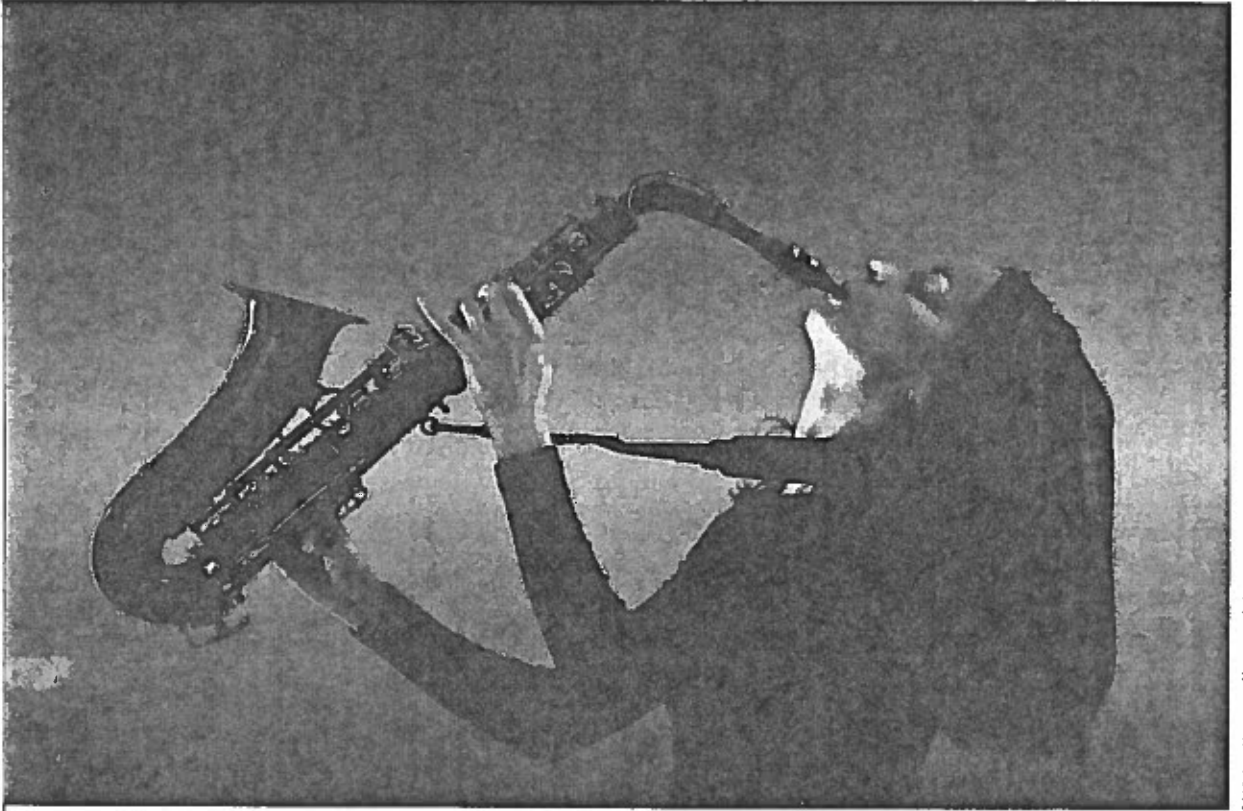


Post-Bop



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Chapter 11

Key Terms, Music, Places, Figures and Bands

Terms

Neo-conservative movement
Young Lions
Thelonious Monk International
Jazz Competition
Roland GR300 guitar
synthesizer
EWI
Harmolodics
M-Base

Music (albums, works, etc.)

The Majesty of the Blues
Tutu
Bright Size Life
Orchestrion

Pilgrimage
Blue Matter
Creative Orchestra Music
New Moon Daughter

Places

Berklee College of Music
Jazz at Lincoln Center

Figures and Bands

Wynton Marsalis
Albert Murray
Stanley Crouch
V.S.O.P. Quintet
Branford Marsalis
Joshua Redman
Christian McBride

Pat Metheny
Michael Brecker
Brecker Brothers
Steps Ahead
John Scofield
David Sanborn
The Yellowjackets
Ornette Coleman
Prime Time
Anthony Braxton
Steve Coleman
Greg Osby
Geri Allen
Cassandra Wilson
World Saxophone Quartet

Morning in America

On November 4, 1980, Ronald Wilson Reagan was elected president of the United States, defeating the incumbent Jimmy Carter. Although Carter was a highly intelligent and deeply religious man who had won the 1976 election as a grassroots populist from rural Georgia, gas shortages, high interest and unemployment rates, and an Iranian hostage situation dogged his presidency. By 1979, his approval ratings bottomed out at 28 percent. Carter increasingly became a symbol of defeatism and pessimism, whereas Reagan offered a contrasting vision to voters. Reagan was folksy, easy-going, and optimistic, and he was determined to single-handedly turn things around. Reagan's vision for America was steeped in nostalgia for the 1950s, a simpler time when the roles of men and women, adults and young people, and good and evil seemed to be more clearly defined. Rugged individualism, hard work, conformity, and the pursuit of a higher standard of living were virtues back then, before the 1960s brought psychedelics and sexual experimentation and the 1970s divorce and discontentment. The country, however, had changed since the 1950s. Although Americans eagerly embraced Reagan's vision of a return to the good old days, they were definitely not willing to return to a 1950s lifestyle. Getting ahead by any means possible was the driving force for many in the 1980s, or as author Troy Gill put it, "the pursuit of happiness degenerated into an obsessive pursuit of pleasure, both indulgent experiences and beautiful things." The poster child for the era was the mythic "yuppie," or "young urban professional"

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whose existence seemingly was based on "consuming rather than being, on things rather than relationships, on an aesthetic life rather than ascetic living."¹ It was no accident that one of the decade's most popular films, *The Big Chill*, was about former baby boomers who had lost their 1960s idealism and jumped on the yuppie bandwagon, and one of its most popular actors was Michael J. Fox, who played the irrepressible young Republican Alex P. Keaton on the television sitcom *Family Ties*. Although, by definition, true yuppies were almost non-existent,* their imagery defined the era. Not everyone bought into the Reagan Revolution—his administration was particularly ruthless to poor and black Americans, for instance—and, consequently, he generated a considerable amount of controversy. Nonetheless, in 1984, the man who facilitated the remarkable 1980s social transformation was re-elected by an overwhelming landslide, helped in part by his famous feel-good "Morning in America" television commercials.

