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Drums, "Jazz," and resistance: the subversive acts of Max Roach

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DRUMS, "JAZZ," AND RESISTANCE :

THE SUBVERSIVE ACTS OF MAX ROACH

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ABSTRACT

Max Roach (1924–2007) is a figure who not only made significant contributions to music, but also played a major role in challenging racist power structures and the bigoted hegemonic thought of many bourgeois white Americans. This paper aims to analyze Roach's musical and non-musical works of protest, as well as his "symbolic resistance" in unintentionally subversive actions, to determine the impact and "efficacy" of his work in influencing social change. How can a notion of efficacy be determined in protest music? How does the intent and goal of the artist affect the reception of their protest music? What actions have had a verifiable and provable impact in fighting prejudicial, exploitative, and oppressive systems? These broader questions are explored as they relate to the work of Max Roach.

The diversity of approach and intent in protest music among artists highlights the complexities when considering Roach's works of protest and "symbolic resistance." The paper first establishes context by discussing several notable works of twentieth-century American protest music up to the 1960s. By such time, Roach had become a prominent musical innovator and Black rights activist. Thorough review of Roach's career makes it possible to identify key actions and musical contributions with complex social implications, which I refer to as "symbolic resistance." This includes Roach rejecting his professor's assertion that he

had improper drumming technique, the power in the act of drumming and its loudness, and a dismantling of racist ideas of "primitivism" in playing drums.

On the other hand, Roach was a revolutionary figure with lifelong involvement in protest. I focus mostly on Roach's article, entitled "What 'Jazz' Means to Me," as one of his best-known non-musical works of protest. Lastly, this paper presents a detailed and methodical analysis of the album *We Insist!: Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite*. I attempt to determine the intent behind these works of protest, and ultimately argue how such works have been received by audiences. Roach fought oppression and discrimination based on race, yet relevant economic critique and class struggles are often overlooked by critics. Throughout the paper, connections are made between race and class struggles, both of which were significant during Roach's lifetime. Roach is among the most influential musicians in the history of American jazz, having made unparalleled contributions to jazz drumming, protest music, the fight against racist structures, and representation through the performance of various Black musical expressions.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE CONTEXT

The United States has an extensive history of protest within its musical culture. Music performance has proven itself to be a valuable tool of communication and of opposition to systems of violence and exploitation. American labor movements, anti-war protests, and civil rights campaigns have all utilized musical expression in an attempt to inform, enlighten, and rally the American people in resisting such systems. The blues and its performance as a form of protest has been thoroughly discussed among music researchers. I would argue that characteristics of blues lyrics, such as their communication of despair in the lives of Black Americans, suggest that the genre is not necessarily a form of protest music when observed in a vacuum. However, if the intent of the blues artist is to be subversive to hegemonic structures and inspire action among listeners, then it becomes protest music. The implication of the title "Protest Music" is that the musical and lyrical content of the work are intended to subvert a system or institution and capture an audience with the collective power to act.

The 1960s were a decade in which American protest music proliferated in an unprecedented manner, yet the practice of protest music can be traced back much earlier, but particularly to the first half of the twentieth century. Woody Guthrie was a folk artist who is often associated with the performance of protest music. Famously writing the phrase "this machine kills fascists" on his guitar, Guthrie was an outspoken opponent of fascism and advocated strongly for socialism in

dismantling the power of the far right. The traits of fascistic governmental systems such as far-right economics, worker exploitation, racial hierarchies, and use of violence to force submission have all had a significant presence in American history. Many of Guthrie's songs sought to challenge these systems of oppression. Will Kaufman writes, "Guthrie's outraged sense of social and economic justice led him to construct the events of his day — what we would call 'history' — through a particular narrative frame." [1] His views were shaped through personal experience, as "Guthrie fought in the front line — sometimes literally — against the gun thugs and vigilantes of California's fruit crop bosses and the fascists of the Associated Farmers resisting the migrant workers' attempts to organize."[2] The storytelling delivery of his songs evokes a very personal and intimate atmosphere that causes one to hang on his every word. An example of the emotional impact of Guthrie's music is in the heartache of his protest song entitled "Ludlow Massacre" (1944). The song represents the true events of the Ludlow Massacre of 1914 in Colorado. Members of the Colorado National Guard and privately hired thugs were sent to intimidate a group of coal miners who were striking for better wages. The miners and their families were eventually attacked one night when the National Guard and militia members lit their tents on fire as they shot into them. This resulted in the brutal deaths of several miners as well as thirteen children and a pregnant woman. The song concludes with the retaliation of the miners, who took up arms and

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[1] Will Kaufman, "Woody Guthrie's 'Union War'," *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 16, No. 1/2 (Spring–Fall 2010) 109–124, at 110.
[2] Ibid.

ambushed the men who perpetrated the attack. The emotion of this song is deepened by its being a true story, and tells of exploitative labor practices that are so extreme that they resulted in such catastrophic violence. By the point in the song when the miners retaliate, the listener is in support of their killing of the murderous members of the National Guard and private militia. "Ludlow Massacre" was recorded 30 years after the actual event, thus getting listeners of the 1940s to sympathize with the working-class miners. The song is written as a retelling of a historical event, rather than being left to interpretation. As Edwin Cohen writes, "Although the song's protest is aimed directly at the mine owners and political authorities, too much anger and bitterness could quickly transform the ballad into a polemic. It is a song of simple people with simple ideas stated simply; the interpretation too must remain uncomplex, straightforward, and arouse sympathy through the story."[3]

Black expression of protest in American music had also developed in the decades leading up to the 1960s. One of the most influential examples of such is Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" (1939), which would later be rerecorded by Nina Simone around the time of the Civil Rights Movement. The piece has an intriguing history, having been originally written as a poem by a Jewish educator and communist named Abel Meeropol in 1937. Originally titled "Bitter Fruit," the poem was first published in the union journal *The New York Teacher* and was inspired by a

[3] Edwin Cohen, "Woody Guthrie and the American Folk Song," PhD Diss., University of Southern California (Los Angeles, CA: University Microfilms, 1971), 127.

photo from 1930 portraying the lynching of two Black men from Indiana, Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith. Regarding the creation of the poem, Meeropol had written, "I wrote 'Strange Fruit' because I hate lynching… and I hate the people who perpetuate it."[4] The musical and lyrical content of this song evokes a deep emotion of sorrow through the graphic description of a lynching. The disturbing metaphor of a hanged Black person as "strange fruit" implies that such actions occur regularly enough that they almost seem as natural as a fruit from the tree, yet its strangeness suggests that it is something that falls outside of that which is accepted. Holiday would pair the performance of this song with a purposeful disruption of white complacency in racist structures. As one of the most popular female jazz vocalists of her time, Holiday was invited to perform at venues all across the country. The white owners of these venues considered Holiday as highly desirable, but they were firm in their assertion that Holiday was not allowed to perform "Strange Fruit." Indicative of her strong will and determination to fight racism, Holiday would always perform the song regardless of what white elites told her to do. Her actions, in conjunction with the emotional impact of "Strange Fruit," form an opposition to racist systems through its deliberate dissent from white elitist authority, becoming protest music.

