



tropical riffs

LATIN AMERICA & THE POLITICS OF JAZZ

JASON BORGE

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Acknowledgments

The beginnings of the project that eventually became *Tropical Riffs* date back to my last years as a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, when, like so many Latin Americanists and jazz enthusiasts, I watched Ken Burns's PBS series *Jazz* and was both enraptured and horrified by what I saw. Newly attuned to the dissonances of North-South cultural politics, I was deeply unsettled by what I considered the series' criminal indifference to the central contributions of Latin American and US Latino/a musicians, bandleaders, and composers.

My indignation never fully subsided. In the years that followed, though, I gradually realized that the story that mattered most to me was not what Latin America meant to the US jazz establishment so much as what jazz meant to Latin America, particularly during the music's heyday between the 1920s and the 1960s. I knew that it was a book that still had not been written, and I felt that it needed to be. In thinking about how I could approach the sheer enormity of the topic, one of the first challenges I faced as a specialist in literature and film was how to tackle what was ostensibly a music studies project. The answer came at a panel on Latin America and new jazz studies at the 2013 meeting of the Latin American Studies Association in Washington, DC, when I was fortunate to be able to exchange ideas with a small group of first-rate scholars—Matthew Karush, Robin Moore, Jairo Moreno, and Chris Washburne. Although from different fields and regional specialties, the five of us shared a common interest in Latin America and jazz and a common desire to address theoretical and historical questions yet to be fully explored.

The success of the panel, which eventually led to a special dossier on the subject in the *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* (including an essay by Lara Putnam), convinced me that the book project I had long envisioned could and should be interdisciplinary in scope. The main challenge that

remained was how to speak with depth, rigor, and specificity about the cultural politics of jazz without losing myself in the fascinating minutiae of the myriad jazz scenes across the hemisphere. In the end I decided to focus on the cities that had given the jazz world many, if not most, of its most luminous talents. Perhaps not surprisingly, these places turned out to be the twentieth-century cultural capitals of the region: Mexico City, Havana, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, and New York City.

For research on early Argentine jazz journals, a summer grant from Vanderbilt University's Center for the Americas allowed me to conduct important research in the Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno, not to mention in the wonderful jazz clubs, used bookstores, and book fairs of Buenos Aires, a largely informal network that helped me track down jazz treasures large and small. Archival research on Cuba and Brazil was made possible in part by a College of Liberal Arts Research Fellowship from the University of Texas at Austin. Especially fruitful were the many hours spent reviewing periodicals at the University of Miami's Cuban Heritage Collection, the Biblioteca Nacional do Brasil in Rio de Janeiro, the Museu Lasar Segall in São Paulo, and the indispensable Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University–Newark. Finally, I should mention the excellent libraries and librarians of my home institution, the University of Texas at Austin, in particular the Benson Latin American Collection and the Harry Ransom Center, both of which proved essential for research on Mexico.

Some of the chapters of the book expand upon and rearticulate previously published works of mine. I would like to thank a few scholarly journals and presses for allowing me to use portions of previously published essays. My discussion of Josephine Baker expands on work first appearing in the edited volume *Urban Latin America: Images, Words, and the Built Environment* (Routledge, 2018). Portions of chapter 2 dealing with early Argentine jazz journals draw from an article in the *Afro-Hispanic Review* (2011). In chapter 3, my discussion of the jazz-samba debates originally appeared in different form as an article in the *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* (2016). Finally, portions of my analysis of mambo films in chapter 4 were first published in the volume *Cosopolitan Visions: Transnational Horizons of Latin American Film Culture, 1896–1960* (Indiana University Press, 2017).

My research on a project covering such a wide range of times, places, and materials has relied not just on institutions but also on people. For crucial encouragement, research tips, and feedback at various points over the last five years, I would like to thank Carlos Jáuregui, Micol Seigel, Charles Perrone, Chris Washburne, and Jairo Moreno, not to mention my present and former colleagues and students in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at

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In any book about music, an uncommon love of music and aural culture inevitably plays a central role. With this in mind, I want to voice my deepest love and appreciation to my artist mother, Martha Borge, who never ceases to amaze me with her keen insights into the creative process; and to my late father, Ralph Borge, and my sister, Michele McCulloch, for instilling in me a lifelong reverence not just for music and musicianship, but also for the intimately linked arts of listening and record collecting—eclectically, adventurously, and insatiably.

As usual, my final thanks go to Sônia: inevitably my first reader and my last, my partner in crime, my sounding board, my unfailing companion, *meu amor*.