Like America, jazz in the 1980s was also changing in fundamental ways. One of the most profound changes was the arrival of a new generation of young players with seemingly unlimited talent who were the products of the now well-established jazz educational system. "The institutionalization of jazz education made advanced technical skills commonplace," wrote Stuart Nicholson, "with colleges producing young musicians well-versed in the craft of improvisation who might have stunned the jazz world just twenty years before with their technical prowess."² Although the phenomena had really started in the 1970s, by the 1980s, it seemed as if young jazz virtuosos were coming out of the woodwork. Formal jazz education programs had begun in the 1940s and, by the 1950s, programs at North Texas State University (now the University of North Texas), the University of Miami, and **Berklee College of Music** in Boston had become leaders in the field. By the 1970s, jazz education was ubiquitous in colleges and high schools across the country. By 1981, there were by one estimate 400,000 student musicians playing in 20,000 to 25,000 junior high, high school, college, and university bands in America.³ Berklee's reputation as a bona fide jazz trade school (with graduates that included Quincy Jones, Gary Burton, and Josef Zawinul) would be further enhanced in the 1980s with its ever more impressive list of alumni and faculty, which includes many of the musicians discussed in this chapter. There was, however, a downside to the ascendancy of the college educated jazz musician. "With so many musicians supporting the same sources of stylistic inspiration, similarity in concept and execution was inevitable...consequently individuality became less important than shared values of craftsmanship—technique, familiarity with the harmonic and rhythmic conventions of the music, an orthodox tone and precise articulation."⁴ Guitarist Pat Metheny adds: "We're at a point now with so many great young players, it's a little like there's a thousand channels on cable but there's nothing to watch." If, he says, "it doesn't come embodied in a conception, it's 'just' good playing."⁵ In other words, was jazz in the 1980s becoming an era in which technical skills trumped individuality, and youth a bigger asset than experience?

* According to *American Demographics*, Jan 1988, only 0.3 percent of the population was under forty and making at least \$75,000 per year, the generally accepted requirements to yuppie-dom.

Berklee College of Music

Originally founded in 1945 as the Schillinger House of Music, the Berklee College of Music in Boston has consistently been at the forefront of jazz and contemporary music education. The school's alumni include Josef Zawinul, Gary Burton, Quincy Jones, John Scofield, Bill Frisell, Joe Lovano, John Mayer, and Donald Fagen. Today, the school has an enrollment of 3,800 with a faculty of 460.⁶

Wynton Marsalis: Jazz Messiah or Prophet of Death?

The Marsalis Invasion

All of this brings us to **Wynton Marsalis**, who became the de facto face of jazz in the 1980s. Marsalis was absolutely Reaganesque in the way he impacted the jazz scene. Like the fortieth president, Marsalis tapped into a dormant yearning for a nostalgic return to the 1950s. While the differences between these two men were obvious—one was a young, hip, urban, black, street-smart intellectual, the other an aging, uncomplicated, white, down-home Midwesterner—they were remarkably similar in the way they facilitated change in their respective arenas. Both men were image

Trumpeter Wynton Marsalis. © 2013
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conscious. Both possessed great communicative skills. Marsalis spoke with a sense of authority that few, if any, other jazz musicians—or critics for that matter—could match. Marsalis's rise to fame and power also benefited from—and, in fact, even broadened—the 1980s trend toward emphasizing technique rather than individuality as a musician's most important asset. He was after all, universally acknowledged as one of the most technically gifted jazz musicians in history. Like Reagan, Marsalis had many followers who bought into his vision, but he also had many critics. He became a polarizing figure at the center of one of the most controversial periods in jazz history. Like American society, jazz had seen its share of turbulent times—the 1960s (descent into anarchy and chaos with free jazz), and the 1970s (over-commercialization and electrification with jazz/rock fusion)—that for many were paths into a musical wilderness. As we have seen, those who stayed the course by playing mainstream jazz often experienced hard times that seemed to get harder by the day. For many of these musicians, Marsalis was a messiah who brought a welcome rebirth to jazz. To others, however, Marsalis was an angel of death who was hastening the music's demise. To be sure, the age-old question "Is jazz dead?" began to surface again in the late 1980s. The bottom line: just as the Reagan Revolution transformed the political discussion in the 1980s, Wynton Marsalis and the neo-conservative movement he helped unleash did the same thing in the world of jazz.

Marsalis (born October 18, 1961) was born in New Orleans into a musical family led by his father Ellis, a well-respected local pianist and educator. Three of Wynton's live brothers also became musicians (saxophonist Branford, the eldest; drummer Jason; and trombonist Delfeayo). Together they ascended into the national jazz scene in the 1980s with a sense of dynasty reminiscent of the Kennedys. (In the 1990s, *The New Yorker* summed up the Marsalis invasion by running a cartoon depicting two children running into a bedroom shouting, "Dad! Dad! Wake up! They just discovered another Marsalist!") As a child, Wynton (named after former Miles Davis pianist Wynton Kelly) was a disciplined and driven trumpet student who faithfully followed a rigorous three-hour daily practice routine en route to developing prodigious abilities in both jazz and classical music. In 1978, he moved to New York to attend the Juilliard School, and began to attract the attention of the city's music elite. In the summer of 1980, Wynton—all of eighteen years old—sat in with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, which in turn led to a job offer. Turning to his father for advice on whether to continue school or go on the road, Ellis Marsalis recalls, "He called up and said, 'Man, I have a chance to join Art Blakey's band. What do you think?' I said, 'Well, one thing about Juilliard, man,' I said, 'Juilliard's going to be there when they're shoveling dirt in your face. Art Blakey won't.'"6 Wynton followed his father's advice, and within a year he had become the group's musical director and was joined on the front line by brother Branford. In 1980, he signed contracts with the jazz and classical divisions at Columbia Records, and in 1981 released his eponymous debut album, which included Branford and featured the members of Miles Davis's 1960s rhythm section (Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter, and Tony Williams) on several tracks. *Wynton Marsalis* sold more than 100,000 copies, an impressive figure for a debut jazz album. In 1983, Marsalis released his third jazz album, *Think of One*, and made his classical recording

debut with *Trumpet Concertos*. Both albums won Grammy Awards, making him the first artist in history to receive Grammy Awards in both categories in the same year. He repeated the feat in 1984, the year he turned twenty-three years old.

These achievements, needless to say, were nothing short of astonishing, and were duly noted in the jazz and artistic worlds. In short order, the young, stylish, incredibly talented jazz and classical musician became the beneficiary of a high-powered public relations campaign by Columbia (the largest record label in the world) that made him the darling of the "cultured" music world. "Marsalis's rise to fame while barely out of his teens was an unprecedented event in the jazz world," wrote historian Ted Gioia. "No major jazz figure—not Ellington or Armstrong, Goodman or Gillespie—had become so famous so fast."⁷ But could he sustain such a high level of achievement? No problem. Marsalis won four more Grammy Awards in 1985—all in jazz—bringing his grand total at the time to eight (he now has ten). Since then, he has won a Peabody Award and the Pulitzer Prize, and has been awarded no less than *thirty* honorary doctorates and an honorary membership in England's Royal Academy of Music. To date, Marsalis has recorded more than forty jazz albums, a remarkable accomplishment considering that many of the albums consist primarily if not solely of music that he has composed. (In addition, Marsalis has released eighteen classical albums since 1981 and estimates that he performs an average of 120 gigs per year.) Marsalis's highly prolific compositional output has resulted in four ballets, two string quartets, and two film soundtracks, all of which have evoked critical comparisons to Duke Ellington and Charles Mingus, two of jazz's greatest composers. He has also written extended works for a number of concept-themed albums, which include *Blood on the Fields* (about slavery, for which he won his Pulitzer), *Black Codes (From the Underground)* (about nineteenth century Jim Crow laws), *From the Plantation to the Penitentiary* (a critique of contemporary American society), and *The Marciac Suite* (a seventy-six-minute, thirteen-movement tribute to the medieval town of Marciac, France).

