

Randall Sandke. 2010. *Where the Dark and Light Folks Meet: Race and the Mythology, Politics and Business of Jazz*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

Reviewed by Mark C. Gridley

Randall Sandke has written a new jazz history book. But it is not the usual jazz history. Rather than offering decade-by-decade accounts of different jazz styles, *Where the Dark and Light Folks Meet* offers facts that differ from popular understanding of the origins of jazz styles. It presents fresh perspectives on the ways that the music industry in the United States has treated jazz. Like other jazz histories, this one addresses the origins of jazz in New Orleans, what in the music is retained from Africa, the origins of modern jazz, and recent trends in jazz styles. But this volume overturns common wisdom about these topics. Instead of recounting traditional notions about jazz history, Sandke raises crucial questions about how jazz history has been told: What are the dangers of combining the telling of history with social activism? How have both black and white jazz musicians been negatively affected by stereotypes? Are the rhythmic approaches of jazz and African music fundamentally the same? Was the music in New Orleans' Congo Square a decisive influence on jazz? Did Jim Crow laws actually affect the creation of jazz? When did white musicians begin playing jazz in New Orleans? Did big business dominate the jazz world in the past thirty years?

Where the Dark and Light Folks Meet provides behind-the-scenes glimpses into the business of the jazz world, touching on audiences and presenters, studio work, copyrights, agents and managers, and the decline of major record companies in the age of the Internet. Sandke's history of jazz is based on voluminous research, much of which is fresh. Instead of merely repeating the accounts of the best-known jazz historians, Sandke highlights their errors. Instead of celebrating the thinking of prominent jazz journalists, he identifies their biases. *Where the Dark and Light Folks Meet* boldly attacks jazz critics, and, quite understandably, jazz critics have attacked the book for this.

In order to dispel misconceptions about jazz history and the music business, *Where the Dark and Light Folks Meet* culls materials from more than three hundred written sources. The author also draws upon twenty-eight fresh interviews that he conducted and eighteen oral history interviews at the Hogan Jazz Archive at Tulane University. Offering an account of perceptions of race effects in jazz by the press, the public, and the business world, Sandke's immense collection of research data overturns the belief that jazz

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is solely an African–American creation. Instead, the author demonstrates how a continuous interaction has always existed among heterogeneous musical sources.

Sandke is a working musician with comprehensive playing experience on the jazz scene since the 1980s. He has played trumpet in traditional early jazz, bebop, post–bop, and jazz–rock fusion bands, as well as performing in Broadway pit orchestras and on numerous film soundtracks. He is also a distinguished composer, and he has written an innovative music theory textbook.¹ Yet, *Where the Dark and Light Folks Meet* is not written primarily from the perspective of a working musician. It is informed instead by the standards of academic scholarship. The choice of sources does not appear to reflect a racial bias, although the author is white. Many of the experts Sandke quotes are African Americans, for example, William Julius Wilson (author of *The Declining Significance of Race*, 1978), Thomas Sowell (author of *Black Rednecks and White Liberals*, 2005), Shelby Steele (social commentator and author of *Harper's* article “The Age of White Guilt and the Disappearance of the Black Individual,” November 2002), jazz trumpeters Nicholas Payton and Terrence Blanchard, and jazz bassist Christian McBride. In fact, the literature review here constitutes a major contribution to jazz historiography. The research displayed in each chapter could constitute a journal article, yet the writing is clear enough that the book might appeal to a lay audience. Additionally, the book might serve as a supplement in any jazz history course that covers business and social aspects of the music, and it should prove to be a welcome addition to the bookshelf of those who teach jazz history and appreciation courses.

