

György Polai:

Introductory words to a “discovered treasure”

Lecture by György Szabados in Nagykanizsa

I wish that the good old Tesla tape recorder was still working: I used it to record the lecture given by the composer and pianist György Szabados about the three giants of the jazz history with „C” (O. Coleman, J. Coltrane, D. Cherry), on the 5th February 1974 in the Jazz-Club in Nagykanizsa. The recorder is not working any more, the tape has disappeared – gone by the wind...

What remains however, is this text – which I thought was lost – but thanks to my friend Gyula Halász, it reemerged a few weeks ago. He collected and kept all jazz stuff concerning Nagykanizsa for his book *Jazz in Kanizsa* (1995).

So the reader can read a real discovered treasure, which nobody has studied more often and more thoroughly than I did. I recorded the lecture with the tape recorder of old times and typed the text instantly with the enthusiasm of a 17 years old with an unbelievable pleasure. When I held the text again in my hands and read it, I heard Gyuri’s voice during my reading, exactly as he presented the lecture more than 40 years ago.

During those times I already knew the later works of Coltrane, thanks to the dear Sanyi Vajda, who selflessly and untiringly sent us good music recorded on tapes. I witnessed several – among the very few - concerts with Szabados (Nagykanizsa, 29th March 1973, Egyetemi Színpad 27th December 1972, and 12th April 1973). I even had several long talks with Gyuri, and we exchanged letters and maybe I even visited him in their home in Borbolya Street. I remember how the four of us (Gyuri, Sanyi Vajda, my brother, and I) spent the night after the Szabados concert in Nagykanizsa in March 73, squeezed in the small room of our flat.

In February 1974, the Szabados Sextet broke up after a successful concert in Üröm, because in September Misi Ráduly didn’t come back with Gyuri and his musicians from the jazz festival in Pau. He flew to the USA to study at the Berklee School of Music in Boston. At the beginning of February 1974 I couldn’t know yet that I would have the opportunity to enjoy the music by Gyuri’s quartet on the 15th March, in the Fészek-Club with Vili Jávory at the percussion. And I didn’t suspect that in the same year I would be present on the first day when one of the best Hungarian jazz records, *The Wedding (Az esküvő)* was recorded in the studio of the Hanglemezgártó Vállalat in the Rottenbiller Street, this time with Imre Kőszegi at the percussion. Perhaps it was the evil constellation of stars or the carelessness of the “competent” comrades – but no empty tapes were prepared for the recording, so they could only try their best with used tapes.

Five years later, on the 14th March 1979, Gyuri came to Pécs with his wife and gave a lecture in the Lawyers Club with the title: *John Coltrane and the contemporary music*. We wanted to cheer up the Saturday morning with a walk in Tettye, when a young reporter of the Radio Pécs put his microphone under our nose with the question: “What do you know about Albert Einstein?”. It was the anniversary of his birth... Gyuri improvised such a lecture about him which left the poor boy breathless. I don’t think that this record is still available but it is sure that Gyuri’s lecture was not recorded: we published only a short discussion in the university’s magazine with the title: *György Szabados about Hungarian jazz*.

I had a surprise for Gyuri on that evening. I took them to the technical college where the dancers of the Pécsi Balett performed a choreography by Imre Eck, made with Gyuri’s composition, the *Miracle*. For Gyuri it was a surprise; he had never heard about it. Otherwise, we would have had to fight seriously to get a ticket to enter.

György Szabados spoke without notes about the three „C’s“ in Nagykanizsa. The following text is nearly an exact transcript (only a few stylistic corrections were required) showing to what extent his message was “ready for print” .

The lecture can be published thanks to the permission of Judith Szabados. Editing by László Babosi, Görgy Polai and Mihály Ráduly.

GYÖRGY SZABADOS:

Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, and Don Cherry

Lecture in Nagykanizsa on the 5th February 1974

Dear Friends,

It is a special pleasure for me to have an opportunity to give a lecture in Nagykanizsa, after the possibility was given to us earlier to serve the world, which is ours, with our music. We strongly feel that it is a firm part of the music language of today’s man, and which is not strange in our regions either. It is a pleasure for me because music tells a lot, but I mean that it is good to talk sometimes about music too, especially when the subject is the music, which may sound today a bit “strange” and whose origin is not in our world, however which contains one of the most elementary phenomena of our age. It reveals the cultural fabric of the coloured people; those novelties, that tonality, such original things, which are characteristic for them, and which had such a great impact on the European arts at the turn of the century (19-20th century) and at the beginning of the 20th century.

My subject is actually restricted to the presentation of three people: Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, and Don Cherry. All have a name with C – and these three people with C have a special place in the history of jazz; especially Ornette Coleman and John Coltrane, the pioneers of this genre, more, of the movements of the blacks as well. Donald Cherry, close companion of both, and himself an active member of this movement, and of this world of music too, can be considered as an „executer” in this music, therefore I will speak less about him, since his style, his visions and his world are rather merely a colour in the concept represented mainly by Coleman.