Neocon Controversy

So what is so controversial about a musician with such unlimited talent? Well, where does one start? From the beginning, Marsalis made enemies by criticizing the elder statesmen of jazz in print. For example, in the July 1983 issue of *JazzTimes Magazine* he claimed that Sonny Rollins and Ornette Coleman were "selling out;" "Bird would roll over in his grave if he knew what was going on." He went on to say (remember, he is only twenty-one at the time): "We gotta drop some bombs here. Indict some motherfuckers. I don't want to cut Freddie [Hubbard] down. I'd rather cut Miles [Davis] down than Freddie. He ain't doin' nothing. [Miles] was never my idol. I resent what he's doing [playing jazz/rock] because it gives the whole scene such a letdown....He's just co-signing white boys, just tommying." To which Davis (whose influence on Marsalis's playing at the time was quite obvious) replied: "He's got a lot of technique, but that's about it," and then added "Without me, [he would] be all 'Flight of the Bumblebee'."⁸ The issue that Davis alludes to, Marsalis's excessive use of technical virtuosity

at the expense of creativity and sense of personal style, has also been a constant gripe with other musicians and critics. Keith Jarrett has been quoted in *The New York Times Magazine* as saying, "I've never heard anything Wynton played sound like it meant anything at all. Wynton has no voice and no presence." Pianist Joe Zawinul: "As an artist he really can't carry the stick. He's been put on a pedestal."⁹ Historian Dr. Lewis Porter states that Marsalis's solos "sound, to these ears, like patchworks rather than coherent statements."¹⁰ Respected jazz writer Whitney Balliett said, "He has never moved me as a trumpet player." To these criticisms, Marsalis replies: "If you're talking I don't play with soul, and all that, man, one thing I want to make clear about that is I'm from the neighborhood and I represent African-American culture much more than these buffoons they think are authentic Negroes."¹¹ (It should be noted that even the critics listed here have acknowledged that Marsalis's technique is impressive.)

Marsalis's critics have also taken issue with his apparent indoctrination by **Albert Murray** and **Stanley Crouch**, two prominent jazz writers with an agenda about what jazz is supposed to sound like and how it should reflect contemporary African-American culture. Their ideology began in 1976 when Murray published *Stomping the Blues*, a book that strongly advocates (among other things) that the blues is an essential element of all jazz. In other words, jazz that doesn't have blues tonalities in it isn't really jazz. Crouch is a former free jazz drummer who began writing for the *Village Voice* in 1979, and over time developed an increasingly conservative and opinionated viewpoint on jazz that eventually aligned with Murray's. Building on the principles stated in *Stomping the Blues*, together they established the criterion for what has become known as the neo-traditional or **neo-conservative movement**, a narrow-minded notion stating that swing, blues tonalities, and the use of acoustic instruments, along with a technical mastery of one's instrument, are indispensable components of jazz. Murray and Crouch have also inferred in writing that one has to be black to play jazz convincingly. A literal interpretation of their canon would mean that most of the jazz played and recorded since the early 1960s is not real jazz. Free jazz? Not jazz. Jazz/rock fusion? Nope. Bossa nova? No way—it doesn't swing, and Brazilians are not African-Americans. Although most jazz before 1960 would get an endorsement from the neocons, their stylistic ideal is hard bop, which in their eyes is the style in which the requisite elements are most fully artistically realized. The hard bop era (1950s–1960s) was also the last time that jazz still played a vital role in African-American culture—before soul, Motown, funk, and rap in succession took its place. Jazz, according to Murray and Crouch, jazz must return to a place of dignity and honor in African-American life.

M-C-M

As the 1980s progressed, Wynton Marsalis seemed to increasingly fall under the spell of Murray and Crouch, and as he became more and more outspoken in supporting the Neocon cause, he became the perfect mouthpiece for their views. Together, the three wasted no opportunity to put their views across in print, television interviews, and panel discussions (prompting one writer to refer

Characteristics of the Neo-conservative Movement

The neo conservative movement of the 1980s advocated the use of the following musical characteristics:

- Blues tonalities
- Swing rhythm
- Acoustic instruments
- Technical mastery of one's instrument
- Most often resembles the sound of hard bop

to them categorically as "M-C-M"). Although Marsalis's first several jazz albums were stylistically reminiscent of the Miles Davis 60s Quintet, he jumped on the neo-conservative bandwagon in 1988 with the release of *The Majesty of the Blues*, whose three-part "New Orleans Function" includes a spoken sermon (written by Crouch) that warns of those who preach "Premature Autopsies" on "The Death of Jazz." (These, in fact, are the titles of two of the suite's movements.) Marsalis and Crouch seemed to be using the album as a bully pulpit from which they could attack their critics, who in turn viewed their use of a sermon as patently sanctimonious. From this point on, Marsalis's album releases have been heavy on what critics have labeled "ancestral worship," and have included tributes to Jelly Roll Morton, Monk, and Ellington. These albums were extremely well-produced and well-played (all showing off Marsalis's virtuoso skills), making them easy listens for casual fans and consequently big sellers. They all also include liner notes written by Stanley Crouch, who was relentless in his praise of Marsalis as the savior of jazz. But as the Marsalis juggernaut picked up steam, protests from critics mounted. That writers (i.e., Murray and Crouch) rather than musicians were staking out the future direction of jazz (or at least attempting to) for the first time in the music's history—becoming a sort of de facto jazz police—was troubling to many. The fact that they were in effect advocating that the music's future really lay in its past was equally disturbing. Isn't art by definition supposed to constantly move forward and seek new original ideas and breakthroughs, they asked? No, said the neocons, who stood their ground. In a column for *JazzTimes* in 2002, Crouch stated flatly, "The jazz tradition is not about innovation."

Marsalis also has been the subject of criticism for allegedly abusing his power in the corporate world. Once he solidified his artistic clout at Columbia, he began convincing the label to sign more artists in his mold—young, black, fashion-conscious neocons—and the label was only too eager to comply. By the late 1980s, Columbia and other jazz labels were filling their rosters with *wunderkinder* such as Roy Hargrove, Christian McBride, Terrence Blanchard, and Joshua Redman. Although these musicians were technically excellent players, by and large they had not matured artistically. To the Marsalis critics, the signing and promotion of the young lions was not only the result of the neocon agenda, it also meant that those artists who didn't fit the profile (older, more experimental, white) were pushed aside and not re-signed when their contracts expired. (In a telling sign of the times, respected trumpeter John Faddis spoke in 1993 of two well-known musicians close to their fortieth birthdays who were not currently signed to recording contracts that were giving lessons to two teenage musicians who were.)¹² Racism, cronyism, and ageism also became issues for Marsalis soon after he was named the artistic director of New York's Jazz at Lincoln Center (JALC) program in 1987. Originally designed by the prestigious Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts as a way to fill empty concert halls in August, JALC, under Marsalis's leadership, has grown to become a phenomenal success story with an annual budget of \$12 million. Marsalis, however, embroiled himself in controversy almost immediately when he published what amounted to a neocon mission statement for JALC in *The New York Times* titled "What Jazz Is—And Isn't."