Events of the 1960s were transformational for Americans and their way of life. Dwight D. Eisenhower's 1961 farewell address warned of the profitability of

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[4] Quoted in Harold Heft, "The 'Strange' Evolution of 'Bitter Fruit'," *Forward* (March 30, 2012), 16.

war and the potential for over-militarization, which had become a stark reality as the decade went on. Many started to doubt the U.S. government's positioning as a well-intentioned actor and champion for democracy. In the 1960s alone, the United States had escalated its war in Vietnam, increased Cold War tensions, and supported aggressive military action and coups overthrowing democratically elected governments in Latin America and elsewhere. An organized anti-war movement produced a proliferation of protest music aimed at the goal of seeking peace. Anti-war protest music of the 1960s would also criticize the ethics of capitalism and its investment in the military-industrial complex. Activists in this movement wondered how the United States could continue to propagandize itself as a beacon of democracy while simultaneously breaking international law in toppling democratically elected governments, who posed no threat. Although the U.S. is a constitutional democracy, anti-war activists argued that the will of the U.S. citizenry was regularly ignored, as evident in America's escalation of war despite a hugely popular anti-war movement. One notable anti-war protest song of the 1960s is Bob Dylan's "Masters of War" (1963). It contains overt anti-war messaging and protests the building up of the arms industry at this point in the Cold War.

Jazz musicians also contributed to the compendium of 1960s anti-war protest music, yet their involvement was somewhat minor in comparison to folk and rock musicians. Leading into the 1960s, the U.S. State Department sent prominent jazz musicians such as Louis Armstrong, Dave Brubeck, and Dizzy Gillespie to tour overseas as "jazz ambassadors" to supposedly establish peace and unity through

cultural diplomacy. As many of the jazz ambassadors later acknowledged however, their tours were essentially a disingenuous propaganda campaign by the U.S. government, which used such jazz musicians to counter racist narratives about the United States put out by the Soviet Union. This dynamic is explained well in a 2017 article by Billy Perrigo, stating:

> The music of jazz, which was structured around improvisation within a set of commonly agreed-upon boundaries, was a perfect metaphor for America in the eyes of the State Department. Here was a music of democracy and freedom. What the bands looked like was important too. "The racism and violence within the U.S. was getting international exposure," says Penny Von Eschen. "For President Eisenhower and his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, this was a great embarrassment." By sending bands comprised of black and white musicians to play together around the world, the State Department could engineer an image of racial harmony to offset the bad press about racism at home.[5]

Louis Armstrong and Dave Brubeck would join forces at the beginning of the decade, as a direct rebuke of their time as jazz ambassadors. Part of the supposed purpose of the jazz ambassador tours was to promote American culture and dispel their country's reputation of racism. As previously mentioned, the jazz ambassador tours were effectively campaigns of U.S. propaganda; making claims of rejecting racism by shining the spotlight on musicians of a Black musical expression overseas (many of themselves Black), while the reality for Black Americans at home was the daily lived experience of injustice and racism. Brubeck would refuse to play at any venue that didn't permit racial mixing in its audience. Armstrong would also become

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[5] Billy Perrigo, "How the U.S. Used Jazz as a Cold War Secret Weapon," *Time* (December 22, 2017) https://time.com/5056351/cold-war-jazz-ambassadors, accessed August 1, 2023.

more aggressive in the push for civil rights after receiving criticism from some Black jazz musicians, like Gillespie, who felt as though Armstrong conformed to white bourgeois aesthetics, especially in his "entertaining" stage performances. In the 1950s, Dave and Iola Brubeck would begin the process of developing a new musical project with Armstrong. This project premiered at the 1962 Monterey Jazz Festival as a "jazz opera" entitled "The Real Ambassadors."[6] The intent behind this work was to reject the U.S. motives in deploying the jazz ambassadors and comment on a variety of issues, such as the fight for civil rights and the Cold War. It is a "story about jazz and jazz musicians in the context of cultural exchange and race relations in the United States during the 1950s," according to Treshani Perera. [7] Armstrong was cast at the hero and protagonist of the play, which helped to silence criticism that he didn't take enough action in fighting for Black justice and civil rights.

One of the most significant anti-war protest songs of 1960s jazz is John Coltrane's "Peace on Earth" (1966). It was first performed in Nagasaki, Japan as a tribute to those who died in the nuclear bombing, as well as a general condemnation of war.[8] While the anti-war messaging of 1960s jazz is limited, there were a significant number of 1960s jazz recordings that advocated for civil rights or

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[6] Keith Hatschek, *The Real Ambassadors: Dave and Iola Brubeck and Louis Armstrong Challenge Segregation* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2022), 117.
[7] Treshani Perera, "The Real Ambassadors: A Musical on Jazz Diplomacy and Race Relations During the Early Cold War Years," Thesis, The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (Milwaukee, WI: ProQuest, 2017), 40.
[8] Chris Nineham, "Jazz and the Anti-War Movement," *Counterfire* (August 4, 2020) https://www.counterfire.org/article/jazz-and-the-anti-war-movement, accessed July 23, 2023.

contained anti-racist sentiment. The Civil Rights Movement called for a Black musical expression that could convey the complexities of emotion and experience that were located in jazz. Before writing "Peace on Earth," Coltrane's protest music challenged systems of Black oppression, such as segregation and racially targeted violence. His recording "Alabama" (1963) is among the most powerful pieces of its kind. Somehow without lyrics, the song still pulls at your emotions and communicates to the listener that something devastating has happened. Through their artful abilities, Coltrane, McCoy Tyner, Jimmy Garrison, and Elvin Jones are able to tell a story through very deliberate effects at a slow tempo and with plenty of space enhanced by the modal harmonies. The song was written in response to the Ku Klux Klan's 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama that resulted in the deaths of four African American girls. Supposedly, Coltrane's melodic lines were based on the vocal inflections of a speech by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.[9]

In speaking of jazz and its response to the Civil Rights Movement, one cannot possibly omit the work of Nina Simone. As one of the most outspoken and aggressive musical voices in the fight for civil rights, Simone was a highly talented and influential figure. In contrast to the more subtle approaches of Coltrane, Armstrong, and Brubeck, the anger against Black oppression and subjugation comes through overtly in the music and comments of Nina Simone. That is not to say that the aforementioned artists were not angry about America's violent history of racism (they certainly were), but Simone would regularly channel this anger through her

[9] Nineham, C. "Jazz and the Anti-War Movement,"

musical content and public commentary. Her song "Mississippi Goddam" (1964) was one of her first works of protest, and was in response to the brutal killing of Medgar Evers and Emmett Till and other horrendous acts of violence against Black Americans. During a performance of the song in 1968, Simone can be heard saying to her audience, "I ain't about to be nonviolent, honey," which is indicative of Simone and other Black Americans reaching a boiling point against white racist violence.[10]

It is in the context of these various expressions of musical protest from the 1960s that we can make sense of the social, political, and musical world that Max Roach was living in. Roach was inspired by the work people like these and became intrigued with the possibilities of the creative expression of protest through jazz. His work would extend beyond music to producing written articles of protest as well. Roach's protest and musical contributions would continue to develop throughout his life.