Before mentioning some data of their lives – since it is not my task to tell life stories – I must speak a few words about the background, first of all about the social background, which gave rise to this music.

And we are already in America, exactly in North-America, in the USA. Everybody knows how the blacks came to America and that they were slaves for three centuries. In the 18-19th centuries they lived in social circumstances which equalled those of European antiquity, until they were officially liberated. These few words touch on how we can best judge the situation of the blacks.

But I must speak of the following, and make a big jump into the recent past.

It is typical for America that economic sensitivities - the economic, existential sensitivities of the people living there - prevail, and not the sensitivity for the development of artistic or other spiritual capacities. The materialistic way of thinking doesn’t foster the arts. The development of the industrial society, the capitalistic, imperialistic focus – even in the economic and social field – creates the kind of overall feeling which we call nowadays alienation, although this is a complex notion with various aspects. I don’t wish to talk about that now. America’s art, which tried to catch up at home, in its own world, the path covered by the European arts, culminated in the art of alienation, which was characteristic of the culture of the white European. The same process applies for the music in America too. Whoever has heard the compositions of John Cage, or the music of Aaron Copland and others, knows and feels that the music of America’s whites expresses a quite glamorous, however

basically empty life. Unlike the black, who differs from the white so spectacularly, is in a completely different situation in the world. Of course, he is in a different situation because of his colour, but the way he is appraised in America is special because blacks and whites have been living together for hundreds of years, and the blacks were not considered as human beings for 300 years. Regarding today's situation, LeRoi Jones makes an interesting statement in his book *The Blues People - Negro Music in White America** : "Today it doesn't befit to remember the 300 years of slavery in America that the white man was the master and the black was the slave." But the knowledge about this fact is at the source of the real American black culture, and this, and "secondary symptoms" such as ambivalence, self-hate, stoicism, and moody optimism leave their mark on the most substantial part of the Afro-American music. LeRoi Jones refers here to the Afro-American music, which is included in, and represented by, the new music phenomenon, which the blacks created in America, and which we call today, jazz.

This would be however an over-simplification. In the meantime, social changes happened influencing the fate of the blacks, but no such changes, which wouldn't have maintained in them the feeling that they are only Negro, only black. Actually - and this refers mainly to the black middle class - this is the reason of the self-hate, mentioned by LeRoi Jones: they were ashamed to be Negroes at a time, when it was the fashion in America that whites disguised themselves as Negroes and entertained each other with "Negro music" in a quite commercial way.

In the meantime, a quick urbanization took place in America, since America is the country where the industrial-social development reached its peak. Contrary to that emerged an archaic nostalgia for a lost empire, mainly among the Negroes, who always had the feeling of being locked in - or better - locked out. This is a psychological phenomenon: when someone finds himself in a bad situation, he replaces his desires into a lost Eden, supposing that it was there once, that he cherishes deep in his soul. Actually, this is nothing other than the longing for his own spiritual, cultural entity, which he couldn't create.

This nostalgia, being even today characteristic for the whole negritude, was not so conscious earlier. Today when we talk about black power, the blacks try to create their own world with such purposefulness that such great personalities emerge, like Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, etc., and such spiritual people, like LeRoi Jones.

These people remained much closer to their ethnic roots compared to the white man, who had already built his cities, acted out his culture, and has a cultural past. The blacks have a more emphatic, ethnic social state and point of view, because they live in ghettos in America. These are not like the ghettos that were created in Europe during the time of fascism, but are demarcated districts, which are very different from areas where no blacks live.

Of course there are important differences in the existential circumstances. We have to make a difference between those blacks who opted for assimilation and cooperation. Those are the members of the middle class who were prepared to forgo their Negro self-consciousness, and created excellent living conditions. But the existence of a people doesn't depend mainly on the material basis, or its prosperity.

Its existence depends on the cultural superstructure, on the consciousness. The negritude in America has acquired its self-awareness today; it already has such experiences and possibilities within the American society that it can build up its own world within this confinement, by profiting from its cultural heritage kept in a pure state from its history, which it brought from Africa and through Africa, finally from the Orient.

One more remark as an introduction: jazz had periods - and for each period it is characteristic that the white man tried to make jazz, as a phenomenon, white. He tried to employ it in the service of his entertainment. The black didn't approve of it. And why didn't he like this music? Because the white man created culture on the basis of different biological and psychological motifs. His sense for tempo, the timing of his life were different. As well as his inheritance; he came from a different origin, he knew other passions. Everything was different from all which was typical for the Negro. As

a consequence, the “Negro mentality” never accepted as his own, all that the white man created and produced for himself by (ab)using black music. Therefore, Negro musicians distanced themselves from time to time, from certain trends of jazz and jazz history, clearly showing that these distancing moments were important preparatory moves towards the further evolution of jazz. Today we know that ragtime, Dixieland, and swing were actually the white periods of jazz history. Frank Kofsky, LeRoi Jones, and others carried out important research on this subject. Those were the periods when the white man tried to commercialize jazz. The negritude was far away from these happenings.