Where the Dark and Light Folks Meet is a multi–purpose work. It is an account of jazz history within the US music industry. It demonstrates how the early accounts of the music’s evolution have biased popular perceptions of its musical advances while serving to promote the social and political agendas of its chroniclers. Sandke writes:

I want to see music judged on its own terms, free of external considerations . . . One view of history paints jazz as restricted, limited, conditioned by the evils of segregation—a cultural expression so ingrained in the black experience that whites can barely fathom its true meaning. The other view, the one presented in this book, places jazz squarely within the mainstream of American culture, even though it was created and in large part creatively driven by blacks. As a living art form, jazz is open to anyone with something personal and unique to contribute. (10)

In reviews of this book on the blogosphere and discussions in college classrooms, some readers have been distracted by elements in Sandke’s research data that they do not like. Unfortunately, this has led them to miss

the importance of the rest. Additionally, a few readers have felt that Sandke diminishes the role of African Americans in jazz by presenting evidence of non-African-American contributions to jazz. Earlier writings about jazz history may have biased their presentations in favor of African-American musicians, and Sandke's attempts to offset this have given some readers the impression that he is skewing the evidence in the opposite direction. However, such interpretations are not warranted. Sandke does not intend to lessen the pride that African Americans should have for their culture's contributions. A goal of Sandke's labors is to stimulate readers to think in new ways about jazz mythology and the racial divide. The enormity of Sandke's research invites in-depth study.

Jazz in the US Music Business

Sandke presents a fascinating history of the American music industry's treatment of jazz. He separates facts from misconceptions by drawing upon forty-six interviews and numerous documents of salaries and sales figures. From the large amount of data that he amasses we can conclude that some of the neglect and mistreatment experienced by jazz can be attributed to conventions that favor commerce over creativity. Interestingly, Sandke's data shows that racism played less a part in this than we had been led to believe by previous writers.

Overlooked White Contributions to Jazz

The book reminds us about European and Anglo-American contributions to jazz that have been missing from some jazz histories. Sandke clearly states that jazz has been primarily the product of African-American musicians, but he also identifies important traits that derived from non-African and non-African-American sources. He emphasizes numerous interactions that contributed to different jazz styles throughout the music's history. To give an example of the extensive training in European classical music that many jazz musicians had, Sandke cites African-American pianist James P. Johnson, who became known as the father of stride piano style. Johnson studied for four years with European American Bruto Giannini and incorporated concert effects he learned from Giannini into blues and rags. African-American saxophonists Lester Young, Buddy Tate, Benny Carter, and Marshall Royal all cited white saxophonist Frankie Trumbauer as an influence on their own improvisations. Discussing Coleman Hawkins, the greatest pre-modern tenor saxophone improviser, Sandke notes that he "started out on the cello and later practiced the Bach cello suites on his tenor

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sax.” He continues, “This not only helped develop technique on the horn, but also provided him with valuable lessons in harmony and voice leading. He once advised aspiring jazz musicians, ‘Do what I do every day. I spend at least two hours every day listening to Johann Sebastian Bach, and man, it’s all there’” (89). In Chapter 3 Sandke offers a significant insight regarding sources for several outstanding harmonic characteristics of bebop:

The melody and harmony of “Fine and Dandy” and “Time on My Hands” emphasize upper intervals . . . “Between the Devil and Deep Blue Sea” and “Out of Nowhere” feature unusual harmonic shifts (F to A going to the bridge in “Devil,” and G to E-flat in the opening bars of “Nowhere”). Half-diminished chords are found in “April in Paris” and “Yesterdays” . . . Hoagy Carmichael’s “Ballad in Blue” is a study in chromatic alterations. (61)

This is to say that some of what LeRoi Jones, Gunther Schuller, and Martin Williams had attributed to Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Thelonious Monk had already been readily available in American pop music (61). Taking issue with some contentions of journalist Albert Murray (1978:205), Sandke writes:

It wasn’t the “traditional folk-type blues strain” that inspired Gillespie, Parker, and Monk to veer off in another direction . . . To me it is obvious that these musicians worked diligently to come to terms with the harmonic implications of the pop tunes of their day, and develop a way of improvising in which all the harmonic nuances found in these tunes could be brought out. (60)

It is important to keep in mind that Sandke is not diminishing the genius of bebop’s founders by citing pop tune precedents for harmonic characteristics of bebop. He is merely reminding us that, like all jazz, bebop drew from a variety of sources. In identifying pop tune materials used in bebop Sandke is simply fleshing out our knowledge of the ingenuity that was crucial to bebop’s origins.