[10] Dorothy Randall Tsuruta, "I Ain't About to be Nonviolent, Honey," *The Black Scholar* 29, No. 2/3 (Summer/Fall 1999), 54–58, at 55.

CHAPTER TWO: MAX ROACH AND HIS "SYMBOLIC RESISTANCE"

Maxwell Lemuel Roach was born January 10, 1924 in North Carolina. His mother, Cressie Roach, was a gospel singer and his aunt was a church pianist who taught him how to read music. Roach's grandfather was also the minister of a church known as "Mt. Carmel Church," and the family would continue regular church attendance after moving to Brooklyn, New York in 1928. Roach stated in a 1984 interview that his "earliest music associations came by way of the church" and the spirituals that were performed there.[11] It was this earliest exposure to Black musical expression, in the form of gospel and historic spirituals, that would influence many of Roach's later compositions. At this time in parts of North Carolina and elsewhere, it was also common for traveling blues musicians to perform on the street. Roach and others witnessed the testimony of experience and struggles of such musicians, as told through their poetic lyrical delivery.[12] There is an interesting contrast between Roach's early music experiences of blues on one hand and gospel and spirituals on the other, due to their contrasting approaches to Black musical expression.

The practice of performing spirituals is among the earliest traditions of African American music, originating in the era of slavery. The rhythm, tonality, and call-and-response techniques in spirituals are informed by musical practices carried

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[11] Arthur Dawkins, "An Interview with Max Roach" (transcript), interviewer W.A. Brower, *Howard University Jazz Oral History Project* (Digital Howard, 1984), 2.
[12] Ibid.

over from Africa. The music of white, Western culture had influenced spirituals in their use of the English language and incorporation of Christian themes and biblical references. Franz Fanon suggests that we might view the Black community's adoption of Christianity as an intentional method of subjugation by white elites. In writing on the violent structures embedded in colonialism, Fanon states, "The colonialist bourgeoisie is helped in its work of calming down the natives by the inevitable religion. All those saints who have turned the other cheek, who have forgiven trespasses against them, and who have been spat on and insulted without shrinking are studied and held up as examples."[13] On the other hand, the prevalent religious themes helped bolster messages of hope and collective movement towards a better future. Not all spirituals contain a hopeful message, but many of the same musical concepts would be brought into the Black church through gospel music, becoming prominent following the abolition of slavery. The blues is also a form of Black musical expression that emerged in the post-slavery South, though its style, approach, and perspective contrast greatly with those of gospel music and spirituals.

In part, the blues is a rejection of what Amiri Baraka identifies as an emulation of white society in the Black Christian church.[14] The texts of classic blues songs tend to be secular and occasionally explore themes that conflict with the virtues of the bible, such as participation in what would be considered "sinful acts"

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[13] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1963), 67.
[14] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York, NY: Morrow, 1963), 54.

like gambling, alcohol abuse, lustful sexual desires, violence, and even dealings with the devil. Classic blues is among the first post-slavery styles of Black musical expression that convey the struggles and cruel reality of lived experiences. It regularly touches upon a variety of problems faced by oppressed African Americans and topics that were simply not typically discussed in other genres of the time. Rather than being performed by a group or containing text that is framed from a collective point of view, classic blues is performed from a very personal perspective to an audience with the capacity to relate.[15] Having grown up in an environment where the performance of the blues, spirituals, and gospel music was prevalent, the young Max Roach was taught powerfully diverse approaches to Black musical expression.

Much of Roach's childhood was lived during the time of the Great Depression. Although the economic crash had a disastrous impact on the majority of people in the U.S. and around the world, it worsened an already dire situation for African Americans. The subjugation of African Americans under "Jim Crow" laws, segregation, rampant racial discrimination, and systematically limited economic opportunities were just some of the issues compounded by the effects of the crash. The white bourgeois class was responsible for the economic depression through deregulation, extreme wealth inequality, and speculative economic practices. They are those who are the source of the broader oppressive and exploitative systems that affected (and continue to affect) the entirety of the working class. However, the

[15] Baraka, *Blues People*, 82.

uniquely violent history of racial prejudice towards Black people in the United States would result in an unparalleled form of systematic persecution that exacerbated the deleterious effects of capitalist exploitation. Over Roach's lifetime, he would find himself regularly resisting and challenging the social structures set by the white bourgeois class, though he likely wouldn't have thought of it in such terms. One major critique of capitalism is that the system contains contradictions that cause it to be unsustainable. In exploring a Marxist reading of musical aesthetics, Parkhurst writes:

> Marx claims capitalism constantly pokes holes in itself, creating spaces within which revolutionary agitation can find latitude. One of the ways it does this, one that should be of interest to Marxists concerned with culture, is by creating material conditions that permit and promote the fashioning of expressive cultural objects — words, sounds, pictures — that are in one way or another inimical to capitalism's persistence, objectifications of human thought and sentiment that intentionally and unintentionally threaten the production and reproduction of the bourgeois order.[16]

Roach's formative years were lived in a time of particularly severe conditions for the Black American community and a time when Black musical expression was taking various approaches in response to these conditions. He experienced unjust discrimination as a Black American and also as a musician. In his dissertation, Kevin McDonald explains, "First, as a Black American, Roach faced racial discrimination within society generally and within the economics of the music industry specifically. Second, as a drummer, Roach faced marginalization within hierarchical jazz

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[16] Bryan J. Parkhurst, et. al., "On Theorizing a Properly Marxist Musical Aesthetics," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 48, No. 1 (June 2017), 41.

performance practices and within historical construction of the jazz canon."[17] As drummers were associated with African music culture and a racially bigoted view of that being "primitive," the art of drum playing was not necessarily considered a musical art. These early experiences would help shape Roach's ideology, music, and method of protest.