One of the activities established by Jazz at Lincoln Center was an annual concert series designed to feature newly commissioned jazz works and honor jazz musicians—living and dead—who had made significant contributions to the music. Critics were quick to point out that for the first several years, the commissions all went to Wynton Marsalis. Later on, the first non-Marsalis commissions went to his acolytes. The concerts were performed by the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, whose members, selected by Marsalis, were nearly all black (including forty-eight of fifty-six performers used during one week in 1996, according to Whitney Balliett). The artists featured at the concerts were also overwhelmingly black. None of this sat well with white jazz critics, who accused Marsalis of “Crow-Jim” tactics and wielding his power recklessly. “They say they have to put on all the important figures before they get to the lesser-knowns and there happen to be more important figures who are black” commented writer Peter Watrous in the *Village Voice*. “That’s complete bullshit. I’d like to know what Dewey Redman or Gonzalo Rubalcaba [two black musicians who received honoring concerts in 1991 and 1993, respectively] has contributed to jazz.” Another controversy arose in 1993, when JALC tried to fire all the members of the jazz orchestra who were more than thirty years old, a clear violation of age-discrimination laws. Although the firing was later withdrawn in the midst of protests by musicians and the press, it was perceived as another belligerent maneuver by the M-C-M triumvirate (Crouch and Murray are both JALC artistic advisers) to control the center’s agenda. In spite of the controversy, JALC has prospered, due in large part to Marsalis’s fund raising and promotional efforts. In October 2004, a stunning new \$128 million home for JALC opened in the Time Warner Center at Columbus Circle that includes three performance halls, an educational center, recording studio, and an interactive multimedia history of jazz installation (Chapter 9).

The Neo-Conservative Movement

Although the Marsalis-led neo-conservative movement achieved critical mass in the late 1980s, its seeds were planted as early as 1976. In the summer of that year, the **V.S.O.P. Quintet**, a reforming of the 1960s Miles Davis Quintet led by Herbie Hancock with Freddie Hubbard taking the place of the then-retired Davis, went on a well-received tour. Later in the year, Dexter Gordon returned from a fourteen-year self-imposed exile in Europe with a triumphant engagement at the Village Vanguard and the subsequent release of the best-selling *Homecoming: Live at the Village Vanguard*. In the wake of his success, Gordon’s contemporaries, including trumpeters Woody Shaw and Freddie Hubbard, also enjoyed career renewals. Gordon, Hubbard, Shaw, and Hancock were all jazz masters in their thirties or older who had well-established mainstream jazz credentials dating from the 1950s or 1960s (Gordon’s going back to the 1940s). The fact that they were all returning to their roots in one way or another playing post-bop jazz—a style that had pretty much been out of fashion for a number of years—was significant and helped rekindle interest in mainstream acoustic jazz. 1976 was also the year that tenor saxophonist Scott Hamilton and cornetist

Warren Vaché released debut albums that were steeped in jazz tradition. Both in their twenties at the time (making them the first true “young lions”), Hamilton and Vaché played neo-swing, putting them back stylistically even further than Gordon and the others, and both won praise for their careful attention to the nuances of that style. Hamilton, in particular, won praise for his ballad playing, an art that had certainly gone out of fashion in the era of electricity. (Ironically, it was also 1976 that Albert Murray’s book *Stomping the Blues*, so influential to Stanley Crouch and Wynton Marsalis, was published.)

The Young Lions

Of course, it was not until Wynton Marsalis appeared on the scene that the neo-conservative movement really took off. With real money to be made in jazz records for the first time in years, major labels such as Columbia and smaller jazz-oriented labels such as Blue Note began signing the Marsalis acolytes, who became known as the **Young Lions**. The first generation of Young Lions, the members of Marsalis’s first quintet, included older brother Branford on saxophone, drummer Jeff “Tain” Watts, bassist Robert Hurst, and pianist Kenny Kirkland, all of whom were no more than twenty-five years old in 1981. It is perhaps unfair to refer to **Branford Marsalis** as a young lion, in that his musical pursuits have been much more extensive and broad-minded than his younger brother’s, although his playing style, influenced by John Coltrane and Wayne Shorter, fits into the neocon canon. Growing up, Branford, unlike Wynton, took life a little more casually and hated to practice. After playing in the Jazz Messengers from 1981 to 1982 and his brother’s band from 1982 to 1985, he joined (along with Wynton’s pianist Kenny Kirkland) the band of pop artist Sting for a year to tour and record. Branford has also recorded with the Grateful Dead, Bruce Hornsby, and formed his own funk band called Buckshot LeFonque. (Although the brothers profess great love and respect for each other, there is a touch of sibling rivalry. Wynton once told a Kennedy Center audience without referring to Branford by name that “There’s nothing sadder than a jazz musician playing funk.”) Branford was also the musical director for the *Tonight Show Starring Jay Leno* from 1992 to 1995, and has won two Grammy Awards to date.

The Young Lion tent expanded when a Kool Jazz Festival concert of the same name on June 30, 1982, featured Marsalis, Chico Freeman, Paquito D’Rivera, and other “exceptional young musicians.” The next generation of Young Lions came of age at decade’s end, and included Roy Hargrove, Christian McBride, Terrence Blanchard, and **Joshua Redman**. Redman came to jazz with good credentials: his father was respected saxophonist Dewey Redman, member of Keith Jarrett’s American Quartet in the 1970s (see Chapter 5). Joshua took an interest in jazz as a child, but academics always took priority, and he graduated from high school first in his class. Originally intending to become a doctor, Redman attended Harvard and graduated summa cum laude in 1991. After winning the prestigious **Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition** on saxophone that same year, he decided to return to his first love: music. The following year, he was named Best New Artist



THELONIOUS MONK INTERNATIONAL JAZZ COMPETITION

An annual Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition is sponsored by the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz. A non-profit organization, the TMIJ was founded in 1986 by the Monk family and opera singer Maria Fisher to present public school-based jazz education programs for young people. Competitions are held each year on trumpet, saxophone, piano, bass, and drums. First place winners receive \$20,000 scholarships. [3]

by *JazzTimes Magazine* and signed with Warner, with whom he released his debut album in 1993. Redman was also able to parlay his good looks into a lucrative sponsorship with the DKNY clothing line, perhaps a sign that there was something to the Young Lion phenomena other than talent. **Christian McBride** has become one of the most sought after sidemen in jazz since his emergence on the scene in 1989. Like Branford Marsalis, McBride is equally comfortable playing a variety of styles, plays both acoustic and electric bass, and McBride has performed with a wide variety of artists, including McCoy Tyner, Sting, Diana Krall, and, of course, Wynton Marsalis. McBride, who turned down a contract from Blue Note when he was in his early twenties because he felt he wasn't ready, has been one of the few Young Lions to speak candidly on the downside of the M-C-M dogma. "I think some of us were kind of scared to do other things [outside of the neocon guidelines], because we were scared that Wynton Marsalis or Stanley Crouch would do a big interview in *The New York Times* and blast us, you know? A lot of the Wynton Marsalis entourage feel that way."¹³