Sandke points out other non-African-American sources, observing that saxophonist-composer-bandleader John Coltrane “was fascinated with Bartok’s use of quartal harmony, which he and pianist McCoy Tyner developed along with their own improvisational language” (89). Sandke also could have mentioned the influence of twentieth-century European music in African-American pianist-composer Mary Lou Williams’ *Zodiac Suite* and the study of scores by twentieth-century European composers as part of the salon that she conducted for jazz musicians at her apartment in New York City during the 1940s. In addition, Sandke could have mentioned the influence of Ravel’s and Debussy’s harmonic concepts on the innovative

style of white jazz pianist Bill Evans and their subsequent influence on African–American pianist Herbie Hancock by way of Evans.

In Chapter 4 Sandke reports that “In 1958 the Ford Foundation provided funds to tape record interviews with all the surviving figures of the early New Orleans jazz scene, both black and white. This source brings us as close as we’re likely to get to resolving the many mysteries surrounding the creation of jazz” (80). But a serious methodological flaw pervaded the interviews. As Sandke notes, “[The interviewers’] questions varied significantly depending on the race of the person interviewed. White musicians were consistently asked about their early exposure to black bands, but black musicians were not similarly questioned. Thus that direction of influence was not explored, though it does occasionally surface in asides and digressions” (81). Such a discovery is groundbreaking because it reveals that the interviewers already had their minds made up before they began asking about the origins of jazz. It would seem that the interviewers neglected to ask black musicians what they had learned from white musicians because the interviewers presumed that jazz had solely African–American origins. Against this a priori judgment, Sandke mounts evidence that indicates considerable interaction among musicians of the various cultures in New Orleans during the birth of jazz (85–86; 97).

Journalists who hold racially exclusionist positions come under considerable fire in Sandke’s book. In Chapter 4, Sandke writes, “By stressing the insularity of black culture, many inconvenient truths are swept under the ideological rug. White participation in jazz is viewed with suspicion, and obvious connections between jazz and mainstream American culture or the Western artistic tradition are downplayed if not simply ignored” (71). In order to counter such positions, Sandke quotes early New Orleans trumpeter Wingy Manone’s (b. 1904) explanation of the racial situation in the earliest days of New Orleans jazz:

It was all mixed up there. Buddy Petit, Sidney Bechet, Freddie Keppard, Bunk Johnson, Nick LaRocca, the Bigards . . . we were all in one area. The musicians listened to each other, and sometimes played together in parades . . . The young jazz musicians listened to everyone who came up who could play, white or colored. (86)

Sandke also cites Louisiana historian Jerah Johnson’s summary of this situation: “Jazz had its origins not in segregation, but in the assimilative tradition of easy interaction of peoples that prevailed in New Orleans” (54).² Sandke reiterates the components of that fusion because a few recent writers seem to have overlooked them.

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Addressing Frank Kofsky's contentions that African Americans possess "sophisticated rhythmic sensibility" (98) and that "whites just aren't able to play the music very well," Sandke writes:

If we accept the common stereotype, it's hard to explain why Duke Ellington and Count Basie hired so many white drummers, including Louie Bellson, Buddy Rich, Dave Black, Ed Shaughnessy, Jake Hanna, Steve Little, Butch Miles, Greg Fields, Duffy Jackson, and Ed Metz, Jr., among others. (99)

Sandke counters the contentions of several journalists and jazz historians, such as Albert Murray and LeRoi Jones (*Blues People* 1963:149;153;219), who felt that "for whites jazz was a 'learned art,' while for blacks it was an indigenous cultural expression" (Sandke 29). Sandke observes:

We have been told for the better part of a century that the blues and swing are endemic to black culture, yet many well-known jazz musicians have frankly admitted that they had to sit down and learn these styles just as much as anyone else. Fletcher Henderson figured out how to play jazz by studying James P. Johnson piano rolls, and though he accompanied a plethora of blues singers on record in his early career, he never really mastered the style. Vocalist Jimmy Rushing recalled the time when "Basie had come to the West with a show. He couldn't play the blues then." The arranger Jimmy Mundy once had to coach Paul Robeson on how to sing the blues for a recording session. (100)

Is Jazz African?