In Brooklyn, Roach attended the Concord Baptist Church Bible School beginning at ten years old. It was here that he began playing the drums and realizing his passion for the instrument.[18] Roach recalled that his school's marching band had a more "laid back" feel than marching bands from other schools. He demonstrates an example of this in a 1984 interview, in which he plays a cadence on the snare drum in the style of his childhood marching band.[19] Intriguingly, rather than evoking the militaristic sound that marching bands typically had, Roach plays a shuffle-like rhythm that is more similar to the New Orleans tradition of second-line bands. This points to the likelihood of the jazz scene in New York being a particular stylistic influence on the marching band at Roach's school. Jazz would remain an integral part of Roach's life as he followed in the footsteps of those who pioneered early jazz drumming technique such as "Papa" Jo Jones and Chick Webb.

In 1940, Roach enrolled in the Manhattan School of Music as a percussion

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[17] Kevin C. McDonald, "Hearing the American Civil Rights Movement in the Music of Max Roach," PhD Diss., The Catholic University of America (Washington, D.C.: ProQuest, 2021), 3.
[18] Adam Budofsky, "Max Roach through the Years," *Modern Drummer* (December 2007), 57–74, at 57.
[19] W.A. Brower, "An Interview with Legendary Jazz Musician Max Roach," Video Interview, *Howard University Oral History Project* (1984).

major to refine his craft through formal training. He would end up switching his major to composition however, when his drum professor told him that his technique was incorrect and insisted that it be changed.[20] Over his career, there were several instances when Roach publicly shared his contempt for this remark and his refusal to change his technique, since that would alter the way he played. There is an underlying implication to his professor's comment that must be interpreted in order to understand the power structure in music at the time. In asserting that Roach was playing drums with an incorrect or improper technique, the professor was unwittingly attempting to enforce conformity to the white, Western traditional approach to drumming. The notion of "correct" or "proper" drumming technique is inextricably tied to the common practice of European musical tradition. Technique only presents itself as a legitimate issue if it limits or detracts from the ability of a musician to express himself, which was evidently *not* the case with Max Roach. Although this experience ended up being rather inconsequential for Roach, it represents a microcosm of the greater structures of Black subjugation. Regardless of the professor's own race or intentions, his comment reflects white musical ethnocentrism. There is irony in the attempt to force white common practice on a talented Black musician playing a form of Black musical expression, on an instrument developed in conjunction with the Black art of jazz. Roach began performing in gigs to pay tuition, and it was during these opportunities that he dispelled any presumption of his technique being inadequate.

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[20] Budofsky, "Max Roach through the Years," 57.

The popularity of the jazz genre that arose in early twentieth-century New Orleans resulted in the emigration of its musicians to larger cities, including Chicago and New York City. Due to a combination of factors, such as segregation and racist attitudes towards jazz by white audiences, most of the New York City jazz scene was condensed in a relatively small section of 52nd Street in Manhattan, between Fifth Avenue and Seventh Avenue, a section colloquially referred to as "The Street" by jazz musicians. The clubs in this area hosted the biggest names in jazz from the 1930s to the 1950s, including Coleman Hawkins, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, and Thelonious Monk.[21] Many of Roach's first serious gigs were with some of these very people, notably Hawkins and Parker, who were particularly influential on Roach's development as a musician.

In 1942, he was called upon to fill in at the Paramount Theater for drummer Sonny Greer of the Duke Ellington Orchestra. This performance with the Duke Ellington Orchestra is often cited as Roach's "big break" and as the most significant event in propelling his career. The next year, he began recording with Coleman Hawkins, producing innovative and genre-advancing tracks such as "Woody 'N' You." Jazz was beginning to take on new characteristics, evolving to its next stage of branching subgenres. Roach became the house drummer at the Onyx jazz club on 52nd street, a venue frequented by Dizzy Gillespie and other transformational jazz musicians, who were responsible for building the foundation of the groundbreaking

[21] Miles Davis, *Miles: The Autobiography*, ed. Quincy Troupe (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 19.

style that became known as "bebop."[22] This jazz subgenre is characterized by frequent chord changes, chromatic movement, small groups (typically no more than a sextet), abundant improvisation, complex melodies that are often played in unison, equal featuring of instruments, and often fast tempos. During a time when the devastation of World War II was having catastrophic effects on the music industry, it is notable that the creative ingenuity of bebop artists enabled them to invent something so full of life when the world was otherwise experiencing unprecedented death and destruction. The early Forties were also a time of unparalleled demonstrations for workers' rights within the music industry, as the American Federation of Musicians called for its union members to strike against major record companies from 1942 to 1944 due to unfair and exploitative practices in royalty payments. Roach is credited with being one of the architects of bebop drumming and the social implications associated with its performance.

Bebop highlights the unique individual expression of its musicians by allowing for musical freedoms in improvisation and approach. For instance, Roach and fellow bebop drumming pioneer, Kenny Clarke, each had a distinct feel that differed in rhythmic placement, accents, and method of "musical conversation." There was also a deliberate social positioning represented in bebop performance that was expressed through a break with cultural and musical hegemonies. It was the intent of bebop's Black founders to subvert the expectations of music performance that were established by white aesthetic preferences. For instance, jazz

[22] Budofsky, "Max Roach through the Years," 57.

musicians had previously been expected to entertain the audience by making jokes, dancing, or exaggerating their physical movements, in addition to performing music. Some jazz musicians began to feel as though conforming to such expectations would present them as entertainers, rather than as professional musicians. Among Black jazz musicians specifically, some felt that such expectations implied a relegation to the racist stereotypes of minstrelsy, or that of an "Uncle Tom" seeking the admiration of white audiences. In performing bebop, jazz musicians established performance practices that directly subverted expectations, such as remaining relatively still and maintaining serious demeanors. By removing just about all visual stimuli and limiting audience interaction, bebop musicians produced an environment that exclusively focused on musical creativity.