Dixieland, and even ragtime, are not original Negro music. Stravinsky observed these styles with sharp ears and he even composed a piece for piano in ragtime taste. Negro music doesn't tolerate such regulations - the order of meter, melody, and other music factors, which the white man requires. It doesn't tolerate that idealized perfection, because its temper is different, and doesn't live in a diatonic way of musical thinking. (Music reached the peak of diatonic in the times of Beethoven and Mozart. But this is a distinguished world of music within the world of sounds, a distinguished music regulation.)

The music world of the blacks doesn't consider it as his own. In the Forties there was a considerable shift in the jazz when great names appeared, such as Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk and Dizzy Gillespie, to name just a few. As a backlash to swing, which was again a downright white period, they wanted to restore the character of rhythm, which is typical for their world, for their culture. That was the moment of birth of the bebop period.

The first big bebop musicians built up and represented this in a demonstrative way in society: they met this concept even with their clothing. They wore the clothing of the country Negro from the small towns; they sported a certain type of cap and they grew a goatee. They completed their outfit with wire-framed spectacles with clear lenses, because they wanted to make it a fashion among blacks, and to display that even a Negro can be intellectual because he is not less than others, and his values and possibilities are not less, but different. Thus, he preferred to wear eye-glasses to have the look of an intellectual. They made these steps, and this was the basis upon which the actual, so-called avant-garde musicians – who are not avant-garde when compared to European composers, but they are musicians of the 20th century - could place the musical renewal.

Interesting that the same things happened in American jazz, however much faster, as that which has happened in the European music history for centuries.

We can follow the same social changes that took place in America, first of all in the life of the Negroes, since music is able to record and to display them. When we study the European music history, we find that a Berlioz, in connection with the ideas of the French revolution, stands for music with elementary outburst. The big innovator Beethoven, who simultaneously summarized all results of music history in his works, represents such a European period, even with its frustrations and renewals, which is eligible for founding and symbolizing the spiritual self-consciousness of the European man, etc.

With this short introduction, which cannot be complete since it is a very complex problem even if looked at from the outside, I think we can jump into deep water and listen to the first composition. We start with Ornette Coleman's music, who was the first among the avant-garde musicians, casting itself like a meteor into the American jazz music.

Music: Ornette Coleman: *Lonely Woman* (1959).

I don't know whether you could feel the spirit of this music? We can deduce from this piece a lot, also what really a “negro-experience” is. Similar to the folk music, in the music of the blacks everything is more direct, less in a figurative sense, less distilled. Today arts and art's symbols smell more the scent of earth. The black musician transmits very sensually what he wants to tell: he wants to evoke in the listener the mental state, which caused him to produce this music. And such a

passionate race like the blacks, tends to be spectacular and elementary, not only in their music. In this book, the author quotes a poem told by a woman who lives out her womanhood:

I'm a big fat mama, got the meat shakin' on my bones
I'm a big fat mama, got the meat shakin' on my bones
And every time I shake, some skinny gal loses her home.

In these words, we can recognize the directness, the roughness; we can almost see the negress' inviting buttocks, isn't it? And this is not a repulsing but a very exciting phenomenon. In this music, we can feel this gold shimmer, this joy of colours, this lushness and voluptuousness, the teasing – since the black man's movement is characterised by negligence and looseness.

When we observe the movement of a black athlete during sport, we see that all his limbs move in a different direction, full of rhythm, de-concentrated, and still so harmonious.

Later we see that this de-concentration can be perceived in the so-called „free“ music, in the seemingly “free” music, but still the musician gives what he wants to give in a coherent way. We just heard a composition by Ornette Coleman, and it is a track from his record with which he first entered the jazz-world.

Ornette Coleman was born on the 19th March 1930** in Fort Worth, Texas. As is the case with other jazz musicians, his life is quite unknown. Probably, his life and childhood didn't differ from that of other urban Negroes. He spent a long time in his youth in the neighbourhood of Los Angeles, in the Southwest, and he studied there and used to play in blues and rhythm bands. As we know, Los Angeles is the first place mentioned where jazz had appeared.

The fact that he played in blues and rhythm bands reveals a lot, since he had a lively connection to rhythm since his early childhood, and the blues is the real Negro experience.

So he lived till the fifties and then he started with studies of forms in Los Angeles. Certainly, he took over such musical forms, which met his own musical concepts and which go as far as the modern composers of the 20th century. He continued with theoretical studies absolutely necessary for his later music. These included mainly historical, further social, and thirdly musical studies. This is the reason why he appeared in America with such a complete “equipment”.

In 1958, he made a record together with Walter Norris, Billy Higgins, Don Payne, and Don Cherry with the title: *Something Else*. This was not his own (solo) record yet. Later other musicians played with him too.

Don Cherry was born in 1936 in Oklahoma City. His music history begins in fact with the emergence of Ornette Coleman: he too plays on the record of Coleman in 1959, which we have just heard.

