HORACE SILVER

Horace Silver is one of the most influential and prolific composers in modern jazz. Many of his compositions have become durable classics frequently arranged for small ensembles and big bands. These compositions represent the quintessence of the hard bop style--an alternative to the light, cool West Coast sound of the day. The instrumentation of his quintet (trumpet, tenor saxophone, piano, double bass, and drums) served as a model for many small jazz groups from the mid-1950s until the late 1960s. Silver advanced and refined the art of composing and arranging for this particular instrumentation to "a level of craftsmanship as yet unsurpassed in jazz" (New Grove 1988, 1:450). He is one of the few jazz musicians to record exclusively original compositions.

In his youth, Silver heard authentic Cape Verdean folk tunes played by his father and uncles who were of portuguese descent. He was also deeply enthralled by gospel music he heard on the radio and at his mother's Methodist church. He received some piano lessons when he was about twelve but only became strongly attracted to the piano when he was sixteen. Later, he studied with Professor William Scofield, a classically trained organist and pianist at one of the white churches. Silver first heard jazz on records after he started lessons with Professor Scofield; his first inspiration was boogie-woogie. He copied this music off the records and played by ear the boogie-woogie arrangements by Tommy Dorsey, Earl Hines, Eddie Heywood, and developed a strong left hand through this process. He listened to recorded folk blues singers such as Muddy Waters, Lightning Hopkins, Peetie Wheatstraw, Memphis Minnie, and tried to recreate their deep blues feeling which captivated him and would later become an integral part of his compositional style. As a young boy, Silver would go to Woolworths and buy 78s by Slim and Slam, and by big bands like Count Basie and Duke Ellington. The Jimmie Lunceford band--renowned for its discipline, cohesiveness, and highly-polished style--made a profound impact on Silver: "Lunceford was my favorite band when I was a kid, and I aspired to be a leader I used to live for the next time the Lunceford band came to town" (Hentoff 1956, 17). Silver bought just about everything this band recorded and was fascinated by its original sound, its precision, and unified sections, especially the reed section which "sounded like one." Silver investigated the music of the innovative swing pianists Art Tatum and Teddy Wilson, and was later profoundly influenced by the music of bop pianist-composers, Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk. Diverse jazz recordings continued to be his principal source of autodidactic instruction: "I use to play a lot

of Bud Powell solos off the record, and when I played tenor, I practiced with Lester young records.....In a sense, I'm self-taught; I applied myself. But my teachers were all these great guys on records" (Lyons 1983, 123).

By the early 1950s, rhythm and blues had provided a new source of ideas to some jazz musicians. Its most distinctive features comprised the presence of a dance rhythm and the soloists were generally more concerned to express their feelings. The intricate bebop style, which began as a promise of freedom in the forties, had quickly turned into "something of a straitjacket, an increasingly codified form of expression" (Rosenthal 1992, 27). Bebop was characterized by greater harmonic and melodic sophistication but had "less reliance on the emotional force of the musician's tone" (Nanry 1979, 183). Consequently, a more emotionally expressive and more formally flexible style of jazz began to emerge in the mid-fifties; a music encouraged by a new respect for black folkways and inspired by a "return to the roots." Hard bop was a recognition of the increasing popularity of rhythm and blues in the race market, and it linked some of the developments of jazz style in the forties to a broader audience (Nanry 1983). It drew a lot of black fans to the music with its rhythmically earthy, bluesy sound.

Horace Silver capitalized on the harmonic advances of his peers while effectively stressing a boisterous and dominant beat. His music is carefully voiced and arranged, and well rehearsed--musical skills which he undoubtedly absorbed from his extended listenings to the Jimmie Lunceford orchestra. Silver has also been inspired by his heritage and his travels; he is open to all types of music and accessible to many kinds of people. His compositional style reflects his world music view which has been shaped by his appreciation of African, African-American, Brazilian, Mexican, and Latin musical styles. Some of the compositions that express this world view include: The Great American Indian Uprising (American Indian), African Ascension (African), Swinging The Samba (Brazilian), Nutville (mambo) Psychedelic Sally (rock), Dragon Lady (oriental) (Meadows 1986, 127). The mixture of influences utilized by Silver is part and parcel of his general approach to music: "I like to mix it up I try to write varied types of tunes." (Morgenstern 1965, 18). The fusion of blues and gospel, and Latin elements with bebop melodic lines appear to dominate Silver's compositional output. Nica's Dream (1956), Senor Blues (1956), and Tokyo Blues (1956) reveal his Latin musical influences, while tunes like Sister Sadie (1959), Filthy McNasty (1961), and Doodlin (1954) manifest the gospel-blues influence. His music often makes a direct synthesis of elements deriving from the swing jazz of the thirties and from the bop jazz of the forties; it is somewhat of a cross between a bebop quintet and a Southwestern blues band (Williams, 1993, 192). His

composition Hippy (1955) for example, is structurally bop with its bouncing melody and thirty-two-bar AABA form; but rhythmically, it remains closer to swing with a secondary theme based in part on big band brass figures. It is evident then, that Silver did not remain unaffected by those numerous big band recordings he had earnestly listened to as a youngster. He was able to develop a group sound that was much larger than the tenor and trumpet front line by voicing the trumpet and tenor saxophone a fourth or fifth apart as in Dragon Lady, Senor Blues, and Nutville. This was an especially effective way to achieve a fullness that made the quintet sound as though it contained more than five musicians.