Fusion Evolves in the 1980s

Miles Returns

Although on the surface it would seem that the jazz world was preoccupied by Wynton Marsalis and his controversies, there was in reality an abundance of other creative activity going on in the 1980s. One of the most celebrated events of the decade was the return of Miles Davis in 1981 from his self-imposed retirement. His first official public performance since 1975 took place on July 5, at Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center, and tickets sold out in less than two hours. According to at least one writer, "It was the most publicized event in jazz history,"¹⁴ and in fact the media coverage in newspapers throughout the world was unprecedented for a jazz event. Sellout crowds followed Davis on subsequent tours in Japan in October and in Europe the following April and May. "Nobody else could do big long tours and sell out stadiums all over Europe," said John Scofield, Davis's guitarist from 1982 to 1985. "And these people were not jazz snobs, they just dug Miles. He could make a believer out of a non-jazz person with the beauty of his sound and the rhythm of his notes. That's pretty heavy."¹⁵ At this point in his life, Miles Davis was standing on a pedestal that very few performers reach. Music fans knew that he was a living legend, an artist who had been at the vanguard of jazz innovation from the late 1940s until his retirement in 1975. Even though he was pushing sixty years of age, he still oozed with charisma. He could have rested on his laurels at this point in his career, but he was still willing to take risks and stir up controversy as he had done throughout his life. Among the eleven albums Davis released in the 1980s were *You're Under Arrest* (1984), which included covers of pop singer Cindy Lauper's "Time After Time" and Michael Jackson's "Human Nature," (for which Davis was, of course, criticized), and three Grammy winners, *We Want Miles* (1982), the big band *Aura* (1989), and *Tutu* (1986), in which producer Marcus Miller created synthesizer and drum machine beds in the studio over which Davis overdubbed Harmon mute solos.

Pat Metheny

As discussed in Chapter 6, in the late 1970s and 1980s some jazz/rock fusionists became entrapped in the musical cul-de-sac known as smooth jazz, an overly commercialized style that was largely unpopular with most jazz musicians and true fans. At the same time however, other fusion musicians began to emerge that took the style to new creative heights while managing to develop a huge popular fan base. One of most important new faces was guitarist **Pat Metheny**, whose willingness to experiment in different contexts and new technologies has since become a paradigm for many contemporary jazz musicians. Metheny (born August 12, 1954) was born and raised in Lee's Summit, Missouri, a suburb of Kansas City, where he started on trumpet before switching to the guitar at age twelve, "thanks mostly to the Beatles," he later recalled. "I saw *A Hard Days Night* 12 or 13 times...[and] the guitar was the one instrument my parents absolutely refused to let in the house. So you add it up and see that irresistible forces led me to the guitar."¹⁶ Although rock music led him to the instrument, he soon fell in love with jazz from listening to the records of Wes Montgomery, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and Ornette Coleman. In 1972, Metheny



The Pat Metheny Group. © 2103 by Gianluca Curti. Used under license of Shutterstock, Inc.

enrolled at the University of Miami but withdrew during his first semester. He was then offered and accepted a teaching job, making him the youngest person ever to hold such a position at the school. After one year at Miami, he joined the faculty at Berklee College, becoming at nineteen the youngest ever to teach at that institution. In 1974, he joined the band led by vibraphonist Gary Burton, who also taught at Berklee and was instrumental in bringing Metheny to the school. In 1975, while still performing with Burton and teaching at Berklee, Metheny recorded his debut album for ECM, the critically acclaimed *Bright Size Life*, a trio setting with drummer Bob Moses and bassist Jaco Pastorius. In 1977, he released *Watercolors*, a collaboration with pianist Lyle Mays, drummer Danny Gottlieb, and bassist Eberhard Weber. Both albums contained the breezy, listener-friendly sound that Metheny would become known for, and accordingly, both albums rose high on the *Billboard* jazz charts. With one exception, Metheny wrote all of the songs for both albums.

In 1978, Metheny formed the Pat Metheny Group, which included keyboardist Mays (who has become a life-long composing collaborator), drummer Gottlieb, and bassist Mark Egan, and released *The Pat Metheny Group*, sometimes referred to as *The White Album* for its plain, Beatle-esque cover art. The group's second release, *American Garage* (1980) was a breakout hit, reaching Number 1 on the *Billboard* jazz chart and Number 53 on the pop album chart. Around the same time, Metheny released his first solo record, *New Chautauqua* (1979), an adventurous mix of jazz, Spanish flamenco, folk, Indian music, and bluegrass that was realized through the creative use of multi-tracking. In 1981, Metheny and Mays released the duo album *As Falls Wichita, So Falls Wichita Falls*, an impressionistic venture with Latin, African, and contemporary jazz influences showcasing the pair's writing and performing talents. The album also includes the beautiful "September Fifteenth," a tribute to pianist Bill Evans (the title referring to the date Evans died in 1980). The Pat Metheny Group won Grammy Awards in 1982, 1983, and 1984 for the albums *Offramp*, *Travels*, and *First Circle*, respectively, which hit the Number 1, Number 3, and Number 2 spots on the jazz album charts. Songs from these albums, including "Are You Going With Me?," "James," and "Phase Dance," exhibit the classic Metheny sound, which *Down Beat* in 1984 called a balance of three parts, "the first being his own irrepressible Midwestern lyricism, the second a penchant for Brazilian rhythms, and the third the wild card of Ornette Coleman's jagged, insular logic." Metheny's "Midwestern lyricism" was a unique new sound in jazz, one that suggested the folk songs of the American West, and could be found in compositions such as "Last Train Home" from 1987's *Still Life (Talking)*, and even as early as "Midwestern Nights Dream" from *Bright Size Life*. Metheny has also been an active technologist who has been incorporating synthesizers such as the New England Digital Synclavier and the Roland GR300 guitar synthesizer into his compositions and recordings. He has also used the innovative forty-two-string Picasso 1 guitar, custom made for him by Canadian Linda Manzer.

Pat Metheny has also been a prolific musical chameleon whose work outside the confines of the Pat Metheny Group has been tremendously varied. In light of this, one of his most refreshing attributes is his ability to restrain his prodigious virtuosity to fit

any musical context in which he puts himself, and his knack for playing the right thing to compliment the music. Metheny has worked as a sideman in the touring bands of Joni Mitchell and Joshua Redman; recorded an album with his idol Ornette Coleman (1985's *Song X*, the *Down Beat* Critic's Poll Jazz Album of the Year); composed the soundtracks to several films including *The Falcon and the Snowman*; recorded *Electric Counterpoint*, an album of music by minimalist composer Steve Reich; and collaborated with fellow Missourian Charlie Haden (*Beyond the Missouri Sky*), guitar legend Jim Hall (*Jim Hall & Pat Metheny*), and pianist Brad Mehldau (*Metheny/Mehldau*). He has won sixteen Grammys to date, most recently for the Pat Metheny Group 2005 release *The Way Up*, a sixty-eight-minute suite composed with Lyle Mays. One of Metheny's most recent ventures is the Orchestrion Project, in which he uses solenoids and pneumatics to create an ensemble-based music for acoustic and acoustoelectric instruments. The results of this ambitious concept can be heard on the 2009 LP *Orchestrion*. He has also been—like Wynton Marsalis—unafraid to express himself in print when he sees fit, most famously in his 2000 criticism of saxophonist Kenny G's overdubbing on a Louis Armstrong record, which he called “a low point in modern culture—something that we all should be totally embarrassed about.”