INTRODUCTION. **Kindred Sounds and Latin Cats**

Ken Burns's sprawling, ten-part documentary *Jazz* (PBS, 2001) was a watershed cultural event that helped to rekindle long-standing debates about the cultural politics of music, race, and nationality. Backed by major contributions from corporate behemoths such as Starbucks and Amazon, the series brought jazz back into the national spotlight and, however temporarily, helped to make the music commercially viable again after a nearly four-decade decline. The opening episode alone reached an estimated thirteen million viewers; books, CDs, DVDs, and related merchandise eventually generated hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue.¹ As with the case of Burns's previous projects *The Civil War* (1990) and *Baseball* (1994), the series allowed US public television to reassert itself as an essentially patriotic enterprise.² Beautifully produced and epic in scope, *Jazz* painted a moving portrait of African Americans' triumph over adversity, consecrating the music as a symbol of the uniquely democratic ethos of the United States.

But something was clearly amiss with Burns's brand of storytelling. With its technically sophisticated yet politically simplistic approach to the topic, *Jazz* was more a coronation of "America's classical music" and "America's art form" than a true celebration of democratic diversity, let alone a balanced account

of the persistent racial struggles, economic exploitation, and transnational complexities of jazz history.³ In spite of a general consensus about the contributions of jazz icons like Armstrong, Ellington, and Parker, whom Burns extolled, many critics bluntly denounced the omission or reduction of key secondary figures, especially Latin American musicians. Ben Ratliff complained in his *New York Times* review that the documentary was “stubbornly Americanist” in overlooking Africa, Cuba, and the Caribbean. He added, “That there’s little more than a peep of Latin jazz since the 1940’s is weird indeed.”⁴ In a damning article published in *Jazz Times*, Bobby Sanabria stressed the importance of recognizing influential musicians not often mentioned by mainstream jazz critics. Citing Burns’s omission of Tito Puente, the Cuban percussionist Mongo Santamaría, and the legendary Nuyoricans Eddie Palmieri and Willie Bobo, Sanabria lamented that “in terms of jazz history, we basically didn’t exist.”⁵ Clearly, for jazz to be sold to US audiences on a massive scale, the music needed first to be branded as quintessentially American. In a maneuver that cloaked overarching nationalist imperatives, in other words, Burns had sold a nostalgic, reductive vision of jazz to a US public eager for redeeming, black-and-white narratives about the nation’s recent past. The undeniably protectionist slant of Burns’s *Jazz* therefore should not be seen as simple negligence. On the contrary, the exclusion of Latin America from the grand narrative of jazz was the main price to be paid in order to claim the music as a national heirloom.

By severing Latin America from the jazz corpus, Burns reinforced what scores of US and European historians, critics, and musicians had done for decades: he rendered jazz something less capacious, muddled, and global than it actually was. During much of the twentieth century, jazz played a vitally important but too often overlooked role in the elaboration of far-flung musical practices. But it was never just about the music. Jazz, in fact, was a central conduit for the negotiation of cultural identity, race, and gender politics, for transnational flows of bodies and technologies, ideas and feelings. The music’s impact was felt well beyond Latin America. As a number of recent scholarly accounts have documented, the acoustic, visual, and symbolic reach of jazz extended from Nazi Germany to the Soviet Union, China to Africa.⁶ What is striking about these pioneering studies is their nearly unanimous insistence that locally generated jazz or jazz-inflected performances, even when xenophobic state apparatuses intervened, never managed to remain “authentically” national any more than jazz could be considered a purely American import. Far from simply reproducing capitalist or colonial ideologies, local performances and nodes of reception often served as sites of ambivalence and contention. This was true of unapologetic US jazz imitators as well as stalwart nationalists.

As Everett Taylor Atkins points out, for example, the “strategies of authentication” that informed attempts in interwar and wartime Japan to reproduce the sounds of North American swing bands involved not only stylistic replication but also ritualistic sojourns to the United States and even claims of racial solidarity, as some Japanese performers sought to ally themselves with black jazz musicians by proclaiming themselves “yellow Negroes.” At the same time, a nativist imperative to produce inimitable national music compelled many local jazz musicians to instill into their work “indigenous” and/or traditional “textures, instruments, or aesthetic principles.”⁷