First, he played the trumpet, after, he played for a while the cornet and pocket-trumpet (which is a special piston-instrument). Earlier, he often performed with Sonny Rollins, who was one of the most typical and most important representative of the traditional and original Negro jazz. Cherry often visited Europe as well. We must mention that the trumpet has a special place in the history of instruments in jazz because it represents and maintains the noblest traditions in the Afro-American music. He followed the Blues intonation, on one hand, that not completely pure tonality which is so characteristic for the Negro intonation. On the other hand, he was more and more attracted by the oriental music world. Several contemporary musicians exerted influence on Don Cherry, like Albert Ayler, Eric Dolphy, and the Indian music. The music we were listening to is the track *Lonely Woman* – from his record *The Shape of Jazz to Come*.

This dragging, sad sound allows us to feel the state of mind of the abandoned woman lost in deep contemplation; moreover, it also presents the huge shift which happened in the music world of the blacks.

I referred already to the movements in the service of self-awareness, but I have to add that the musicians in the forties simply asserted that they were making serious music. The reason is that their music is the expression of the deepest human spheres, carrying the deepest human problems, and therefore what is serious concerns the contents. It is not light entertainment, but it is music built on catharsis and wants to involve the listener as co-sufferer. Regarding the form, we witness such richness that few instrumentalists in the world are able to handle their instruments as they do.

This generation headed by Coleman, whom I consider as the first and leading figure of the movement, produced this serious character in its completeness. *Lonely Woman* is a short, well composed piece written down, although jazz is basically improvisation and the music is rather perceived by our senses due to its content. Next, we listen to *Eventually*.

Music: Ornette Coleman: *Eventually* (1959)

Those who can read such notes deserve our respect because it is not simple, and for us Europeans it is not easy to sense this music when we hear it for the first time, not even after the tenth time. Basically, this is a musical expression which implements a lot of strange, exotic sounds and effects, and sometimes we feel that here is some lyricism, and there some hardness. How can one consider this almost chaotic and appalling music as art? This could be the impression felt by the American Jazz world – still living in the world of cool jazz and hard bop - when hearing Ornette Coleman's first record and first performances.

The periods run out much faster in the American music, since they have to make up a backlog of several centuries, or one thousand years, compared to the European music. The period of cool music presents a funny ambiguity. Under the influence of Bach's pre-classical music, it is a very fine jazz music in the style of chamber music, which has evolved mainly due to white jazz musicians: Dave Brubeck, Gerry Mulligan, Shorty Rogers, and others. This type of music implemented melody lines, a counterpoint system, and rhythmic types, which are characteristic of the European classical music. On the other hand, the "cool" developed features with the contribution of Negro musicians. I refer here to Miles Davis, one of the cool's fathers. But those who took part in cool, together with Miles Davis, had different ideas. Here we fall again on the problem of "making white the jazz". The black was present in the cool jazz so that he said: "I am staying cool whatever happens to you in America". Davis dissolved this contradiction; he created behind the cool intonation very warm lyrics with fantastic depth, using the meeting of the archaic world represented by the black man and today's cosmic world. He realised an "inward turning attitude" which helped the blacks in the field of music, to know himself better and to gain self-confidence. Confidence in himself! In his soul! In possibilities, which can be lured out from the Negro soul. But this also met its end. Hard bop was an overstretched version of bebop and became so schematized that it couldn't be developed further. But it is interesting that hard bop tried to revive the periods of early jazz history, which used to follow the course of blacks. Such were the rhythm and blues periods, of which a famous representative is Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson, whom I met in San Sebastian. Even today he can sing Blues and play the saxophone fantastically. An old Negro with goatee.

After these efforts of hard bop and "cool", something very interesting happened. The latest stream of the European music burst into the world of the blacks: the results of the music of the 20th century, and no lesser composers as Stravinsky and Bartók. Both made use of folk traditions, of Russian music or better, from the Ural region on the one hand, and of Central and South European, Turkish, resp. North African music on the other hand, thus, not the Western European, not the American, but the oriental traditions. At the same time, these traditions brought along another kind of rhythm. When we look at the rhythmic Central-European or North-African folk music, or at the Hungarian folk music of parlando-rubato character, in all of them we find the possibility to break up the rhythm, thus a novelty after all the achievements the European music has performed so far.

So, the composers of the 20th century placed in the centre of music thinking the polyrhythmic, a typical phenomenon for oriental music and implemented it. The consequences were immense, because the asymmetric rhythm induced an asymmetric way of thinking of the composers and those playing modern music. On the other hand, it followed its own path because polyrhythmic is a field of

immense wealth, and see, we landed again at the black music. The African rhythm world follows the way of polyrhythm, so that for who knows how many thousand years, it is there, existing, since we notice when listening to today's folk music records what an elaborated rhythm world the African man has. All this met in a formidable unity in the circle of the avant-garde Negro musicians and their music, and this music was born together with the polyphonic way of thinking mentioned before. The characteristic of this new music is the polyrhythmic, thus it is the direct inheritor and follower of the black, and first of all, of African traditions. Since this is neither characteristic for the Oriental man, nor for the mentioned masters of the 20th century, suddenly a contemporary classical music has emerged, which differs from the European classical music – and the contrast is huge! – because it is rooted in a different culture and in a different human soul.