Although bebop was conceived out of Black musical expression, it wasn't uncommon for it to be performed by mixed-race bands. White jazz musicians, such as trumpeter Johnny Carisi, were involved in developing the bebop style and were encouraged to join Black bebop bands by artists like Gillespie, who sought to break down racial barriers. Some Black musicians felt as though the inclusion of white musicians in bebop was permitting a white appropriation of the style. The "Black music ideology" that is reflected in Baraka's *Blues People* suggests that white musicians, having never gone through the lived experience of African Americans, could never produce anything musically creative in their "imitation" of jazz or any style that could be considered "Black music." Gillespie and others, while acknowledging that bebop was a product of Black musical expression, refuted the

idea that it was inaccessible to other races, with Davis stating, "I wouldn't give a damn if he was green with red breath. I'm hiring a motherfucker to play, not for what color he is."[23] Such racial integration was intentionally provocative to the dominant social convention of the white majority. Even given the diversity of New York City, race mixing was relatively uncommon in the early 1940s. The performance of bebop by racially mixed bands was aimed to challenge the systematic racism and cultural hegemony in American society. Scott DeVeaux argues that relative to other professions at the time, personal relations between Black and white musicians were generally amicable. Therefore, bebop performances with racially mixed bands were an attempt to extend the same social tolerance and racial solidarity "into the broader public sphere of commerce."[24] Despite the racial diversity of such groups, Black jazz musicians approached bebop from a social position not experienced by their white counterparts. The treatment of the African American community as a type of underclass had undermined the perception of equality represented in racially mixed bebop bands. The systematic oppression of African Americans restricted their economic opportunities and confined them to limited social spaces. Bebop, DeVeaux argues, was shaped by the incentive of Black musicians to subvert these social restrictions in collaboration with allied white musicians in the same narrow social spaces. DeVeaux's analysis provides context that is critical in understanding some of the social dynamics leading to the creation

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[23] Davis, *Miles: The Autobiography,* 117.
[24] Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 168.

of bebop. However, his commentary is not immune from criticism.

In his exploration of bebop's origins, DeVeaux lacks nuance in describing the "pressure of racial hostility" experienced by Black bebop musicians, seemingly suggesting that bebop performance operated outside racist social structures, merely citing the relationship between white and Black jazz musicians as evidence.[25] One could argue that such a generalization is ineffective in portraying the accurate social dynamics at play in the creation of bebop. First, although DeVeaux acknowledges that racism was a significant factor in bringing bebop musicians together, it should be clarified that racial hostility never subsided, and in fact, continued to be a major driving force behind the social and musical content of bebop. Second, although bebop groups were often racially integrated, the bebop genre is primarily a form of Black musical expression. Racially mixed bands were intended for promoting the idea of equal treatment of Black Americans to white Americans, not vice versa. Also, the construction of bebop was not dependent on the collaboration of white and Black musicians. Instead, the subgenre was conceived by Black jazz musicians who possessed autonomy in this narrow space to *choose* the inclusion of white musicians. Unlike the practice of segregation that was unjustly imposed upon the Black community by racist white power structures, Black bebop musicians adhered to a principled pursuit of equality, inviting white jazz musicians to participate in a showing of racial solidarity and creative collaboration that transcended racial barriers.

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[25] DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop,* 169.

The bebop era defined Roach's reputation as a uniquely skilled and innovative musical genius. He practically reimagined approaches to jazz drumming and is often credited with popularizing what would become the standard ride cymbal swing pattern. The 1940s were not only pivotal in Roach's development as an artist, but also in establishing his ideological leanings and involvement in subversive acts of protest. Intriguingly, Roach's divergence from the white social conventions of 1940s America would be far more overt than in his work in subsequent decades. Among his numerous musical contributions to the bebop era, Roach is responsible for sparking a paradigm shift in the traditional white European perception of drum playing. Up to this point in time, the general consensus among critical white European and American observers of music was that drummers and percussionists were not on the same level of musicianship as those who played Western melodic instruments. At the very least, there was a culturally insular conception of drumming ability and the role of percussion outside its use as accompaniment or texture, as often is the case with Western "art music." This idea is largely predicated on the history of Western prejudice against people of color or "others" and the musical cultures of drumming that come out of Africa, Asia, and South America.

European colonial powers attempted to control the economy and culture of these areas for centuries, considering the colonized people and their practices as "primitive". White racists in the United States held these bigoted beliefs toward enslaved Africans and post-Emancipation Black Americans throughout the country's

history. Black Americans, and by extension their music, were considered "less evolved" than white Americans, especially those of Northern European ancestry. The white elites of the American music industry exploited Black musicians to a degree that is incomparable to the exploitation of other groups, due to the capitalist weaponization of racist sentiment in the United States. Black American musicians have frequently been subject to insufficient monetary compensation and a lack of attribution, despite Black musical expressions being at the forefront of American popular music (jazz, rock & roll, funk, hip hop, etc.). By contrast, skilled white musicians with classical training reached a respected status as "virtuosi," and would be recognized as musical masters among Eurocentric observers. Some musicians who have often been regarded as having virtuosic abilities include Niccolò Paganini and Franz Liszt, as well as contemporaries of Roach such as Leonard Bernstein, Van Cliburn, and other names that are typically white European men, and not those who specialize in music outside of the Western classical tradition. I argue that Roach was the most significant factor in the radical altering of the traditional Western bias against and limitations on the art of drumming. In doing so, he was also a major figure in altering the broader discourse on race and removing the concept of racial primitivism from mainstream American thought.

The concept of "the body" and its relationship to cultures from the African diaspora has been well documented and theorized. As Paul Gilroy writes, "The oral character of the cultural settings in which diaspora musics have developed presupposes a distinctive relationship to the body," and quotes Edouard Glissant in

declaring that "it is nothing new to declare that for us music, gesture, dance are forms of communication, just as important as the gift of speech."[26] This suggests that the history of Black repression, forced suppression of African culture, and commodification of the Black body had resulted in the necessity to develop communicative practices outside of language. Gilroy notes that Black cultural expression is subject to a prejudicial hierarchy of creativity that associates Black people with "the body", and white people with "the mind."[27] This concept is particularly relevant to the musical expression of Max Roach. The physicality of drum performance and Roach's participation in the development of new forms of Black musical expression are directly linked to a communicative practice through the body. One could argue that the violent history of Black oppression is also reflected in the physical act of Roach beating drums and the loudness produced by the instrument. The symbolism of "the body" in relation to Roach's musical creativity should be considered as a subtle form of Black resistance that is derived from a retooling of racist limitations and the subjugation of Black culture.

As Roach entered the 1950s, he found himself contending with rock & roll and the American popular music of the time. Certain record producers would encourage Roach to move on from jazz and make substantially more money playing pop, however, the promise of increased payment did not tempt him away from pursuing musical expression through jazz. White capitalist elites of the music

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[26] Paul Gilroy, "Black Music and the Politics of Authenticity," *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 75.
[27] Gilroy, "Black Music," 97.

industry saw musicians as tools for them to increase profits and detached themselves from any notion of prioritizing musical creativity. Also, the performance of pop music is alluring to such elites, as unlike forms of Black musical expression such as jazz, pop music mostly contains no implicit or explicit subversive messaging, and is highly commodified. Roach's rejection of playing pop music is representative of a rejection of capitalism and the white elites that have attempted to suppress Black expression and culture. During this time in Roach's life, he began to refine his ideological leanings and involve himself in the fight for civil rights. By the time that the 1960s came about, Roach had defined himself as a radical resistor of the systematic racism imbedded in the historical and contemporary lived experience of Black Americans.