As I will discuss in subsequent chapters, early to mid-twentieth-century Latin American jazz interpreters (in the sense of both intellectual mediators and also musical practitioners), storm-tossed by the frequently countervailing winds of global capital and cultural nationalism, faced similar pressures. Yet close cultural and economic ties combined with frequent geopolitical rifts between the United States and Latin American nations placed the region in a unique category with respect to jazz. The many parallels and frequent interactions and overlaps between jazz and loosely analogous Latin American forms—from choro, maxixe, tango, and samba to son, rumba, mambo, and even salsa—strongly suggest that the word “jazz” was better suited as an umbrella term for a whole range of musical practices in the hemisphere than as a stable signifier for a discretely national form. To a greater extent than any other region outside the United States, I would argue, Latin America did not just embrace and repudiate, consume and purge, imitate and appropriate jazz. The region and its musicians actively participated in the global jazz enterprise to such a degree that its imprint eventually had to be acknowledged, even if ultimately disavowed, marginalized, or bracketed off as “Latin jazz.”⁸ The fundamental problem that Latin America presents to US jazz historiography, therefore, can be seen in part as one of cultural blowback: how to reconcile “banal” or “quiet” nationalist claims to cultural ownership and imperial conquest with the inherent porousness of musical borders and instability of musical practices.⁹

The problem is not just a unilateral one. One of the more striking phenomena is the extent to which twentieth-century Latin American intellectuals, politicians, fans, and musicians, echoing their US counterparts, tended to celebrate local jazz musicians and enthusiasts while also excluding them from the category of authentic jazz. Such cultural policing signaled at once an admiration for jazz’s tantalizingly kindred pedigree—a shimmering (and shimmering) product tied to New World modernity—and also an apprehension of the music’s penetration of local and national landscapes. Indeed, in the early to mid-twentieth century, I would like to propose, popular and elite Latin

American audiences alike understood jazz as the product, however strange, of conditions fundamentally analogous to their own disjunctive social environments, a range of cultural expressions seemingly both modern and primal, timely and syncopated.¹⁰ Even conservative Latin American intellectuals were hard pressed to dismiss the music as entirely foreign to local and national sensibilities. One minute emblematic of savage Northern modernity, the next evoking retooled national narratives of racial difference and New World ingenuity, jazz oscillated between the familiar and the remote, signifying different things at different times to distinct nations, communities, and ideological factions within the region. Jazz thus emerged as particularly illustrative of overlapping yet divergent—syncopated—experiences of modernity within the Americas.¹¹ What joined Latin Americans of myriad stripes—writers and intellectuals, musicians and composers, filmmakers and fans—was how they offered up original and compelling narratives about the central role jazz has played in questions of race and gender, power and nation.

For the most part, as I discuss in chapter 1, jazz arrived in Latin American cities as an exotic oddity and quickly mutated into a contentious emblem of cosmopolitanism. The music's cachet lay in the fact that it was an aggressively modern export nonetheless imbued with seductive yet potentially disconcerting moral laxity and racial alterity. For many Latin American intellectuals of the 1920s, news of jazz washed ashore muddled and secondhand by way of written accounts, drawings, and photographs as often as through hard-to-find recordings and sporadic live performances. Early icons of the Jazz Age, such as the singer-actor Al Jolson (star of *The Jazz Singer*), the white bandleader Paul Whiteman, and the Paris-based African American singer and dancer Josephine Baker, left an impression of the music constantly in flux and sometimes at odds with the more stable but still variegated jazz imaginary that would emerge in the 1930s. With her aggressively erotic, explicitly racialized revue spectacle, Baker proved an especially alluring and divisive entertainer, one who introduced many Latin American audiences to the emancipatory potential of jazz while still clinging to the demeaning lexicon of minstrelsy.

The idea of jazz as an avatar of vernacular modernism generally prevailed in the 1920s, thanks in part to the growing prominence of young lions associated with avant-garde movements at home and abroad—Latin American intellectuals such as Alejo Carpentier, Mário de Andrade, Miguel Covarrubias, and Ulises Petit de Murat and Europeans such as Blaise Cendrars, Darius Milhaud, Robert Goffin, and António Ferro. By the late 1930s, however, many critics, composers, public officials, and other denizens of the Latin American lettered city began to treat jazz warily if not with open hostility—attempting,

in effect, to sanitize the music just as its popularity spread. Fearful of the US culture industry's moral corruption of the lower classes, many intellectuals turned against jazz, typecasting the sounds of Goodman and Gillespie as the antinational music par excellence. In chapters 2, 3, and 4, I examine how Argentine, Brazilian, and Cuban intellectuals, composers, and musicians came to terms with jazz's meteoric popularity during the mid-twentieth century. As we shall see, the music frequently clashed with the pedagogical narratives of Latin American cultural nationalism. These discourses stressed not only the primacy of favored styles like samba, tango, and son, but also the erection of rigid barriers between national practices and the "American," "capitalist," "foreignizing," or "antipeople" qualities with which jazz was variously associated.¹²