In the early 1970s, Silver wrote lyrics as well as the music for a series of three quintet recordings under the generic title, The United States of Mind. During this period many of his albums presented an expanded group with ensembles of brass, woodwind, percussion, voices and strings: Silver n' Brass (1975), Silver n' Wood (1976), Silver n' Voices (1977), Silver n' Percussion (1977), Silver n' Strings Play the Music of the Spheres (1978-79).

Song For My Father

Song for My Father (Cantiga para meu pai) (1964) was Horace Silver's most commercially successful composition and brought him an unprecedented measure of popular appeal. It was covered by James Brown and recorded by other artists such as George Benson, Sherry Winston and Groove Holmes.

Song for My Father is Horace Silver's tribute to his dad, who for many years, had suggested that his son arrange and adapt some Cape Verdean folk music to jazz. However, at the time, Silver seemingly found this folk music trite and banal. Not until he was invited by Sergio Mendes in Rio de Janeiro during the Carnival, did Silver become fascinated with the bossa nova and the new melodic-rhythmic possibilities inherent in folk music. The trip to Brazil appears to have given Silver the initial impetus and inspiration to compose Song for My Father. When he returned to New York he proceeded to compose a new piece employing some of the Brazilian rhythms that had inspired him in Rio: "I was very much impressed by the authentic bossa nova beat the real bossa nova feeling, which I've tried to incorporate into this number" (Feather 1964, liner notes). He soon realized that the melody he was composing was akin to the Cape Verdean melodies his father had played in his youth,

incorporating both Portuguese and Brazilian elements. Similarly, Silver's composition, The Cape Verdean Blues (1965), combines Portuguese melody with a rhythmic conception from Brazilian samba music that is somewhat different from the bossa nova.

Just as in Cape Verdean melodies, Song for My Father is characterized by a minor-mode theme. This theme is stated for the most part, in unison and in thirds by the trumpet and tenor saxophone. It has a rather placid and plaintive quality, and comprises two eight-measures sections performed over a typical bossa nova beat. It is preceded by a four-measure, mainly rhythmic introduction, which includes piano, double-bass, and drums. As exemplified in this introduction, Silver often composes bass figures and plays them on the piano in unison with his bassist, expanding the usually limited scope of bop bass lines. Instead of the standard thirty-two measure AABA format of the bebop era, Silver generally creates original forms for his compositions. This piece for example, is twenty-four measures long (the first eight measures are repeated) and is set in a AAB form.

The sequence, consisting of a repetition of the same melodic pattern at a different pitch, is one of the most common compositional techniques to be found in Silver's music. He uses the sequence of a two-beat motive, four times in the first two measures, and employs another disparate sequence in the B section. Eddie Meadows posits that the sequence as used by Silver, "helps to reinforce the feeling that the listener knows or believes that he knows where the music is going and how it will get there" (Meadows 1986, 128). Silver has always attempted to reinforce continuity and familiarity in his compositions through "melodic beauty" and "meaningful simplicity," two of his most basic compositional principles; and places great importance on pleasing his audience: "In my writing I strive for melodies that will linger in people's minds, something that can stick with the listener" (Morgenstern 1965, 19); "to hopefully write the type of music that the public will enjoy" (Milkowski 1994, 26). His basic philosophy is that music is universal and should be appreciated by everyone. He has done this by employing compositional devices that make his music accessible and more acceptable to the general public: "Why make it difficult for the listeners to hear? The hardest thing is to make it simple" (Lyons 1983, 122). In the late sixties Silver had an "overwhelming urge" to reach more people; he asked Jon Hendricks to add lyrics to Song for My Father.

Nica's Dream

Horace Silver apparently composed Nica's Dream (1956) for Baroness Panonica de Koenigswarter-Rothschild, an English aristocrat and a very dear friend of his. She was known to the New York press as the Jazz Baroness and to the black musicians for whom she was something of a patron, simply as Nica. Her apartment in the fashionable Hotel Stanhope on Fifth Avenue became a "hospitality suite for some of the greatest jazz players of the day, whom she treated generously" (Chambers 1985, 1:248).