In Chapter 3, Sandke points out a significant irony. He notes that jazz writers "have often bent over backwards to demonstrate the African origins of jazz. However, at the same time many African-American musicians have been quick to deny any such direct link, insisting instead that jazz was created in America by African Americans" (41). For example, Sandke points out that jazz historians have erred in overestimating the presence and mistaking the function of polyrhythms in jazz:

In African music, opposing rhythmic groupings furnish an ongoing structure from which the entire performance derives its basic identity. In jazz, polyrhythms function by creating a feeling of momentary tension that ultimately resolves by re-emphasizing the basic meter—much like the role that dissonance plays in harmony . . . examples of continuous polyrhythm in jazz are practically nonexistent. (40)

Sandke also mentions that writers have missed Paul Oliver's observation that "improvisation on a theme, which is fundamental to jazz, also appears to owe little to improvisation with tight rhythmic patterns on the [African] drums . . . Whatever the links with African drumming, conceptually jazz music is very different" (cited in Sandke 41).

Interviews quoted by Sandke show that not even such knowledgeable insiders as drummer–bandleader Art Blakey and trumpeter–bandleader–composer Dizzy Gillespie contend that jazz is African. Eminent African–American pianist–composer Mary Lou Williams said, "Afro has nothing to do with jazz. Jazz grew up on its own here in America" (43). Moreover, African–American New Orleans musicians, in particular, have railed against the assertion that jazz came out of Africa. Regarding Jelly Roll Morton's jazz recording of *Maple Leaf Rag*, the African American guitarist from New Orleans Danny Barker (b. 1909) said, "That's something that came out of New Orleans. It didn't come out of Africa. I've heard hundreds of records of, and from Africans. African is nothing like no New Orleans music . . . King Oliver, Kid Punch [Miller], Buddy Petit, [Henry] Kid Rena; they have nothing to do with Africa" (44).

A frequently repeated story about an African connection in the origins of jazz concerns public performance of African music in New Orleans, particularly on Sundays in a region that is today known as Congo Square. This story continues to be told in twenty–first–century writings. For instance, in the textbook *Jazz: An American Journey*, Brian Harker writes, "The weekly performance rituals at Congo Square lasted through the Civil War, and then died out sometime in the 1880s" (2005:37). Connecting early jazz to African musical traditions would be persuasive if such performances were occurring near the time that jazz originated in the 1890s. However, as Sandke demonstrates, this is a misconception. Documents indicate that the period when undiluted African music was performed in Congo Square ended much earlier. Such musical assemblies had been outlawed there since 1829. Moreover, Sandke points up the irony that by the 1820s the music played there had already assimilated aspects of European music.

In addressing an emphasis that previous writers have placed on African rhythmic complexity emerging in bebop, Sandke notes that much of what was essential to bebop was harmonic, and that its precursors had been readily available within the music of white composers associated with the "Great American Songbook." Sandke departs from contentions of LeRoi Jones (*Blues People*, 1963), Martin Williams (*The Jazz Tradition*, 1970), and Gunther Schuller (*Early Jazz: Its Roots and Development*, 1968) regarding African rhythms characterizing bebop. He writes:

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The increased speed of the harmonic rhythm in such tunes as “Liza” and “Cherokee” encouraged Parker and Gillespie to adopt eighth note phrases for spelling out the intricacies inherent in the harmony . . . If you slow Parker’s and Gillespie’s phrases down, their syncopations are not that dissimilar from Armstrong’s. The main difference is that boppers thought in terms of shorter time spans dictated by faster harmonic rhythm. (62)

Journalism or Activism?