Michael Brecker

One of the most influential tenor saxophonists of the post-John Coltrane era was **Michael Brecker**, whose remarkable talents and versatility made him an in demand session player as well as a thirteen-time Grammy Award winner for his own albums. Brecker was a sideman by one estimate on more than 900 jazz and pop recordings (including for pop artists as diverse as Frank Sinatra, Willie Nelson, Yoko Ono, Funkadelic, and Aerosmith, as well as a who's who in the jazz world) and, as a result, didn't get around to recording an album under his own name until seventeen years after his recording debut. Brecker (March 29, 1949–January 13, 2007) was born into a musical family in Philadelphia, where his father, a lawyer and jazz pianist took Michael and older brother Randy to see Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, Duke Ellington, and others perform live. After starting on the clarinet, Michael switched to the tenor saxophone in high school after falling in love with Coltrane's playing. After graduation, he and Randy attended Indiana University for a year before moving to New York in 1970. It was there that they co-founded the short-lived but groundbreaking jazz/rock group Dreams, which recorded two albums for Columbia before breaking up in 1972. In 1973, Michael and Randy played together in the Horace Silver Quintet for a year before leaving to form the **Brecker Brothers**, one of the more innovative jazz/rock/funk groups of the 1970s. An ongoing concern, even as the brothers involved themselves in other projects, the Brecker Brothers recorded ten albums between 1975 and 1990 before dissolving. In the late 1970s, the brothers operated a popular downtown New York nightclub called Seventh Avenue South, where regular jam sessions led to the formation of the group Steps, which included Michael, vibraphonist Mike Mainieri, pianist Don Grolnick

(a veteran of both Dreams and the Brecker Brothers), bassist Eddie Gomez, and drummer Steve Gadd.

Steps (who later changed their name to **Steps Ahead** due to a legal issue) was arguably the leading fusion band in the early 1980s, producing innovative music that was experimental, imaginative, and demanding to play, while somehow remaining accessible. Despite enduring constant changes in personnel (which included at one time or another pianists Eliane Elias and Rachel Z, guitarist Mike Stern, and drummer Peter Erskine), the group managed to record seven albums before breaking up in 1986. During his tenure with Steps Ahead, Brecker began using the **EWI** (electronic wind instrument), an expressive, breath-controlled synthesizer controller that opened up new creative horizons for the saxophonist. "It gave me the sensation of being in a sax section in a big band," he said, "kind of a big band on Mars."¹⁷ Brecker today stands as the only jazz saxophonist to have mastered the challenging instrument. After the dissolution of Steps Ahead, Brecker finally began to devote his attention to his first solo album. Released in 1987, *Michael Brecker*, which includes an all-star backing cast of Pat Metheny, keyboardist Kenny Kirkland, bassist Charlie Haden, and drummer Jack DeJohnette, won album of the year honors from both *Down Beat* and *JAZZIZ* magazines. *Michael Brecker* is a showcase for Brecker's dazzling technique, his trademark Coltrane-esque tone, and his unparalleled inventiveness. He also uses the EWI to great effect on several songs, including "Syzygy" and "Original Rays." His follow-up album, 1988's Grammy winning *Don't Try This at Home* again featured outstanding support from Herbie Hancock, Mike Stern, bassist Charlie Haden, violinist Mark O'Connor (who is featured in a wild sci-fi bluegrass duet with Brecker's EWI on "Itsbyrne Real"), and others. Following *Don't Try This at Home*, Brecker went on to record six more albums as a leader, including 2002's *Directions in Music*, a tribute to Miles Davis and John Coltrane, and 2003's *Wide Angles* with a "quindectet," a thirteen-piece orchestra. However, Brecker's most poignant, and arguably his best album, was his last, recorded just five months before his death.

EWI—Electronic Wind Instrument. 13

In mid 2004, Brecker noticed a sharp pain in his back while performing at the Mount Fuji Jazz Festival. He was later diagnosed with myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS), a blood disease that often leads to leukemia. Therapy for the disease usually involves finding a donor with matching stem cells, which Brecker was unable to do despite a well-publicized search. As his condition worsened and the disease evolved into leukemia, Brecker sought out experimental treatment, but to no avail. Terminally ill and with his strength diminishing, he wrote nine songs to be included on one more album, which he knew would be his last. Recorded in August 2006 with his close musical friends Pat Metheny, Herbie Hancock, Jack DeJohnette, pianist Brad Mehldau, and bassist John Patitucci, *Pilgrimage* was mixed and completed in January, just two weeks before his death. It is a heroic and bittersweet last artistic statement from one of the most influential jazz musicians of the last quarter century. Despite being critically ill at the time of the recording *Pilgrimage*, Brecker's forceful tone and intense virtuosity are undiminished. After his death, a memorial service was held at New York City's Town Hall on February 20 that included musical performances by Herbie Hancock, John Patitucci, Jack DeJohnette, Paul Simon, and others.

Other 1980s Fusionists

Other fusionists also made contributions to jazz in the 1980s. Guitarist **John Scofield** first came into prominence when he joined Miles Davis's group in 1982 and participated both as a performer and as a composer on the three albums he recorded with Davis between 1983 and 1985. Scofield (born December 26, 1951) was first interested in rock and blues before a local teacher turned him on to jazz guitarists Wes Montgomery, Jim Hall, and Pat Martino. Eventually Scofield attended Berklee College, where he graduated in 1973, and made his recording debut in 1974 on the CTI *Carnegie Hall Concert* album by Gerry Mulligan and Chet Baker. By the time he joined the Davis band, "Sco" had developed a highly recognizable sound that effectively fused jazz, the blues, distortion, and other rock-oriented effects. "I liked the subtleties of John

Guitarist John Scofield. © 2013 by PhotoHouse. Used under license of Shutterstock, Inc.



Scofield's playing," Davis said in his autobiography. "The blues was John's thing, along with a good jazz touch, so I felt comfortable playing the blues with him." After leaving Davis, Scofield put himself in a variety of musical settings that resulted in ten album releases as a leader, including 1986's *Blue Matter*, one of the decade's finest fusion albums, and 1987's *Loud Jazz*. The music on these two albums is tight-knit funk/jazz (especially *Blue Matter*, which includes the high-octane funk players Dennis Chambers on drums and Gary Grainger on bass) that is exploratory enough to allow each musician to explore the boundaries of contemporary, modern jazz without becoming overly commercial or cliché-ridden. Since the 1980s, Scofield, has recorded with Herbie Hancock, Pat Metheny, Medeski, Martin and Wood, Joe Lovano, and the Grateful Dead's Phil Lesh.