Among jazz musicians, this is one of his most sought after compositions, recorded several times by various groups and on several labels. Its strong memorable melody, original harmonic progression, alternating latin-swing rhythms, and use of pedal point have made this work a durable jazz standard, and a prime vehicle for improvisation. If the music of Brazil and Cape Verde eventually emerged in Silver's music, Latin music was already present by the time he composed his popular Senor Blues and Nica's Dream in 1956. Silver has always been fond of Latin music and had heard a lot of it on the radio. In the early 1950s, when he was working at Birdland and at various dances around New York, there would occasionally be Latin groups playing opposite his own group. He always appreciated their rhythmic concept and incorporated it in his own compositions (Cuscuna 1980, 17).

Nica's Dream is structurally set in an uncommon forty-eight measure AABA form, where the A sections are performed with a Latin rhythm while the B section, the bridge, is played in swing. As is the case with many Horace Silver compositions, Nica's Dream comprises an introduction, and an interlude that effectively prepares and smoothly connects one improvisation to the next. As used by Silver, the interlude is a key structural device functioning as a transitional passage between two different solos. It also provides less adept listeners with a recurring reference point signaling the end of a chorus and the beginning of another. In the final statement of the theme Silver generates contrast by substituting the original melody of the A section with a big band brass figure for the first eight measures, followed by an improvised solo in the next eight measures. A coda is also appended to the end of the forty-eight bar structure after the final statement of the theme.

The aforementioned analysis evidences that Silver painstakingly crafted his compositions, carefully balancing improvised sections with written passages. Many great jazz composers--Jelly Roll Morton, Duke Ellington,

Charles Mingus, etc.--have also demonstrated through their most enduring works, that jazz composition requires a deliberate and careful equilibrium between improvised and written parts. More importantly, Nica's Dream reveals Silver's fondness for creating contrasts, all the while maintaining and captivating the listener's attention through recurring interludes, highly structured brass figures, and well-arranged introductions and endings. There are several ways in which contrast and variety are generated in this composition, especially between the A sections and the bridge. A minor-major dichotomy is present throughout the work since the A sections are all in B-flat minor while the B section is in D-flat major, its relative major. Furthermore, in part A the tenor saxophone plays a countermelody to the theme played by the trumpet, effectively filling in the more rhythmically and melodically sparse and static areas. This part clearly illustrates how Silver successfully manages to create a full ensemble sound within a quintet format. In the bridge, however, contrast is created by having both the trumpet and tenor play the melody in unison. The contrast between sections is further accentuated by the Latin rhythm of the A sections and the opposing swing rhythm of the bridge. Many other compositions exhibit distinct forms of rhythmic contrast, one of the most salient feature of Silver's compositional style. Works that contain contrasts produced by an almost static, rhythmically punctuated section, followed by a release into a typical swing section include: Stop Time, Hippy, No Smokin,' Finger Poppin', Break City, Sister Sadie, Where Are You At?

The Preacher

In the fifties Horace Silver began to build up a long series of hit instrumental compositions that were to become jazz standards. Tunes like The Preacher (1955), based on a traditional sixteen-bar format, and Doodlin' (1954) were most typical of the "funky" style of jazz described by Silver as "earthy, blues-based," with "that down-home feel to it" (Lyons 1983, 122). The "funky" style is deeply rooted in blues and gospel music; Silver's compositions in this genre were inspired by his fascination with the purer form of the blues by Peetie Wheatstraw, Memphis Minnie, and Memphis Slim on "all those old Bluebird and Decca records" (Cuscuna 1980, 17). The Preacher went on to become one of the biggest hits of this particular school of playing which eventually came to be called "funk" or "soul." According to Silver, "soul" music is similar to "funk" but "there's an added dimension of feeling and spirit to soul--an in-depthness" (Lyons 1983, 122).

Many black musicians were not satisfied with the direction in which jazz seemed to be heading during the early fifties. Some of these musicians wanted to establish themselves more firmly in the black popular musical traditions of their own heritage--blues, gospel, rhythm-and-blues, and the line of development from classic jazz to bebop. They resented the lack of emotional involvement in the carefully crafted, contrapuntal, light ensemble sound of cool and West Coast jazz. They preferred instead, a "full-voiced instrumental sound, loud dynamics, blistering energy in the up-tempo performances, greater accentuation and emotional fervor" (Tirro 1993, 345) as displayed in Horace Silver's The Preacher.