CHAPTER THREE: MAX ROACH AND HIS DIRECT PROTEST

In Chapter Two of this thesis, I discussed symbolic resistance in the musical contributions of Max Roach. These forms of resistance are implicit subversions of established structures of the white bourgeois class in Western music. Roach's rejection of his drum teacher, his challenge to notions of racial and musical primitivism, and his representation of "the body" each exemplify his symbolic resistance and were notably influential contributions that were an unintended product of Roach's musicality. The implicit and unintended results of symbolic resistance are what differentiate it from forms of protest. Evidence for symbolic resistance is derived from the theorization of musical contributions and the tracing of their social, political, and cultural reverberations. In claiming that an act of symbolic resistance is "effective" in producing a certain outcome, one should point to historical, theoretical, or other evidence to support the assertion. Its effect can be identified, defined, and supported with relevant evidence, but the notion of determining efficacy in forms of musical resistance and protest involves some degree of subjectivity. How then can efficacy be determined outside of that which is ultimately theorized and in the analysis of deliberate musical protest?

Unlike symbolic resistance, analysis of protest must take into account the intentions and goals of those protesting. Without a specified intended goal, it is difficult to measure efficacy. There must also be a direct and traceable cause-and-effect relationship between the protest and its intended goal being fully or partially

met. Typically, any protest lacking a specific indicator of success will have to be judged ineffective and will eventually fade into obscurity, as is evident in the fate of failed protest movements, such as 2011's "Occupy Wall Street." The intent of protesters informs purpose in their movement, yet the specific goals of protest music are often vague unless explicitly conveyed by the composer or performing musician. In fact their intent in protesting may not be to meet a specific goal, but rather, to imply some idea or concept, share information, normalize non-hegemonic discourse, or promote thought-provoking interpretations of their art. As a result, objective efficacy can only be located in musical protest if the intent of the protestors is clearly communicated outside of the music itself. The objective efficacy of protest music can therefore only be assessed in accordance with the success of protestors in directly accomplishing or aiding to accomplish their specific intended goal.

However, the purely musical value of protest music could result in its proliferation among listeners, regardless of whether the intended goal of conveying protest has succeeded. The message embedded in protest music may be circulated simply by the popularity of the music itself. An analysis of audience reception and the popularity of a subversive musical work allows for an additional method of viewing efficacy in protest music. Essentially, the musical content cannot be detached from its intended messaging. The popular acceptance of the music is therefore, in a way, an adoption of its protest, whether or not the listener identifies with the protest. Roach's musical and non-musical works of protest must both be

considered in determining their underlying implications or effects.

Over the course of his career, Roach participated in a variety of protests in support of Black equality and justice. Outside of music performance, Roach discussed aspects of his ideology in interviews and released written articles that presented his perspective on white oppressive structures and their effect on the Black community. The most prominent of these writings is a journal article entitled "What Jazz Means to Me" (1972).[28] As this was written shortly after the decade concluded, it speaks to Roach's mentality following the events of the 1960s. Before analyzing the text, it should be noted that Roach's article was written decades ago, and the social discourse and audience reception were probably different than they would be to many people today, such as myself. The majority of the article is highly compelling and thought provoking, but there are some lines that are rather problematic and controversial. Following a brief introduction, Roach declares:

> Let us first eliminate the word "jazz." It is not a term or a name that we, as black musicians, ever gave to the art which we created. It was a name which was given to the Afro-American's art form by white America, with and which [sic] therefore inherits all the racist and prurient attitudes which have been directed to all other aspects of the black experience in this country. [29]

He then continues by tracing the etymology of the word "jazz" and its origin as a term sexualizing the Black body. Its roots are in nineteenth-century Black American slang referring to various sexual acts, as well as "jass" (original spelling of

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[28] Max Roach, "What 'Jazz' Means to Me," *The Black Scholar* 3, No. 10 (Summer 1972), 2–6, at 3.
[29] Ibid.

the music genre) being a creole patois term related to sexual aspects of Congo dances. In doing so, Roach identifies an additional component of white racism that has projected a "sinful" sexual nature on Black men and women. "The subject is myth-laden", writes Julianne Malveaux, "as white perceptions of differential black sexual prowess has produced a fascination with blacks by whites. They see us as sexually looser, uninhibited, and their view of us permeates both their reality and their fantasies."[30] It is very plausible that the term "jazz" may have sexually charged and racist origins, but it is simply inaccurate to suggest that it hasn't taken on a completely different and distinct meaning. It is a term widely adopted by Black jazz musicians, including Roach himself, who obviously implied no racist connotation in speaking of "jazz." Rather, it has become a term that describes a particular kind of Black creative expression, with its supposed sexual origins being unintended or unknown to those who speak of it.

While he doesn't specifically bring up "class," Roach also discusses the economic exploitation of Black Americans and how it is supposedly perpetuated by the jazz culture. "The term 'jazz' has come to mean the abuse and exploitation of black musicians; it has come to mean cultural prejudice and condescension."[31] The clubs and record companies did indeed indulge in prejudicial treatment towards Black musicians, resulting in poor working conditions and meager pay. Roach

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[30] Julianne Malveaux, "The Sexual Politics of Black People: Angry Black Women, Angry Black Men," *The Black Scholar*, Vol. 10, No. 8/9 (May/June 1979), 32–35, at 32.
[31] Roach, "What 'Jazz' Means to Me," 4.

describes the typical "union wages" of Black musicians in 1972 being $90 per week, while musicians in predominantly white clubs would earn $175 to $200 per week. The financial strain put on Black Americans as a whole also permeated the club experience, as Black clubs would often not be able to make as much money from Black audiences. The exploitation of Black workers, as described by Roach, is one of the most compelling parts of his argument. The capitalist system has historically exploited musicians and workers of all races, but the racial component has drastically worsened the issue for Black Americans in particular.

Roach continues by stating:

> I am often asked, "Can whites play your kind of music?" My answer is, "Yes, anybody can play something that's already been put out there. If a painter paints a certain thing, I can imitate it. But no whites have ever contributed to the creative or innovative aspects of black music." White musicians have not contributed for the same reason that no blacks have come to the stature of Debussy and Schoenberg and others in Western European music. For, society has forbidden either musician to be fully engaged with the other's culture.[32]

Here, Roach's argument contains contradictions, lacks nuance, and oddly attaches race to cultural predispositions. In order to accept this argument, one would have to accept that there are different abilities and inabilities tied to race. He does vaguely state that "society" has barred people of different races from experiencing other cultures, but that seems to contradict his earlier point, which suggests that white people don't have the *ability* to create, but only imitate in jazz. He then pivots by also stating no Black people have "come to the stature" of

[32] Roach, "What 'Jazz' Means to Me," 6.

traditional Western European music. In equating a lack of famous Black classical artists to an alleged limit on white jazz abilities, Roach is ignoring pertinent historic social context, and to some extent, comparing imaginary apples and oranges. The argument that racist structures in society prevent different races from being "fully engaged with the other's culture" certainly has validity. However, Roach is discussing the ability of individuals to create music, which is not intrinsically tied to race. While it is not an exact parallel, if this section of Roach's article switched "white" with "Black,", it would read as quite bigoted. In no way am I suggesting that Roach was bigoted himself, but his argument here is somewhat contradictory, not well constructed, and detracts from the stronger arguments made in the article.