Another saxophonist who became an influential and popular voice of fusion in the 1980s was alto player **David Sanborn** (born July 30, 1945). Sanborn's early influences were blues musicians, and from 1967 to 1973, he was a member of the highly regarded Paul Butterfield Blues Band. In the mid 1970s, Sanborn worked with a number of rock artists, including Stevie Wonder, the Rolling Stones, David Bowie, and Paul Simon. In 1975, Sanborn released his debut album *Taking Off*, which included the Brecker brothers, Don Grolnick on keyboards, and future *Late Night with David Letterman* bassist Will Lee. In the 1980s, Sanborn's distinctive high-energy alto sound won him two Grammy Awards for *Voyeur* and *Double Vision*. One of the most successful fusion groups to emerge in the 1980s was the **Yellowjackets**, formed in 1981 by keyboardist Russell Ferrante, bassist Jimmy Haslip, and drummer Ricky Lawson. From their first album *Yellowjackets*, the group has established themselves as a tight-knit funk/R&B/bop endeavor with strong playing and well-conceived original compositions. By 1987, and the release of their fifth and arguably best album *Four Corners*, the group's personnel had changed somewhat with the addition of Marc Russo on soprano and alto saxophone and drummer William Kennedy replacing Lawson. *Four Corners* conveys a wide variety of styles, from synth-bop to world beat to R&B-tinged fusion. The group won the first of its two Grammys in 1988 for the album *Politics*.

Ornette Coleman also experimented with fusion—albeit his own distinctive brand of the genre—in the 1980s with his group **Prime Time**. Coleman had been nearly invisible before venturing into the world of fusion, rarely performing in clubs and recording only three albums between 1969 and 1975. His first venture into electric funk-oriented jazz came in 1975 with *Dancing in Your Head*, an album with a band (not yet known as Prime Time) that included two electric guitarists and the Master Musicians of Jajouka, an ensemble of Moroccan musicians. Coleman still played with his customary bluesy lyricism; like Miles Davis, he had simply changed the musical setting. In the 1970s, Coleman began using the word **harmolodics** (a contraction of harmony, motion, and melodic) to describe his improvisational concept of focusing on melodic development unfettered by harmony or chords. He cryptically defined the term in *Down Beat* as such: "Harmolodics is the use of the physical and mental of one's own logic made into expression of sound to bring about the musical sensation of unison executed by a single person or with a group." Whatever. Notable

Harmolodics—Ornette Coleman's improvisational concept, a contraction of the words harmony, motion and melodic.

albums released under the Prime Time name include the 1987 double album *In All Languages*, which reunited Coleman's 1959 Five Spot quartet (Don Cherry, Charlie Haden, and Billy Higgins) on disc 1 with Prime Time (including son Denardo on drums) on disc 2; and 1988's *Virgin Beauty*, which includes Grateful Dead guitarist Jerry Garcia on two cuts.

The New Left: Avant-Garde Jazz in the 1980s

Anthony Braxton

Although his work will be discussed here in the context of the 1980s, the career of composer/saxophonist **Anthony Braxton** cannot in any way be confined to just one decade. Since making his recording debut in 1968, Braxton has recorded well over 150 albums as a leader, and appeared as a sideman on many others by such notable artists as Chick Corea, Dave Brubeck, and Max Roach. He has written more than 100 compositions that encompass everything from music for solo alto saxophone to a composition for 160 musicians arranged in four separate orchestras. Braxton has also been a musical anarchist and provocateur throughout his career, creating new and challenging music that explores the boundaries of postmodernism. Braxton (June 4, 1945–) was born in Chicago, and first began playing music as a teen. His musical studies commenced at Wilson Junior College and Roosevelt University, and it was at Wilson that he met Roscoe Mitchell of the Art Ensemble of Chicago. Braxton released his first two LPs in 1968, *Three Compositions of New Jazz*, which featured Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians founder Muhal Richard Abrams on piano, and *For Alto*, a double album of compositions written for solo alto saxophone, believed to be the first jazz album of its kind.

In the 1970s, Braxton became active in a number of progressive avant-garde groups, including the Creative Construction Company, a trio with a violinist and trumpeter; Circle, a quartet featuring pianist Chick Corea; and the Dave Holland Quartet, featuring bassist Holland and New York Loft veteran Sam Rivers. In 1973 the latter group released one of the defining avant-garde albums of the decade, *Conference of the Birds*. Braxton also continued releasing his own albums at a frenetic pace (31 in the 1970s alone!), and won the 1977 *Down Beat* Critics Poll Jazz Album of the Year for *Creative Orchestra Music*, which was recorded by a postmodernist big band. That same year the critics also named him Best Jazz Clarinetist in their poll. 1978 saw the release of *For Four Orchestras*, which, according to the liner notes requires "303 pages of notated music for four orchestras and four conductors. Each orchestra is positioned to have the optimum sonic possibilities for a three dimensional spatial music." Much of Braxton's work in the 1980s and 1990s was focused around his group the Forces in Motion Quartet, which also included pianist Marilyn Crispell, bassist Mark Dresser, and drummer Gerry Hemingway. Prominent among the group's recorded output are three live albums from a European tour in 1985, one of which, *Quartet (Coventry)* 1985 includes two 30-minute interviews with Braxton.

Braxton's compositions are heavily influenced by composers of the European classical avant-garde tradition such as John Cage,

Harry Partch, Steve Reich, and Karlheinz Stockhausen. He has used graphic notation in his scores, and in some cases titled his pieces with diagrams. Most of his other compositions are titled with numbers and letters rather than words. Braxton's compositions seem to embrace a scientific approach and therefore do little in the way of conveying emotion, which seems to be contradictory to the jazz tradition and has annoyed many in the jazz field. "I never talk about feeling or haven't tried to address the emotional aspects of the music," he has said. To which jazz critic Greg Tate replies, "Braxton's talent for inspiring antipathy may be unrivalled by any living jazz creature." He may have his detractors, but Braxton also has many who support his artistic vision, including the MacArthur Foundation, which awarded him with its "Genius" Fellowship in 1994. Since the 1990s, he has been a music professor at Wesleyan University in Connecticut.