It is not an easy task for a white man to bridge the difference. So, let us try another path and arrive to the name of John William Coltrane, because I think he might help us. Because he was the musician who stands the closest to the Hungarian ear in this world, because his intonation remained more archaic and vernacular, unlike Ornette Colman, who displayed absolutely the gestures of the urban black. Let us listen to a track from one of his earlier records, where we can hear his attempts to find his own way.

Music: John Coltrane: *My Favorite Things* (1961)***.

John Coltrane was born on the 23rd September, 1926 in Hamlet in North-Carolina and died on the 17th July 1967, due to liver cancer in New York. He dedicated his whole life to music in a heroic struggle, and during his last years while terminally ill.

First, he played in Dizzy Gillespie's band – thus in a good school – in that mentioned social environment, which discovered its self-awareness. His role model was Dexter Gordon. He played with Miles Davies between 1955 and 1960, and they made several well received records; he attracted attention with his extraordinary virtuosity, with the emotional content typical for all his solo performances and all his music. Due to the perfect mastering of his instrument he evoked fantastic runs, such soundscapes, mainly due to these runs, which touched and felt the tonal course in the music from a thousand sides. This was the most characteristic and fantastic technical asset, which his instrumental art contributed to the jazz literature.

In 1960 he broke up with Miles Davis and funded his own quartet, and produced his first record with his band *My Favorite Things*. I was often together with people together who loved folk music, jazz and all kinds of music, and several times they asked me why a number has to be played for so long. The same rhythm is repeated and so the concept falls apart, swims away, and has no effect. Often, I had difficulty finding the answer. Still, the best answer is when we listen to the original recording of any of our folk ballads, let me say, *Kőmives Kelemenné*; the more verses the singer is singing, the more we get an answer, since this monotony, so characteristic for the Negro musical thinking, is not only typical for them, but for most kinds of folk music too. The dizzying rhythm, permanently repeated, and allowing the inserting of thousands of variations, is truly representative of the blues, being the depth of the Negro music and Negro soul – maybe its genuine core. This rocking play evokes the warm, painful and still joyful mood which we recognize in this song, in Coltrane's favorite song. Coltrane has adapted this piece several times, once he improvised in major, and once in minor key so that once he highlighted one side, and the next time another side of his favorite song, of the favorite mood. Anyway, he remains within this complex, and as such a truly modern musical feeling, which is one of the greatest assets provided by the black classical music, and mainly by the blues.

Later others joined him: McCoy Tyner, Reggie Workman and one of his best bass players, Jimmy Garrison and Elvin Jones, who contributed to the band's style his wonderful polyrhythmic drumming. He used to work with Eric Dolphy and many others, who later found their own path.

After having practiced and played all modal scales, in 1961 he learned the Indian improvisation technique and studied it seriously. The American critics, and even the jazz world, considered his music first as anti-jazz. He himself is sometimes like the person who let the Jinn escape from the lamp. He would like to put him back sometimes. Later he issued one or two records with a traditional type of music, like *The John Coltrane Quartet Plays* – approaching the mood of earlier times, mainly

the bebop period (maybe due to nostalgia). In the meantime however, he followed his own path and reached fantastic vastness. He went immediately farther compared to Ornette Coleman, although his lifework has been closed. But we must always emphasize the fact that the musical architecture of the blacks always includes the blues. The blues is something intangible. I tried to describe this previously: joy and sorrow, at the same time, nostalgia and fury – many things, and finally a really complex thing. It has become a world phenomenon, since even the entertaining music had its blues period and even the beat had it. In the composition we just listened to, we can recognize that here he was very faithful to the traditional jazz thinking due to the fixed rhythm. The next piece is from the record *Coltrane Plays the Blues*, and it is still linked to, and engaged with, the world of blues. We are going to listen to the character drawing with the title *Mr. Knight*, from the record *Coltrane Plays the Blues*, with a gospel-like introduction.

Here I would like to draw your attention to the riff-character of the theme, which is such a phenomenon in the Negro music, as certain steps are in the Hungarian folk music. The riff is a short, permanently repeated phrase, in two or four bars. It can be repeated as a theme, to serve as a base for improvisation, or it can be the backing or the intermedium. The reason why it is so interesting is that here the riff has to evoke the decisive phenomenon typical for the Negro music: that the rhythm always prevails. I mean this is the characteristic of the “Negro jazz bar” which determines and rules the melody, and as a consequence, the whole improvisation. Improvisation and melody are actually the unfolding of the rhythm’s different possibilities, through the melody, and enjoying this process.

We can hear something like that in *Mr. Knight*. It is perceivable that it is about to grasp a certain state and to sink into it. After this, Coltrane goes on his way with huge steps, as the next Coltrane track will show.

Music: *John Coltrane: Mr. Knight (1962)*.