Roach suggests that it is a misnomer to categorize individual forms of Black musical expression. Jazz, blues, reggae, soul, funk, and other such genres are "various expressions of black music, black culture itself, [and] the expression of Africans in the diaspora" that, according to Roach, are only categorized for their commodification and exploitation of Black artists.[33] American record companies have had a history of exploiting their musicians, especially Black musicians, who were routinely underpaid, undervalued, and unfairly marketed. Many early recordings of Black American musicians were marketed as "race records." In the 1940s, American record companies labeled most recorded Black music as "rhythm and blues," except jazz recordings, which were considered a separate category. Although Black musicians would redefine R&B as its own distinct genre, the label is

[33] Roach, "What 'Jazz' Means to Me," 6.

rooted in white bourgeois marketing. Roach argues that the same applies to all categorization of Black music. This argument presents an intriguing and complex dynamic that exceeds the scope of Roach's theorization. As English is the language of European whites, just about any form of categorization has been predetermined by white linguistic practices. Also, if such Black music genres were not categorized, the individual nuances and diversity of Black musical expression could not be fully realized. Jazz is a genre born of Black musical expression, but has become a musical mode of creativity and unity. In arguing the lack of "ability" in white musicians to contribute to jazz, or Black musicians to contribute to classical music, Roach is perpetuating an idea of separation between races and promoting Black Nationalist beliefs. He is also indulging in the kind of essentialism he condemns in white people.

CHAPTER FOUR: MAX ROACH'S "FREEDOM NOW SUITE"

The dismantling or disrupting of powerful, oppressive systems requires a unified movement of the mass of people who have the will to resist and remain in solidarity behind a shared ideology or interest. The philosophy in approach to such resistance has differed greatly between the various protest movements throughout history, whether they are violent or non-violent, justified by religious or secular reasoning, or influenced by other factors. Within the Civil Rights Movement and the twentieth-century fight for racial equality, several opposing philosophies rallied Americans in resistance, such as those, for example, of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. Although the methods and rationale of these two figures differed, each of their respective messages were effective in mobilizing large numbers of people. The philosophies in approach to protest music differ as well, and a detailed analysis of such music can provide insight as to the composer's intent and the possible effect on the listener.

One of the first and most significant of Max Roach's musical works of protest is his album *We Insist!: Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite* (1960). The album stands apart from other works of protest music, particularly in the jazz genre, for its creative expression and commentary through a modern application of Black musical traditions. Rather than containing an assortment of unrelated pieces, *We Insist!* includes five tracks that are intended to be listened to in sequence as a collection. The tracks are arranged into two distinct sections according to their subject. The

first two tracks comment on Black civil rights struggles in nineteenth-century America, and the last two tracks relate to African identity and Black civil rights struggles in Africa. The middle track, "Triptych", is an expressive representation of the response by people of the African diaspora to oppression and subjugation. This album presents bold messaging regarding the Black American experience, the unfortunate propensity for Black subjugation to persist, and the hope found within the continued fight for equality and an egalitarian future.

Written by Max Roach and Oscar Brown Jr., *We Insist!* features Abbey Lincoln on vocals and a number of other notable musicians, such as saxophonist Coleman Hawkins on the track "Driva' Man." In addition, the album features Booker Little on trumpet, Julian Priester on trombone, Walter Benton on tenor saxophone, and James Schenck on bass. On the last two tracks, the album includes three additional percussionists including Afro-Cuban musicians Raymond Mantilla and Tomas Duvall, and Nigerian musician Michael Olatunji on congas. Every track on the album stands out as unique, extremely innovative, and packed with emotion. Its liner notes, written by Nat Hentoff, begin with a quotation by A. Philip Randolph: "A revolution is unfurling — America's unfinished revolution. It is unfurling in lunch counters, buses, libraries and schools — wherever the dignity and potential of men are denied. Youth and idealism are unfurling. Masses of Negroes are marching onto the stage of history and demanding their freedom now!"[34]

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[34] Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 172.

Track 1 – "Driva' Man" (5:14)

Driva' man he made a life
But the Mamie ain't his wife.
Choppin' cotton don't be slow
Better finish out your row.
Keep a-movin' with that plow
Driva' man'll show ya how.

Git to work and root that stump
Driva' man'll make ya jump.
Better make your hammer ring
Driva' man'll start to swing.
Ain't but two things on my mind
Driva' man quittin' time.

Driva' man he made a life
But the Mamie ain't his wife.
Choppin' cotton don't be slow
Better finish out your row.
Keep a movin' with that plow
Driva' man'll show ya how.

Git to work and root that stump
Driva' man'll make ya jump.
Better make your hammer ring
Driva' man'll start to swing.
Ain't but two things on my mind
Driva' man quittin' time.

Driva' man de kind of boss
Ride a man and lead a horse.
When his cat 'o nine tail fly
You'd be happy just to die.
Run away and you'll be found
By his big old red bone hound.

Patteroller bring ya back
Make ya sorry you is Black.
Driva' man he made a life
But the Mamie ain't his wife.
Ain't but two things on my mind
Driva' man and quittin' time.

The first track refers to the "overseer" in the era of American slavery, who was hired to inflict brutal violence upon slaves in an attempt to force them into submission. "Driva' Man" begins in an open-meter musical style influenced by Black work songs, with Lincoln's vocals in the key of C-minor and accompanied only by tambourine. The lyrics evoke a similar emotion to Holiday's "Strange Fruit", painting gruesome imagery of violence against Black people. Lincoln sings, "When his cat 'o nine tail fly — You'd be happy just to die" and that it "make you sorry you is Black", highlighting an intense sense of hopelessness under such violence and subjugation. Throughout the song, the lyrics reflect a reluctant submission to forced labor in a

struggle for survival under the constant threat of violence. Once the band begins playing, we hear that the meter is 5/4 and the form follows a 6-bar blues structure in the key of A-flat major at 100 BPM. The melody is played on tenor saxophone by Hawkins, replacing Lincoln's vocals and tambourine. Tension is created in the horn section harmonizing augmented triads, while the downbeat is accented by Roach's "cross stick" on the snare drum.[35] Following the melody, Hawkins plays a 48-bar solo that is divided into four 12-bar sections. In the first and third of such sections, Hawkins is only accompanied by drum set and bass, while the second and fourth sections of the solo include background figures from the horns. The first half of his solo remains in the key of A-flat major, then modulates back to the key of C-minor for the remainder of the piece.[36] The song concludes with no resolution but simply the hope of surviving to the end of the day, with the lyrics concluding, "Ain't but two things on my mind — Driva' man and quittin' time." It's notable that Roach chose to begin the album with a piece set during the era of slavery. Following "Driva' Man" is a piece entitled "Freedom Day," which is set in the moment slavery was abolished. Once "Driva' Man" concludes, it is literally left in the past, and the remainder of the album is set in Black musical expressions outside those in the era of American slavery.