This gospel-flavored composition was a cut from Silver's first collective outing as a combo leader entitled, Horace Silver and the Jazz Messengers. At the time it ultimately made a deep and lasting impression on many musicians and fans. However, The Preacher nearly went unrecorded since Alfred Lion of Blue Note found that it was "too old-timey", and "that no one would go for it" (Rosenthal 1992, 38). Compared to the sophisticated bebop standards of the 1940s and other more bop-derived Silver compositions, this work does indeed exude "meaningful simplicity" with its rather static melody spanning one octave, its simple harmonies, and its head (theme) and recapitulation performed in an old-fashioned, two-beat style. The composition evolved out of Silver's habit of routinely playing Show Me the Way to go Home as his final number of the evening during various club performances. It includes a shouting theme based on I've Been Working on the Railroad harmonies (I-I7-IV-I-II7-V7), a chord sequence that had been used previously as the harmonic underpinning for Show Me the Way to Go Home and Ole Miss, a college march that became a dixieland standard. The theme is based on the repetition of a simple phrase and emphasizes the subdominant harmony, giving the impression that it is a blues; yet in spite of the riffs, the overall sound, and the style, it is not (Tirro 1993, 40*). The composition comprises sixteen measures with four-measure phrases in an aa'a"b pattern. It is enhanced by rocking and insistent back-beat accents during the solos, making it an exemplary and fiery vehicle for jazz improvisation. Before the recapitulation, the band riffs using a secondary theme behind Silver's improvisation in a classic call-and-response pattern, reminiscent of black gospel music.

Other jazz artists who have recorded The Preacher include: Herb Ellis, Woody Herman, Art Hodes and Jim Galloway, Quincy Jones, Gene Quill Allstars, and Kai Winding.

Sister Sadie

Sister Sadie (1959) is an all-time favorite, engaging, soul-jazz classic that has been recorded by many jazz performers including among others: Monty Alexander, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Ray Brown, James Clay, Joey DeFrancesco, Terry Gibbs and Buddy DeFranco, and Maceo Parker. According to Martin Williams, its melody is based on a durable, traditional riff that was used in a quasi-spiritual pop tune the Count Basie orchestra once recorded, called Do You Wanna Jump, Children? Its boisterous and jovial, bluesy theme is set within a thirty-two measure AABA formal structure. As is customary with Silver, he creates rhythmic contrast by employing stop-time accents in the A sections and a regular swing-feel pulse in the B section that ultimately functions as a sort of rhythmic release. In the A section, the rhythmic accents of the rhythm section are followed by the melody played by the horns, producing an interesting gospelish call-and-response pattern. As in Nica's Dream, a minor-major dichotomy is also existent in this composition. The melody of the A section is built principally around the G major blues scale with an emphasis on the major third, while the melody of the B section, the bridge, is built on the G minor blues scale emphasizing the minor third. Although this work is not based on the blues form, Silver succeeds in attaining a similar harmonic effect by employing exclusively the tonic harmony throughout the A section, while the bridge begins with the subdominant harmony and returns to the tonic chord. This simple but original progression imparts the composition with part of its inherent bluesy-gospel quality, and breaks the predictability that comes with the use of a regular twelve-bar blues progression. Hence, Sister Sadie displays "the flexibility that is available" in Silver's work (McRae 1966, 15).

Sister Sadie manifests a careful balance between jazz composition and improvisation through the integration of three distinct secondary themes within the soloing context. Through these themes Silver promotes contrast, variety, and plenty of interest in his music. The first secondary theme is actually a riff, a rhythmic motive, reiterated on a single note by the trumpet and piano in unison. It is played exclusively on the A sections of the form while the tenor player improvises on his final chorus. After the piano solo, the two horns and the piano play a second secondary theme in unison on the A sections, followed by a disparate third theme in call-and-response pattern preparing for the recapitulation. The two horns and the piano sound almost exactly like the alternating brass and reed sections of a big band executing call-and-response riffs. On several pieces such as this one, Silver "has in effect done some of the best big band writing of the period" (Williams 1993, 195) with the instrumentation

of a quintet. He was able to make two horns sound a lot bigger than two instruments: “I try to get that big sound by fooling around with the harmonies, because I’ve got only five pieces to work with” (Lyons 1983, 128). Moreover, Silver often uses his piano as a substitute for a horn or brass section, propelling his soloists along with background riff figures (Williams 1993, 196). He likes to play around with rhythmic patterns when comping behind the horns, creating dense or busy musical textures; he is very involved with rhythm, and that is an important aspect of jazz to him. Trumpeter Art Farmer acknowledged that Silver’s music was highly rhythmic: “If I would play with Horace Silver, I would learn something about drive” (Berliner 1994, 372). There is a melodic element of horn playing in Silver’s compositional approach and his accompaniment style is highly percussive.

In conclusion, Sister Sadie incorporates the idioms of swing jazz: riff figures, big band sound; and devices derived from gospel and blues: ‘blue notes’ (particularly the minor thirds), call-and-response patterns, and emphasis on subdominant harmony.

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