But let us have a look what Coleman is doing all this while.

Ornette Coleman was rather an urban man, unlike Coltrane. Coleman has a great desire for something more, for something cosmic and timeless, and his path will lead him there too. Ornette is rather busy with the present time, he prefers to analyze the condition in which the blacks used to live in those days; there, in the city, with that which he brought along with him. We shall hear a track from his record presented later: *New York*, from his record *New York is Now*, and we shall realize how much he is an urban man.

But before, I must mention what happened in the field of music during this time, what kind of changes took place also within this movement, and we have to deal with the bebop phenomenon of the forties with all the changes.

Before the bebop period, the improvisation technique was so: there was a piece, a theme, a certain form, and the musicians blew the variations of the theme, spiced with changing rhythm, following the given course of melody and chords, and maybe the instrumented part was more. This was especially important in the swing period when they went so far that almost everything was taken down, and there were only some inserted improvisations. This music was too precise, too drab, too mechanical, and actually already emptied. It didn’t say anything. It wanted no more than to entertain. After that, the bebop musicians were thinking, I have a theme and the chord schemes of the theme (at least in draft, more accurately, the functional chord schemes) which make up the basis for the improvisation after the theme has been played, in such a way that the improvisation will produce a totally new melody, and totally new solutions. It is possible that one or two motifs of the theme appear, one or two relations. But it is essentially about the creation of something new, to catch the scope of the theme in the sense of music and of mood and to unfold its different possibilities. This is a very serious step forward, since the musician wants to deal with the world fixed by the theme. This is one of the changes. The other one is the rhythm section within the orchestra.

The contrabass appears in the bebop period. So far, the big drum provided the rhythm - let us think on the orchestra of Chick Webb or Krupa - the contrabass takes over the rhythm. It plays the role of a tunable big drum at the beginning. Later it becomes an instrument of equal rank due to the

polyphony. The consequence is the fact that the contrabass leads the bass, and the rhythm section was shared by the drum and the contrabass. The piano technique underwent a change too.

So far, the left hand was the leader of the bass, normally as a “walking bass” – let me remind you about Art Tatum and others – and later this technique disappears: the piano started playing with the right hand in an improvisative, in a linear way of thinking, while the left hand provided the chord accompaniment. The first master of this was Bud Powell. Further changes happened under the style of avant-garde. The polyphonic and polyrhythmic way of thinking started to predominate. In this respect, the role of the piano was doubtful, since the piano is a chordal instrument. The piano was fundamental during the age of Classicism and Romanticism when chords played an important role. But the piano played a secondary role in the linear way of thinking. Ornette Coleman for example, dropped it totally. His earlier records had no piano. It was typical for Ornette - he was a truly improvising soloist. Of course, after having completed serious studies, gaining knowledge and discovering several variations, he put every element into a given function and used them freely in his improvisations.

Moreover, polyrhythmic fulfils an additional step: the definite rhythmicisation begins to disintegrate on the one hand; on the other hand, the rhythm’s task within a piece is changing. The music becomes more colorful due to the variation of fast and slow pace, according to the required musical process. The musical melody leading follows the inner emotional and music aesthetic, and so, the created compositions are similar to classical music, mainly by improvisative approaches on improvisative basis. This means, when the process needs a tense, a furious or joyful, more robust and elementary effect, or a faster pace, the music will be played accordingly. The music is suddenly faster or slower, depending on the architecture of the orchestra. And here we have the musical motivation, and why this cannot be called entertaining music any more.

The first track begins with a double bass solo. I want to draw your special attention to this. The bass player, Scott LaFaro, was one of the most promising bass players in the history of jazz. He died young in a car accident.

When we listen to the composition of a modern composer for contrabass or cello, we recognize something very similar to this music. The second track is a solo by Don Cherry, which is extraordinarily expressive and typical for him, and present are the traditions of the bebop period, of the blues, and of the forties; Cherry was very engaged in keeping them alive. This music has generally a narrative character, and practically we arrive to the atonality. Tonality appears here and there like in modern music, because it has a different function within the atonality: it is a bit nostalgic, a reminder of the old times, or the composer wants to evoke a very warm ambiance.

The first track’s title is *Ornette* – it is about himself. The melody line, the rhythmic charm of the contrabass and the drum, are moving forward and above them; the music of the solo instrument evolves parallel with the rhythm, living its own life, and both are independent from each other.

And still, they belong together, something joins them. At the same time, every voice produces music of a different kind. It is difficult to find a point where we could say: this is D-major or H-minor or something similar. The world, which has fixed the way of thinking of the people in earlier times, has gone, because it had to go forever – first of all in a fast-paced world like America. Musicians and composers confirm it: we want to use the language of today in the field of our culture. And this grown up Negro music culture - with the black movement behind it - this culture turned its back on contemporary America, on the American public, because they didn’t want to be goods for sale. They wanted to create the spiritual building of the black man, because America’s real cultural importance remained in the realm of the blacks. Even the Negro’s have recognized this, because when we study the entertaining music, from the beat to any kind of entertaining music, we find the traces of the rhythm world of the blacks. There is a word, which the Negroes are proudly using when referring to themselves – and they apply the word also to characterize their music: funky. The dirty, “funky Nigger” was not allowed, for a long time, to get into a bus or a tram. Today, this is no longer possible. The “funky nigger” straightened his backbone, and this expression has remained in the vocabulary of their spiritual self-awareness, even if not so extensively as earlier. The word funky identifies the “Negro entity”, being the real trump for America in the field of culture. The true and only trump, since the red Indians had been exterminated.