Among the most powerful institutions were national film industries in Argentina, Mexico, and Brazil, all of which capitalized on popular dances and associated musical performances to bring local spectators to the box office in droves during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. Musical melodramas in various guises had an undeniably decisive impact on what constituted the national in the popular imagination. At a time of considerable musical heterogeneity and generic fluidity, however, most productions felt compelled to strip down myriad expressions to a single form, to the exclusion of others: in Argentina, tango; in Brazil, samba.¹³ Such disjunctions between unitary narratives and the actual diversity of musical practices lent cinematic discourse an ambivalent and inherently unstable quality, or "double time."¹⁴ The disciplinary forces of nationalist populism did not simply keep marginal musical idioms from the soundstage. In the name of the nation, such films also promoted views of race that excluded in the name of inclusion by, as the cultural theorist John Beverly puts it, "rhetorically sutur[ing] over the gaps and discontinuities internal to 'the people'."¹⁵

As might be expected, the racial politics of musical nationalism in the region varied from country to country, according to a whole host of factors including divergent colonial legacies, migrational and other demographic trends, and particular strategies embraced by individual governments and their various intellectual and institutional supports. In spite of these differences, though, in official and unofficial narratives from the 1930s through the 1960s jazz consistently played what I am calling the "kindred foil": an object of strange familiarity at odds with ideological goals yet also deeply resonant with local populations at social and affective levels.¹⁶ Indeed, in an ironic twist, the very Latin American nations that had their own flourishing culture industries during the middle decades of the twentieth century—industries at various moments placed in the service of racialized nationalist objectives—would also prove to be hotbeds of jazz consumption and production. It is

precisely these nations (Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Cuba) that I focus on in *Tropical Riffs*.

In Argentina, as I discuss in chapter 2, even intellectuals favorably disposed toward jazz held up the music as a modern, exogenous expression fit for selective consumption if not quite wholesale appropriation. Although Argentine fans and critics of the 1930s and 1940s were among the first in the region to celebrate local exponents of jazz, ultimately they viewed North American and especially African American musicians as the music's only authentic practitioners. Their paradoxically distant embrace of jazz—both celebratory and self-preserving, negrophile and negrophobic—makes more sense when we consider that the Afro-Argentine provenance of tango had been all but expunged from mainstream discourse by the end of the 1930s, only to be picked up again several decades later.¹⁷ Jazz—as *arte negro* par excellence—therefore assumed a uniquely contradictory and prosthetic role in national debates over several decades, a role ultimately challenged by the fictional writing of Julio Cortázar and the international fame of musicians such as Oscar Alemán, Lalo Schifrin, and Leandro “Gato” Barbieri.

In Brazil, by contrast, such an odd typecasting of jazz in the national narrative was not an option. As I examine in chapter 3, the political-symbolic paradigm that came to haunt the Brazilian cultural arena in the late 1930s and through the 1940s and 1950s explicitly promoted the incorporation of racial admixture into the national imaginary. As critics such as Hermano Vianna have written, however, the ideology of *mestiçagem* was so internally flawed and fictitious that it demanded the scaffolding of xenophobia to hold it erect. In cultural debates of the period, jazz served as an emblem of Americanization as well as a suitable countermodel to samba since it seemed to epitomize at once the decadence of foreign capitalism, the moral excesses of liberal democracy, and the racial hypocrisy of US society and institutions. A peculiar legacy of the *Estado Novo*'s antijazz ideology was that it helped brand North American popular music as a fundamentally middle-class and even “white” pursuit—a critical legacy that would carry over into raucous debates over bossa nova in the 1960s. With its cool jazz cadences, I maintain, the music of João Gilberto, Tom Jobim, and others made an easy target for Brazilian musical nationalists and samba purists. Yet the international success of bossa nova undermined US exceptionalist claims to jazz at the same time that it weakened Brazilian anti-jazz rhetoric, while also further infusing vernacular idioms from both countries with new rhythms, modalities, and compositional range.