In chapters 5 and 6 Sandke pointedly addresses the effects that ideology and politics have had upon the telling of jazz history. Some of his coverage is reminiscent of similar analyses by John Gennari in his book *Blowin’ Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics* (2006). Sandke openly addresses early examples and recent revivals of reverse racism, writing that “several generations of jazz writers believed it was their duty to combat racism by depicting the music as an outgrowth of African culture; as the product of an insular black community; and as a reaction to segregation and discrimination” (39). Challenging LeRoi Jones’ ideological conception of jazz, Sandke includes a line from African–American novelist–essayist Ralph Ellison’s review of Jones’ *Blues People* (1963): “The tremendous burden of sociology which Jones would place upon this body of music is enough to give even the blues the blues” (29). Other writers have similarly objected to Jones’ understanding of jazz. For instance, in his book *This Is Our Music* (2007), historian Iain Anderson also quotes Ellison who notes that Jones “ignored the cross–pollination between black and white influences.” Anderson additionally mentions observations by African–American historian J. Saunders Redding, who pointed out that Jones’ attempts to reclaim an African past, in Anderson’s words, “floundered on a poor historical understanding of African cultural norms.” Anderson continues: “Too few champions of Afrocentric traditions appreciated the diversity of the continent’s languages, religions, arts or fashions. Redding believed that scholars deceived themselves by attempting to recover a homogeneous cultural impulse where none existed” (2007:106–107). In the same passage Anderson notes that in *Urban Blues* (1966) the ethnomusicologist Charles Keil had written that Jones had, in effect, created a new “myth of the Negro past.”

Preservation versus Innovation

Chapters 5 and 6 decry the neo–conservative (aka neo–classical) trends of the past thirty years, in which young players, more than during previous periods, were content to learn and perform earlier styles instead of inventing

new styles of jazz. Controversy has swirled around the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra's conservative repertory for which African-American journalist Stanley Crouch is an artistic consultant and African-American trumpeter Wynton Marsalis is bandleader. Sandke voices dismay at prominent musicians, such as Marsalis, and journalists, such as Crouch, who encourage young players to remain imitators. During the early 1980s an increasing interest in earlier jazz styles was evident in explorations by a number of jazz musicians, both black and white, newcomers and veterans. The origins of some of these practices among black musicians, according to Sandke, partially lie in an earlier period in which jazz "became widely touted as a product of a hermetically sealed black environment." Sandke writes, "The importance of originality and innovation would be replaced by a new aesthetic calling for a celebration of bygone heroes and a recapitulation of the jazz tradition" (121).

Though not explicitly stated by Sandke, it may be useful to note that the neo-classical jazz musicians and journalists seem to have missed three facts:

(a) If jazz has had any traditions at all, one of the most prominent has been its emphasis on originality.

(b) Because jazz is an improvised music, recreating and performing "repertory" is not equivalent to such practices in classical music, in which the essence could be extracted from written scores and be performed for centuries thereafter. Jazz had no real counterpart to classical music in that regard, except perhaps the extent to which sound recordings of improvisations provided a repertory.

(c) As a music that places considerable emphasis on collective improvisation, jazz has been more about process than product.

Clarifying Jazz History

Among the misconceptions that Sandke's research dispels is the belief that the earliest musicians in America who had African ancestry made music that reflected exclusively African-American culture. In Chapter 4, the author mentions that band repertoire among the earliest African-American jazz musicians, from Buddy Bolden to Joe "King" Oliver, commonly included such European dance forms as mazurkas, schottisches, polkas, quadrilles, and waltzes. Sandke demonstrates that these were versatile musicians who made their livings playing almost any form that was demanded of them

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and not only what we routinely designate as jazz today. Sandke writes, “The record clearly shows that bands of all racial hues shared more or less the same repertoire before the advent of jazz” (79).

Another misconception that Sandke dispels is that white musicians necessarily out-earned black musicians. In Chapter 8, the author reveals documents from the eras in which there was demand for early jazz and swing styles: “These contracts indicate that in many cases, African-American performers earned roughly as much as their white colleagues” (170). He also shows that “the recording industry has been an equal opportunity exploiter” (168).