In the meantime, Coltrane made a huge step in the direction of deepness. Concerning the content, moreover, concerning the musical way of thinking and the tools, he breaks up the rhythm and implements a free musical tonality, free in respect of rhythm, of free rubato character, which can store many things. This is actually the step which took him farther than Ornette Coleman. It is typical for Coleman that while being engaged in polyrhythmic, the rhythm in his music is always present, fixed and lively; he never let his musicians to go too far from a certain rhythmic structure and rhythmic experience.

Coltrane is freer and has more courage. He doesn't break up a certain tempo into different parts but several tempi go parallel next to each other. He treats the rhythm experience as being an abstract experience, thus the listener perceives the rhythm like a feeling, a general well-being. Regarding the content: he starts dealing with deeply human, deeply social problems; maybe he anticipated that the months of his life were numbered.

Now we listen to an excerpt of the piece, *Selflessness*. Since the western man and western culture have been created and built up in the name of egoism, the question is, in this growing world suffering more and more from massification, whether we can be collective people. This requires selflessness, otherwise we remain trapped within ourselves, hating each other. What a deep and cosmic problem! Let us hear how Coltrane endures this, and with what emotional and expressive content he fills his performance.

Music: John Coltrane: *Selflessness* (1965).

Please, here we had horrible honking and screeching! Isn't that awful? What should this be? Anti-music or what? He is blowing an instrument, and what comes out, it is split! ... Music? Cacophony! Noise pollution! Environment pollution! No, no, nothing at all. This is a more abstract and more complete matter, a big recognition. The evoking of some very great matter. Why? The first impression this music gives is that something begins to flow, to stream, to spout. Selflessness is the selflessness of a man whose soul is really overfilled. The desire that he wants to be selfless, but it is impossible. Because he lives in a world, where the selfless man is considered an idiot. One can die of it! This desire to give drives the creative man into a state, which is the inner propelling force of creation. He is aware of his talent, of his great talent, and that he has to share it with others, because if he doesn't do so, then his talent would turn against him. How many creative artists left this unblessed world by hanging from a rope! He killed himself because he couldn't express himself, he couldn't transfer this desire. This drive to give is deeply human, typical for every creature in every part of the world. Aesthetically, the blacks are a people with such a passion; they express everything so lively, so dazzlingly, with a tendency for exaggeration, with overflowing zeal. Should he not use these means when expressing just this feeling, the gesture of the stream of selflessness? This is one of my remarks. The other one: every exaggerated feeling carrying huge energy, when obstructed by barriers, will blast every frame, even the frames of sound. Moreover, when someone has reached the recognized perfection with an instrument, or with an object, and has perfected it to the utmost border of possibility, then everybody will tempt the impossible and enter fields, which represent very strange states and temptations. If someone listens to an oboe concert of a modern composer, he will discover that these chirps, counter-sounds, hooting and honking – from the humming to the factory siren, from mooing to cackling – are the sounds of the same complex world, like those of the oboe concert; thus, it is today's music. It is so comprehensive and complete, so extreme and strange, so multifold, difficult to oversee; like this age. And the 'drive to give' is hidden in it, and it implies that there is a man who perceives this age with all its sound-phenomena, and is able to fill it with soul. This is what I feel in it. It is interesting, when I made anybody listen to these records, those without musical education – apart from a few honorable exceptions – felt much more what essential is, the archaic-direct character of the musical expression captured them much more. Simply: when I don't love somebody, I pinch him.

So, Coltrane starts to take a path of worshipping. He is in such a social and spiritual situation, in such a state of his life - he is two years before his death – he slides into an impossible situation due to his

problems with the world, that he creates his own religion.

This streaming extasy, which we came to hear is in fact the antechamber, the prelude to his last period, and of the next record, *OM*, which was his greatest work. There is already a mad rotating of the world under him. This impression is created by the horrible racing of the man who wants to master the universe, while he is running towards an odd, far away goal. This is not the kind of meditation done by the passive Indian. Apart from the unusual aggressive tone, we realize that concerning musical means, Coltrane as a composer and as an improvisator reaches ahead towards modern music.