Unlike Brazil and Argentina, prerevolutionary Cuba “enjoyed” considerable geographical, political, and economic proximity to the United States,

which in turn encouraged intensive musical exchange, seasonal employment, and, in many cases, emigration. Yet, as I discuss in chapter 4, in the first half of the twentieth century Cuba lacked the sort of consolidated, freestanding culture industry that characterized Mexico, Argentina, and, to a lesser extent, Brazil. This was especially true in the realm of film musicals. Whereas Cuba's prodigious talent was well represented abroad, prerevolutionary governments in Cuba failed to develop stable institutional supports with which to foster cultural production and pedagogical narratives typical of larger populist regimes in the rest of the region. As a result, compared to Argentina and Brazil, Cuban performers were highly susceptible to economic and symbolic poaching on the part of more powerful film and music industries—namely, in Mexico and the United States. It was out of this triangulation of cultural production in the 1940s and 1950s that both Afro-Cuban jazz and mambo—although usually segregated in critical discourse, they were in many ways two sides of the same coin—emerged to challenge the United States' monopolization of jazz and big band. As I will argue, innovative figures like Chano Pozo and Dámaso Pérez Prado plied their trade in hybridized transnational settings that challenged generic orthodoxies. After the triumph of the revolution, Cuban musicians remained in the forefront of what was now becoming known as Latin jazz. The nationalist orthodoxy and anti-yanqui stance of the Castro regime, however, disavowed the very idea of Cuban jazz even as cultural institutions fostered the music's development.

In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, as jazz gradually lost its commercial clout, the music's artistic and countercultural cachet grew, lending it symbolic currency among new generations of writers, intellectuals, and listeners. In chapter 5, therefore, I return to fiction and poetry as key archival repositories through which to trace the afterlives of jazz in the region during the Cold War. While these literary and cultural interventions constituted in a narrow sense a return to the cosmopolitan stance of the historical vanguard, in the last few decades of the twentieth century jazz was just as likely to play the part of outsider or anachronism as savior or scapegoat. If Latin American writers such as Julio Cortázar and Alain Derbez frequently spun jazz into nostalgic metaphors of personal and creative freedom against the oppression of nationalist autocracy and populist vulgarity, others, such as Hermenegildo Sábat, César Aira, and Silviano Santiago, probed the contradictions, limits, and post-Utopian hauntings of the music's liberatory potential.

One of the more ambitious goals of *Tropical Riffs* is to introduce a decentered, expansive notion of what constitutes jazz discourse and criticism. In his study *Blowin' Hot and Cool*, John Gennari has made a compelling case for the

unique mediating power of US intellectual jazz discourse compared to that of other musical genres.¹⁸ To an unusual degree, critics like Marshall Stearns, Leonard Feather, Gary Giddins, and Stanley Crouch have helped to shape “the terms and conditions on which the music and the musicians reach the public.” What is more, they have done so not just as writers, but also as promoters, educators, radio and television hosts, and even spoken-word participants in concerts and recordings.¹⁹ As Gennari concedes, though, the transnational dimensions of the jazz “superstructure” point to the urgent need for a more comprehensive survey of jazz criticism, one that goes beyond the signature racial tensions and other particularities of North American discourse and specifically takes into account the rest of the hemisphere. The long-standing prestige enjoyed by Latin American *letrados* gave many such intellectuals a peculiar stranglehold over the “order of signs” of modernizing cities and cultures.²⁰ This in turn made erudite advocacy of jazz (particularly among music scholars) a risky endeavor in the region until the emergence of a “jazz art world” in North America and Europe during the postwar period.²¹

Even so, scores of other jazz interpreters, from marginal musicians and small-time editors to poets and *cronistas*, had begun to engage critically with the new music almost as soon as the word “jazz” entered into circulation. At a basic level, what most separated Latin American jazz literature from analogous practices in North America and Europe was the former region’s relative lack of strategic agency vis-à-vis the invention of jazz orthodoxy and coproduction of hegemonic jazz scenes. In short, Argentina and Brazil did not produce any equivalent of Feather or Crouch, nor should they have been expected to. Like critics from Asia, Africa, and much of Europe, Latin American writers simply lacked the personal access and linguistic and cultural authority to mediate jazz at a global level for a global audience.²² To be sure, the absence of a professional class of jazz gatekeepers in Latin America intimately involved in the international music industry at the level of production came with certain advantages. For one thing, it left those writers and intellectuals who wrote about jazz less susceptible to accusations of parasitism—one of the hallmarks of the often contentious relationship between African American jazz musicians and white critics from North America and Europe.²³ Yet, more important, the very autonomy of informal jazz discourse created ample opportunities for poetic license—Cortázar’s novella *El perseguidor* (The Pursuer, 1959) perhaps being the foremost example—in which literary and film fiction absorbed and subverted the mediating function of the metropolitan Jazz Critic. Such activities were not limited to imaginative pursuits. As will become apparent at various moments of this book, intellectual interventions of different stripes, found in

a wide range of media—jazz as liberator, jazz as modern vulgarity, jazz as the mask of cultural invasion—can be seen as arbitrary and therefore essentially fictive devices.