A pervasive misunderstanding that Sandke upends is that the birth of jazz was expedited by the discriminatory racial legislation, known as the Black Codes or Jim Crow laws, through their forced mixing of New Orleans Creoles with blacks in New Orleans (or “Negroes”), consigning Creoles to the low social and occupational status of Negroes. (This reverses statements in numerous jazz histories, including one by this reviewer.) In Chapter 3 Sandke explains that Alan Lomax introduced this misunderstanding in 1950. Actually, the codes did not take effect until *after* the birth of jazz, and they did not really change the work of Creole musicians. For instance, Code #111 referred to mandated separate train cars for white and black passengers traveling in first class only, and, as noted by Jerah Johnson, “these regulations were not systematically enforced until near or during World War I, which meant by the time segregation became effective, jazz had already developed.” Furthermore, Creoles and black musicians did not come together for legal reasons. After the birth of jazz they came together because, in Sandke’s words, “there was growing demand at all levels of society for the hot new style of dance music that was jazz,” and “anyone who couldn’t or wouldn’t play it would be left out of a competitive and lucrative market” (53). Again, we find the situation well summarized in a telling statement by historian Jerah Johnson: “Jazz had its origins not in segregation, but in the assimilative tradition of easy interaction of peoples that prevailed in New Orleans, undiminished by the . . . Jim Crow laws of the 1890s” (cited in Sandke 54).³

In Chapter 7 “The Biggest Myth of All,” Sandke shows that white listeners have historically predominated within the jazz audience at large, though in absolute percentages the relative popularity of jazz is greater in the African-American community than in the white community. (Recent studies suggest that African Americans make up 16 to 20% of the audience for various performances of jazz despite constituting only 11% of the adult population of the United States (cited in Sandke 162).) Several of the most historic venues for the giants of jazz catered almost exclusively to white patrons. Historic examples in New York City include The Cotton Club, Roseland Ballroom, and Kentucky Club, to name just a few. A few examples

in Chicago include the Three Deuces, the Garrick Show Bar, the Band Box, and the Preview. Among examples from the swing era in Kansas City are the Reno Club and the Hey Hey Club. After recounting the history of audience profiles for jazz Sandke brings us up to date with a quote by Nicholas Payton, a currently prominent African–American jazz trumpeter: “Jazz, sad to say, probably has no social significance to most black people’s lives” (161). Sentiments similar to this appear in quotes by other currently prominent African–American jazz musicians, including trumpeter Terrence Blanchard and bassist Christian McBride (162).

Intellectual Property Issues

In his wide–ranging Chapter 9 about intellectual property, “Accounting Without Accountability,” Sandke shows that “those who have reaped ill–got–ten gains by way of ‘copyright protection’ have come in all colors. And many times the offenders have been the musicians themselves” (201). For example, despite the Miles Davis name listed for authorship of many tunes on Davis albums, the composer of *Tune Up* and *Four* was Eddie “Cleanhead” Vinson. The tune *Solar* was written by Chuck Wayne, not by Davis. Bill Evans, not Miles Davis, conceived a large portion of the music on the *Kind of Blue* album. Gil Evans, not Miles Davis, conceived much of the music on the *Filles de Kilimanjaro* album.

Sandke also writes, “If a publisher commissions a tune and arranges for it to be recorded, the composition may be considered a ‘work for hire.’ So, however distasteful it might have been for Irving Mills to attach his name to so many Duke Ellington compositions, technically Mills was within his legal rights” (202).

Conclusion

Where the Dark and Light Folks Meet is a revisionist history of jazz. Sandke’s work tackles many different angles in the various roles that jazz has played in the music business. The author combines neglected interview data with fresh interviews of his own, and he organizes information from widely disparate written sources to make everything easily digestible. In presenting this vast array of research he revises common wisdom about several aspects of jazz history, particularly the influence of race. He tries to help understand racism within the larger picture of mistreatment of jazz as a whole, and he identifies elements of reverse racism among jazz journalists and historians. Sandke reminds us of the substantial contributions that non–African–American sources have made to jazz, and he provides a fresh look at the interrelationships among sources that some writers have overlooked.

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Notes

1. Trumpeter Randy Sandke has performed at festivals, clubs, and concerts around the world. He has toured Europe over forty times and performed extensively throughout Japan, the United States, Canada, Brazil, and India.
2. See Johnson's "The Jim Crow Laws of the 1890s and the Origins of New Orleans Jazz: Correction of an Error," *Popular Music* 19 no. 2 (2000): 243–51.
3. Once again, see Johnson's "The Jim Crow Laws of the 1890s and the Origins of New Orleans Jazz: Correction of an Error."

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