Steve Coleman and M-Base

Another keeper of the flame in the 1980s avant-garde jazz community was alto saxophonist **Steve Coleman** (September 20, 1956–). Coleman preferred to give his creative concept a name, **M-Base**, which is an acronym for Macro—Basic Array of Structured Extemporizations. Although the exact definition of M-Base is, like Ornette Coleman's harmolodics, a little fuzzy, the M-Base website describes it as "a way of thinking about creating music, it is not the music itself. One of the main ideas in M-Base is growth through creativity. As we learn through our experiences then the music will change and grow to reflect that. The idea is not to develop some musical style and play that forever." Coleman (no relation to Ornette) hitchhiked to New York in 1978 from his native Chicago, where he first began playing music at fourteen and improvising at eighteen. After spending three to four years playing on the streets of New York and staying at the YMCA, he began working his way up through the local scene by playing in the big bands of Thad Jones/Mel Lewis, Sam Rivers, Cecil Taylor, and Dave Holland. At the same time, he was working with a more improvisational unit called the Five Elements, which ultimately became a workshop for the incubation of M-Base. By definition, M-Base draws on a wide variety of influences, but generally the most pronounced are free jazz, bebop, and funk. "I'd like to have all those elements in the music," Coleman said in 1995. "Something for people who want to dance, something for people who are intellectual and want to find some abstract meaning and something for people who just want to forget their troubles."¹⁸ Coleman also has approached his musical growth with the same passion as one of his heroes. "For me, the main point, when I see someone like John Coltrane, who I know was not satisfied with his own thing, when I see that, what I see is a person on a certain path. His goal was more about the search than it was the actual finding of. It was just putting yourself in a certain mode, a certain mentality. That's more of what I'm about. That's why I keep striving for it, to do it at a higher level."¹⁹

Others in the M-Base camp include alto saxophonist **Greg Osby**, who, after graduation from Berklee College in 1983, began working in short order with Jack DeJohnette, the World Saxophone Quartet, John Scofield, Pat Metheny, and Herbie Hancock. In 1987, Osby signed with what was at the time the de facto M-Base record

M-Base—(short for "macro-basic array of structured extemporization") is a concept of how to create modern music which reached its peak in the mid to late 80s and early 90s.

label JMT (Jazz Music Today, based in Munich, Germany), and has been with Blue Note since 1990. The career of pianist **Geri Allen** has spanned everything from involvement with the M-Basers to introspective mainstream jazz. Born in Detroit, Allen received a bachelor's degree from Howard University and a master's degree from the University of Pittsburgh. After moving to New York in 1982, she worked with Steve Coleman on several albums while releasing her first album *The Printmakers* in 1984. Although much of Allen's later work is in the mainstream mold, her avant-garde credentials are impeccable, having recorded with Ornette Coleman, Greg Osby, Charlie Haden, and Bobby Hutcherson. She is currently an assistant professor at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre, and Dance.

The M-Base artist to achieve the widest recognition so far is vocalist **Cassandra Wilson** (born December 4, 1955). Born in



Vocalist Cassandra Wilson.

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Jackson, Mississippi, Wilson sang everything from folk to funk and began writing her own music before moving to New Orleans in 1981, where she performed with, among others, Ellis Marsalis. In 1982, Wilson moved to New York and began working with Steve Coleman, with whom she made her recording debut in 1985. She also worked with alto saxophonist Henry Threadgill's avant-garde trio New Air. By this time, Wilson was expanding her early influences from singers Abbey Lincoln and Betty Carter to include free-form improvisation. In 1985, *Down Beat* described her low, throaty, gospel, and

blues-drenched voice as "the most strikingly sensual, warmly cunning set of vocal chords to hit the jazz world in years." In 1986, she signed with JMT, and made her album debut as a leader with *Point of View*. Wilson made a radical change in direction with 1988's *Blue Skies*, an album of jazz standards backed with a conventional piano trio that achieved wide acclaim. Since then, her musical output has been eclectic. After signing with Blue Note in 1993, she had released several notable albums, including 1993's *Blue Light 'Til Dawn* and 1996's Grammy-winning *New Moon Daughter*. In addition to writing her own material, Wilson has covered songs by such disparate composers as Hank Williams, Robert Johnson, Joni Mitchell, and Bono. She won the *Down Beat* Critics Poll Vocalist of the Year award for seven consecutive years from 1996 to 2002.

The World Saxophone Quartet

As one of the most innovative and unique ensembles in modern jazz, one could say the **World Saxophone Quartet** marches to

the beat of a different drummer; the only problem is that they *have* no drummer. The roots of the World Saxophone Quartet go back to the mid 1960s and the St. Louis-based Black Artists Group (see Chapter 4), a free jazz and artists collective whose members included Julius Hemphill, Oliver Lake, and Hamiet Bluiett. Coming to St. Louis from different hometowns, each of the three moved independently to New York by the early 1970s to participate in the city's thriving loft scene. The fourth and youngest member of the World Saxophone Quartet's original lineup, David Murray moved to New York in 1975, where at age twenty (the other three were in their mid thirties at this point) opened Studio Infinity, where he often performed with future neocon writer Stanley Crouch. Although all four musicians knew each other and had occasionally played chance gigs with each other, they did not all perform on the same stage together until 1976, when they were all invited to perform in concert at Southern University in New Orleans. Performing some of their material with rhythm section and some without, the nascent group drew the most enthusiastic audience response at the concert when playing alone as a quartet. Playing without a rhythm section was more challenging for the group but, at the same time, brought a keener sense of artistic satisfaction. After the concert, a mutual decision was made to make the group permanent.

With such a novel concept—an avant-garde improvisational jazz band with no rhythm section—the World Saxophone Quartet was an acquired taste for many listeners, but their novelty soon became an attraction. In the early years, a typical instrumentation had Lake and Hemphill playing alto, Murray on tenor, and Bluiett on baritone, although doublings by each member on soprano, clarinet, bass clarinet, and flute were common. Early recordings by the band, including their debut album *Point of No Return* (1977), were on the Italian independent label Black Saint, but in 1986, they signed with the American label Electra and released *World Saxophone Quartet Plays Duke Ellington*, which made the *New York Times* Best Albums of 1986 list. By this time, the World Saxophone Quartet was consistently rating highly on the *Down Beat* Critic's Poll. Today, the group is signed with Justin Time Records. After a number of personnel changes in the 1990s, the group has stabilized its membership with Bluiett, Lake, Murray, and John Purcell. Julius Hemphill left the group in 1990 and died in 1995.

Members of the World Saxophone Quartet

- Julius Hemphill alto saxophone
- Oliver Lake alto saxophone
- David Murray tenor saxophone
- Hamiet Bluiett baritone saxophone

Notes

1. Both quotes from Gill, Troy: *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s*, pg 119, pg 122
2. Nicholson, Stuart: *Jazz: The 1980s Resurgence*, pg 252
3. Simon, George T.: *The Big Bands*
4. Nicholson, pg 252
5. Nicholson, Stuart: *Is Jazz Dead? (Or Has It Moved to a New Address)*, interview with the author, pg 18
6. Quote from "Wynton's Blues," by David Hajdu, *The Atlantic Monthly*, 3/03
7. Gioia, Ted: *The History of Jazz*, pg 385
8. Quotes from Lees, Gene: *Cats of Any Color: Jazz, Black and White*, pgs 227–228
9. Nicholson: interview with the author, pg 25

10. Porter, Lewis: *Jazz: A Century of Change*
11. Nicholson: interview with the author, pg 44
12. Nicholson: *Jazz: The 1980s Resurgence*, interview with the author, pg vii
13. Nicholson: *Is Jazz Dead? (Or Has It Moved to a New Address)*, interview with the author, pg 47
14. Ibid, pg 2
15. Interview in *Wire* magazine, 1991
16. Digitalinterviews.com, 6/99
17. Nicholson: *Jazz: The 1980s Resurgence*, interview with the author, pg 202
18. Ibid, pg 258
19. From interview with Fred Jung at www.m-base.com