The full political complexity of jazz in Latin America was negotiated not just through narrative fiction, music criticism, radio broadcasts, live performances, or the circulation of records and liner notes, but also, and at times quite centrally, through film and television. To those seeking an exclusive focus on musical practices, recordings, and music criticism *per se*, my attention to the latter in *Tropical Riffs* may at first glance seem disproportionate, and no doubt reflects my own scholarly background and interests. But an analysis of relevant audio-visual culture is also crucial to understanding how the idea of jazz morphed and spread in Latin America, especially in regard to race. In shedding light on the cultural politics of jazz in Latin America, particularly during the middle decades of the twentieth century, popular cinema and television lend us key methodological tools with which to uncover the strategic positions of south-of-the-border intellectuals, politicians, and culture industries.

That jazz had a jarring impact on twentieth-century debates about race, nation, and cultural production is not just a testament to the singularity of the music's formal innovations or its peculiar sway over political debates in the region. Jazz also reveals the geopolitical dimensions of what Ana María Ochoa Gautier calls the “aural public sphere” of Latin American intellectual and cultural channels, a discursive space that channeled a common interest in “identifying and visibilizing local musics as part of a project of valorizing sonic localism.” Rooted in folklore studies, yet ultimately the by-product of diverse interests and institutional investments, this frequently contentious forum of debate articulated and mediated a whole range of local, national, and international expressions.²⁴ Vernacular music's pervasiveness in political, social, and cultural discussions during the first half of the twentieth century ensured that jazz would also find a distinct place in the public sphere. Ever mindful of facilitating the “aural differential modernity” of national expressions, critical discourses in Latin America sought to advocate and shape—and conversely, to police and discourage—the consumption of competing transnational idioms, particularly jazz.²⁵ Rarely achieving the status of industry players beyond the relatively insular music scenes in Buenos Aires and São Paulo, Havana and Mexico City, critics in various guises nonetheless played central roles in interpreting the meaning of jazz for local readers, listeners, and fans.

Throughout *Tropical Riffs*, I argue that jazz has operated in various Latin American settings as a vital touchstone, bearing the risks and benefits of urban modernization, hemispheric geopolitics, and transnational cultural production.

Initially, the music provided intellectuals a shiny new instrument with which to navigate rapidly evolving attitudes toward race and sexuality, national identity, and mass consumption. As I will show in the chapters that follow, however, the acquisition of this useful tool of metropolitan citizenship required a crucial trade-off. Like popular cinema, jazz in early twentieth-century Latin America was widely associated with the very nation-state that posed the most palpable economic and military threat to regional stability and integrity. Above all, though, the United States loomed as a *cultural* force of the first order whose bag of tricks prominently featured popular dance music assisted by a formidable trio of technological-industrial supports: radio, the phonograph, and the film industry itself. For many Latin Americans, jazz gave vivid—even cruel—aural and visual form to North America's cultural, political, and economic dominance.

In the remainder of this book I will examine how and why jazz—whether embraced or denounced, exploited or obstructed, diverted or repatriated—echoed in peculiar ways with Latin American audiences, artists, and intellectuals of the twentieth century. To a greater extent than Hollywood, whose systemic racism excluded African Americans from all but token roles in the vast majority of films throughout the first half of the century, jazz forced proponents and critics alike to grapple with the cultural matrix of modern capitalism in all shades of its political complexity. The sheer power with which jazz penetrated Latin America was not just proof of the unyielding might of the US imperial machine, what Ronald Radano and Tejumola Olaniyan have referred to as “the pernicious vibrations of rapacious capitalists, the sound of bad men.”²⁶ It also served as clear evidence of how mightily critics, intellectuals, and fans in the region struggled with questions of race, technology, sexuality, and nation during a period marked by disorientating social and demographic change. Sensitive to such issues yet also seduced by jazz’s musical vitality and symbolic cachet, *jazzistas* and other performers from Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro to Mexico City and Havana—Oscar Alemán and Chano Pozo, João Gilberto and Gato Barbieri, Arturo Sandoval and Danilo Pérez—ultimately transformed the music they played in ways few critics could have predicted.