Maybe you cannot hear it well because the loudspeakers distort everything, but the piano has regained a certain task in addition to those mentioned above: here it has not the completing function of a leading melody, or of background music, as before. The pianist implements the cluster technique, as it is called in modern music. For the musician, the cluster is not so awful because everybody knows it who has ever tried to play piano. Sound relations, sound fields. When he strikes a sound structure simultaneously, so that he strikes all neighbouring keys, 5 or 8 keys, it has a certain character, a tone. On one hand, the tone is determined by the "place" in which pitch the keys are touched, on the other hand, "sounding together" the harmony, even if they seem to be dissonant, have a certain character. Cluster means all sounds within the interval, further, are relations resulting from the pentatonic – and here I have to mention Bartók's technique – thus it is about the implementation of the mentioned relations in a cluster.

Now, what do I refer to when mentioning Bartók?

Bartók who had profoundly studied the folk music, since his music is built on it, had checked the rules of folk music in so much detail that he recognized in them mathematical forms and he composed most of his string quartets while using them. The numerical relations in the pentatonic are present in the music following the rules of the Golden Section. The Golden Section is a notion borrowed from geometry and its essence is that in the world of Golden Section no symmetry can be created.

Bartók implemented these rules that he abstracted them from the folk melody, and he used the rules as a foundation, which has provided the character, the tone and the style of a piece. Finally this is the consequence of pentatonic, but it is the characteristic of the arrangement that the composer made this piece, from such building blocks, that made it individual and unique. Unlike Ornette, Coltrane made use of these solutions very often, almost completely, of course with involving the chromatic and the above-mentioned Indian way of thinking. Bartók treated this subject in one of his writings: he evaluated that the way of music would go towards the realm of halftones, thus in the direction of quarter tones and sixth tones.

Thus, it is not by chance that Coltrane was orientated towards Indian music. As a result of the research and of the use of modern music, his music has a tortured and torturing character. This torturing character is the basis of his religious architecture in view of aesthetic: he is "voicing" the totality built by himself, the path between the beyond and this world with this agonizing gesture, with this life feeling, with this expression of immeasurable suffering. In this we find something very interesting! The fact is that the Negroes experienced their religiosity within the framework of the American Catholicism.

This piousness, however, is not linked to that: it is a consequence of the blacks' temper, of their ideology - creating, self-awareness building, culture creating - and within these, pious, almost experimental disposition, in this case expressed through the arts. I once saw a record cover with the combined depiction of many great founders of religions and prophets. This presents such a statement, which refers generally to a separate way of thinking above the actual forms of religions.

The next track which we will listen to is an excerpt from *OM*, composed in 1966****. I want to draw your attention to the subtleties of the artistic control, which goes so far that the pianist, McCoy Tyner, is playing on an upright piano instead of a pianoforte.

As we know, pianists normally hate the upright piano. They don't like it because the upright piano is an instrument to be used in a small room, and the pianoforte... is nature's wonder. But in spite of this, he is playing on the upright piano. I think, due to two things: because old blues musicians used to do so and – and this is more important - the upright piano has a sound which fits better to this music of oriental character.

Here we can hear gongs and other oriental instruments, which lead towards an introspective, and at the same time, cosmic world. The upright piano's strangely round, bottled-up sound, and its dullness fit much better to this music compared to the well-tuned, harder sound of a pianoforte, which is rather linked to European music. Let us listen to the first part of *OM* and Coltrane's solo!

Music: John Coltrane: *OM* (1967)****

One could talk a lot about the moving, beautiful period, and to research it, while Coltrane prepared for his death and became more reserved. His whole world calmed down but he didn't lose the achieved modern tone. Further, we could discuss what Ornette Coleman was doing all this time, because he released such records as the mentioned „*New York Is Now*“, with such titles like „*The Garden of Souls*“. And we could present such records, which have been born under the sign of this new way of thinking and style in the music, and we could mention a few musicians who used to work with Coltrane and developed this style further, after his death in 1967.

Coltrane had died but Coleman had yet to say the last word, so we expect the new records with interest.

I would like to summon up what is for us a bit – or not a bit – overwhelming in this music at a first hearing. Anyway, I have to say that such music had not existed in the world before. We have never heard such music. This last track, *OM* – which title can hardly be translated and may be a sign, a warning – is something very mystic or mystically drastic. Threatening and warning emerging from the depth of matter. I think this content is quite modern. Regarding his musical tools, they can be explained with the help of classical music, and by the still living folk music of different peoples; identities and similarities could be well illustrated, with the difference that a people in a different culture would shape these musical tools according to his own image, and would use them as his own tools.

Finally, I thank you for your patience and attention and that you allowed me to speak and to present this entire subject. It is ascertaining and praiseworthy that a people tried with an invincible desire, emanating from every sound, to create for himself a cultural home, a spiritual building where he feels good, which is his own world, and which provides him a shelter in history's storms. In a world, where the most undeniable fact is that he has to live there, where he was not born.

Thank you for your attention.

Notes:

* **Blues People** | Amiri Baraka, Nelson George | ISBN: 9783936086089

** Ornette Coleman was born on the 9. March 1930

*** „My Favorite Things“ was recorded on the 21st October 1960

**** „OM“ was recorded on the 1st October 1965

Translation by: Marianne Tharan (January-March 2018)

