me / I know I can say," the instruments answer quietly, though not passively, announcing Lifetime's belief in fusion music's abilities to "sound out" the network of links between sounds and social context, creativity and representation, race and genre. Psychedelic organ timbres mingle with distorted rock guitar, each announcing rock's "answer" to Williams's probing questions about origins as well as aspirations. As Williams's obscure liner notes to *Turn It Over* caution us, we should not miss the music for the words, the temporal flow of pitch, timbre and rhythm for the discursive formation. And in his denial of overtly political music, he argued that we should be wary to claim too easily that the dialogic signifying of fusion would replace the cyclical arguments regarding authenticity and purity within musical discourse.

Yet, Williams remained distressed over the critical reception of his first Lifetime recording and the second, the confrontational *Turn It Over*, measured his concern with its deliberately difficult-to-read liner notes, and its unapologetic use of hard rock elements such as Williams's bellicose rock drumming, McLaughlin's aggressively angular guitar pyrotechnics, and Young's abstract yet visceral organ work, alongside delicate, psychedelic rock tracks. Frustratingly for these professional musicians, Lifetime was not commercially successful, failing to attract much attention at the time. While Lifetime is now credited with being one of the first fully-realized jazz-rock fusion bands, the band—and Williams's own perspective from the leader's position—is important in other ways. Williams described his music in the 1970s as a "reaction to the 60s." As people began to coalesce politically around new social movements on the left and the right and identity politics became an increasingly salient space of political and social action throughout the decade, Lifetime's cultural politics were part of a larger series of cultural debates, including questions regarding cultural plurality, transitory affiliations, and shifting identities.

Williams's agenda of crosscultural coalescence—not necessarily cohesion—speaks to the ways in which fusion music provided one model for engaging difference. Lifetime's band members' efforts to self-consciously merge their musical tastes and abilities into a broader, more inclusive musical formation were dialogical yet contestative. By crafting an aesthetic out of "seemingly antagonistic relationships as non-contradictory oppositions,"<sup>71</sup> Lifetime challenged the notion of an oppositional white and black "sounding world." Lifetime's transgeneric musical blends disputed cultural hierarchies based on racialized conceptions of "high" and "low" culture—an idea through which later fusion bands would fashion themselves.

## Abstract

This essay investigates the ways in which Tony Williams's fusion band, Lifetime, challenged and complicated the meanings jazz held as both a tradition of popular music and as art music. The band merged psychedelic and hard rock styles with jazz,

<sup>71</sup> Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Vintage-Random, 1998), xv.

producing music that unmasked the racialized assumptions behind genre categories, helped introduce rock's enthusiastic use of new recording technologies as aesthetic ends in themselves to jazz recordings and performances, and fomented an explicit engagement with young, popular audiences. Lifetime's accomplishments were produced in spite of music industry misunderstandings about the band's music as it did not easily fit into given generic categories, jazz audiences' resistance to their music because of its unapologetic embrace of rock aesthetics, and jazz critics' antipathy towards rock music more generally. As young musicians who had grown up appreciating rock music as well as jazz music, the members of Lifetime helped initiate the formation of a set of musical practices that operated under a number of different names but which I call "fusion music" in order to highlight the explicit generic mixing these young musicians enacted. One of Williams's primary motivations for merging rock and jazz was to reach beyond normative genre categories, evincing the naked, perhaps naive, optimism fusion held for its early practitioners.

**Keywords:** Tony Williams, John McLaughlin, Larry Young, Lifetime, rock, jazz, popular music, genre, Miles Davis, Jimi Hendrix, the Beatles, the MC5, crossover