Jazz music’s ambiguous but abiding relationship with Latin America demonstrates the sheer volume, mutability, and mobility of musical currents within and across national borders. Yet that is not all it does. Any book about cultural politics should, of course, make every attempt to steer clear of facile premises about a form or genre’s supposed country of origin. This is especially true for jazz, which perhaps more than any musical expression of the twentieth century enjoyed an unusually prominent and enduring global profile, but also was

(and still is) subjected to an inordinate number of nationalist claims. What I propose to do in the chapters that follow is not to define jazz as Argentine or Cuban or Brazilian, or to deny that most of its innovators or practitioners were US-born. Rather, I hope to reveal the uniquely multipurpose, shape-shifting, mobile character of jazz, qualities that owed their strength not just to the intrinsic dynamism of the music, but also to its perceived Americanness. Jazz thus contained an unavoidable paradox. While consistently seen in Latin America as *yanqui* in provenance, “America’s art form” was and remains a transnational project and a collective idea.

Notes

Introduction

1. Pond, “Jamming the Reception,” 11–12.
2. Burns’s *Jazz* helped PBS and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) reassert their relevance after the “culture wars” of the 1980s and 1990s, which culminated in withering attacks on public radio and television by a Republican-dominated Congress in 1994 and 1995. The federal appropriation of the CPB shrank from \$285.6 million in 1995 to \$250 million in 1999. By 2002 it had risen to \$350 million, and it continued to rise for the next few decades. “CPB’s Appropriations History,” CPB, accessed November 16, 2013, <http://www.cpb.org/appropriation/history.html>.
3. George Lipsitz has argued that *Jazz* misses the boat politically for the same reason that it succeeds as entertainment, that is, by spinning a “fairy tale about cooperation, consent, and consensus,” and thus responding adroitly “to the need of elites to recruit the populace to their political projects of triumphant nationalism and managerial multiculturalism” (*Footsteps in the Dark*, 81).
4. Ratliff, “Fixing,” 32.
5. Meredith, “Latin Jazz,” n.p.
6. A pioneering study in this regard is S. Frederick Starr’s *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union* (1983), which underscores the paradox of “capitalist” music’s popularity behind the Iron Curtain. Mike Zwerin’s *Swing under the Nazis: Jazz as a Metaphor of Freedom* (1985) and Michael Kater’s *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (1992) examine in different ways the singular menace, at once seductive and poisonous, that jazz represented during the Third Reich. Uta G. Poiger’s *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (2000) focuses on the postwar period, and in particular how jazz and early rock posed challenges to projects of national reconstruction. More recently, Jeffrey H. Jackson’s *Making Jazz French: Music and Modern Life in Interwar Paris* (2003), George McKay’s *Circular Breathing: The Cultural Politics of Jazz in Britain* (2005), Matthew F. Jordan’s *Le Jazz: Jazz and French Cultural Identity* (2010), Jeremy Lane’s *Jazz and Machine-Age Imperialism: Music, “Race,” and Intellectuals in France, 1918–1945* (2014), and Tom Perchard’s *After Django: Making Jazz in Postwar France* (2015) have filled out our understanding of vital areas of European contact with jazz. Everett Taylor Atkins’s *Blue Nippon: Authenticating Jazz in Japan* (2001), meanwhile,

traces jazz's development in Japan, including the ambivalent embrace of swing music by wartime nationalists. Similarly, Andrew F. Jones's *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age* (2001) studies the unique jazz hybrids in interwar China as well as the emergence of new urban forms supposedly stripped of "corrupting" foreign influence. Finally, Gwen Ansell's *Soweto Blues: Jazz, Popular Music, and Politics in South Africa* (2005) studies the social and cultural conditions that gave rise to South Africa's unique jazz scene over the course of the twentieth century; Steven Feld's *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra* (2012) narrates the rich tapestry of Ghana's jazz and experimental music community; and Robin D. G. Kelley's *Africa Speaks, America Answers: Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times* (2012) focuses on transnational encounters between US and African musicians during the 1950s and 1960s, cultural crossings that informed new identities and strategies of decolonization on both sides of the Atlantic.

7. Atkins, *Blue Nippon*, loc. 353.

8. The "Latin" label itself is the invention of a recording industry and pan-Latino social movements that emerged in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, prevailing over earlier "Cubop" and "Afro-Cuban jazz" categories shortly after the triumph of the Cuban revolution (Washburne, "Latin Jazz," 97). Though to some extent born of a revolutionary climate, therefore, "Latin jazz" hews closely to what Claudia Milian calls the comfortable "structuring content" of US-centric *latinidad* (*Latining America*, 4).

9. US and Western European political theorists, journalists, and other intellectuals, Michael Billig points out, have frequently fallen prey to reductive impulses that consign nationalisms to "small sizes and exotic colors . . . located 'there' on the periphery, not 'here' at the center" (*Banal Nationalism*, 6). Given its persistent marginalization and invisibilization of Latin America in canonical jazz discourse, Burns's *Jazz* exemplifies what Billig has termed the "banal nationalism" of power-wielding Western democracies (8). This concept is somewhat akin to what Paul Gilroy calls "quiet cultural nationalism" or "crypto-nationalism," terms he uses to describe how even radical thinkers "are often disinclined to consider the cross-catalytic or transverse dynamics of racial politics" (*The Black Atlantic*, 4). For an analysis of the porosity of geopolitical borders when it comes to music, see Kun, *Audiotopia*, 21–22.

10. Early critics of jazz so frequently invoked "syncopated" and "syncopation" that the words often functioned as epithets. As Katherine Biers has suggested, North American and European assessments of ragtime music had initiated this tendency. While critics pointed to the bodily excitability supposedly produced by syncopated rhythms, ragtime's defenders argued that the music's skipped beats and sudden stops and starts expressed "the true American rhythm" ("Syncopate Fever," 105–7).

11. Borrowing key concepts from the media scholar Jesús Martín-Barbero, the music theorist Jairo Moreno has used the expression "syncopated modernities" to identify the temporal and spatial dislocations that typify jazz music made by Latin Americans in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Such dislocations are "simultaneously sustain[ed] and challenge[d]" by the peculiarities of North-South geopolitics and hemispheric aural networks ("Past Identity," 98–99). As we will see, such inter-American syncopations are hardly endemic to the rise of Latin jazz in the 1960s and 1970s, having marked jazz since the early twentieth century.

12. See López, “Of Rhythms and Borders,” 310–12. For a discussion of how Juan Perón frequently invoked the category “antipeople” as an oligarchist/imperialist catchall, see Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony*, 504–21.

13. It is worth noting that an analogous “jazz picture” trend does not emerge on the same scale in the United States. Where it does, as Krin Gabbard has argued, it is usually in the form of “whitewashed” pictures, as in the case of Kay Kyser’s RKO films featuring white performers and the most commercialized brand of swing (*Jammin’ at the Margins*, 25–28).

14. “When music and dance are invoked as national discursive units of gestures, rhythms, and sounds,” Ana M. López writes, “Bhabha’s double-time becomes only too apparent. The rhythm must stand in as that which has *always* been a part of the national imaginary, but it must also serve as that which can *performatively* interpellate social actors into a community in the present” (“Of Rhythms and Borders,” 311).

15. Beverly, *Latinamericanism after 9/11*, 27.

16. Radano, *Lying Up a Nation*, 11–12.

17. Although always in the background in debates about the origins of tango, race did not begin to be examined again in earnest until the 1980s, with the publication of Oscar Natale’s *Buenos Aires, negros y tango*. It is significant that the venerable Argentine music scholar Néstor Ortiz Oderigo waited until 1988 to write *Latitudes africanas del tango*, though the study was not published until well after the author’s death in 1996.

18. “Of all the great American vernacular musics,” Gennari writes, “only jazz has cultivated intellectual discourse as a core element of its superstructure” (*Blowin’ Hot and Cool*, loc. 292).

19. Gennari, *Blowin’ Hot and Cool*, loc. 285–92.

20. See Rama, *Lettered City*, 17.

21. The postwar period witnessed a flowering of collaborations between prestige writers and challenging music (particularly bebop) increasingly divorced from the dance floor. See Lopes, *Jazz Art World*, 4–8.

22. Here it would be prudent to make a distinction between Jazz Critics (in the sense of a regular vocation) and *informal critics of jazz*, the latter a much broader category that included, over the course of the twentieth century, politicians, folklorists, musicologists, composers, fiction writers, filmmakers, and film and cultural critics from all corners of the globe.

23. Gennari, *Blowin’ Hot and Cool*, loc. 230.

24. Ochoa Gautier, “Social Transculturation,” 396.

25. Ochoa Gautier, “Social Transculturation,” 397.

26. Radano and Olaniyan, *Audible Empire*, loc. 233. Rather than focus simply on the “audibility of dominance,” Radano and Olaniyan propose “to inquire into ways in which imperial structures help to modify and produce qualities of hearing and to make a ‘music’ discernible in the first place” (loc. 233–40).

CHAPTER ONE. *La Civilizada Selva*

The epigraph to this chapter translates as “In the civilized jungle / the cat-like eyes of automobiles do battle.”

1. Menanteau, *Historia del jazz*, 27.

2. Pujol, *Jazz al Sur*, 38.