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[35] "A technique where a drum stick is placed with one end of the stick (usually the tip) on the head with the other extending over the counterhoop. The shaft of the stick is then struck on the counterhoop producing a hollow sound, similar to that of a clave." James A. Strain, *A Dictionary for the Modern Percussionist and Drummer* (London, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 49.

[36] Alisa White, "'We Insist! Freedom Now': Max Roach's Transatlantic Civil Right Imperative," *Jazz Education Journal* (October 2007), 47–52, at 48.

Track 2 – "Freedom Day" (6:05)

Whisper, listen, whisper, listen
Whisper, say we're free.
Rumors flyin', must be lyin'
Can it really be?
Can't conceive it, can't believe it
But that's what they say.
Slave no longer, slave no longer
This is Freedom Day.
Freedom Day, it's Freedom Day
Throw those shackle n' chains away.
Everybody that I see
Says it's really true, we're free.
(2x)

The second track is the only song on the album that is in 4/4 meter. It begins at 86 BPM and throughout the piece regularly doubles that tempo or cuts it in half. Most of the song is taken at a very quick tempo that is reminiscent of Roach's bebop recordings. "Freedom Day" contains immense energy and is supposed to represent the feeling of hope that followed the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. The track contains a drum solo towards the middle that is artfully delivered and draws from the song's melody, serving as a perfect example of Roach's melodic musicality on the drums. The piece features an abundance of polyrhythms between the band accompaniment and its simple melody. The melody outlines "the first three pitches of the C-minor scale over the i chord and then transposing those notes up a fourth over the iv chord."[37] Following two verses of Lincoln singing the melody, the horns play a series of parallel major and minor triads, mostly in rhythmic unison with

[37] White, "'We Insist! Freedom Now," 48.

Roach at half the speed of the initial tempo, before returning to double the original tempo and modulating to A-flat minor for the solo section. After the drum solo, the piece modulates back to C-minor and the form is run through once more.

Although this track has a hopeful message on the surface, the underlying implication of not obtaining true freedom is quite disheartening. While the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation was a major step forward towards Black liberation, it was unfortunately not the end of the oppression, exploitation, and subjugation by the white bourgeois class. Although the structures of oppression had changed post-slavery, Black Americans still faced a continued fight for freedom. Segregation, prejudicial capitalist exploitation, mass incarceration, a racially bigoted justice system, and continued inequality would be just some of the structures that perpetuated a lack of freedom following the abolition of slavery.[38]

Track 3 – "Triptych: Prayer/Protest/Peace" (8:05)

Prayer 0:00 – 3:36	Protest 3:37 – 4:57	Peace 4:58 – 8:05

The third track on the album is entitled "Triptych: Prayer/Protest/Peace" and is a work of three movements that only contains drum set and wordless vocalizations. The first two movements are in open meter with no discernable time signature, while the third movement includes a drum part that suggests the meter 5/4 at 132 BPM. Hentoff wrote in the album's liner notes:

[38] White, "'We Insist! Freedom Now," 49.

> "Prayer" is the cry of an oppressed people, any and all oppressed peoples of whatever color or combinations of colors. "Protest" is a final, uncontrollable unleashing of rage and anger that have been compressed in fear for so long that the only catharsis can be the extremely painful tearing out of all the accumulated fury and hurt and blinding bitterness. It is all forms of protest, certainly including violence. "Peace," as Max explained to Abbey before the take, "is the feeling of relaxed exhaustion after you've done everything you can to assert yourself. You can rest now because you've worked to be free. It's a realistic feeling of peacefulness. You know what you've been through.[39]

The "Prayer" movement is soft and a bit somber sounding. It contrasts with the second movement, "Protest," rather dramatically. "Protest" is intended to be uncomfortable and "painful", and it is certainly successful in doing so, as Lincoln screams horrifically and Roach plays chaotically around the drums for more than a minute. On one hand, the "Protest" section is practically unlistenable, and the inability to tolerate listening to it relegates the movement to a status akin to a Yoko Ono art project. On the other hand, as I had noted, the intense feeling of discomfort caused by this section is intentional and attempts to comment on the intensity of suffering. In speaking of the piece, Lincoln mentions that the screaming was Roach's idea, stating: "It wasn't an approach to music that I would have chosen, but because I thought of him as a teacher — he preceded me — I did what I could to please him."[40] In fact, the screaming of "Protest" was also a source of disagreement between Roach and his co-writer, Oscar Brown Jr., supposedly resulting in repeated arguments between them. Although the intent of the screaming was to make a powerful political statement, I argue that its unpleasantness detracts from its potential to be

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[39] White, "We Insist! Freedom Now," 49.
[40] Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 178.

effective to many listeners. It also highlights a removal from the non-violent protest advocated by those like MLK Jr., and instead indirectly advocates for the release of anger and violence upon the white racists that have caused centuries of suffering for Black Americans, with the liner notes stating that the movement reflects "all forms of protest, certainly including violence." The last movement, "Peace," is representative of the calm people feel at the point where they have done all that could be done to obtain freedom.[41] Also, it is notable that the liner notes mention that the song is representative of "any and all oppressed peoples of whatever color or combination of colors." While the album's emphasis is certainly placed on the experiences of Black Americans and people of the African diaspora, the inclusion of all oppressed people regardless of race implies a collective class struggle.

Track 4 – "All Africa" (8:03)

The beat has a rich and magnificent history
Full of adventure, excitement, and mystery.
Some of it bitter, and some of it sweet
But all of it part of the beat, the beat, the beat.
They say it began with a chant and a hum
And a Black hand laid on a native drum.

Bantu, Zulu, Watusi, Ashanti, Herero, Grebo, Ibo, Masuto,
Nyasa, Ndumbo, Umunda, Bobo, Kongo, Hobo, Kikuyu, Bahutu,
Mossi, Kissi, Mbangi, Jahomi, Fongo, Bandjoun, Bassa, Yoruba,
Gola, Ila, Mandingo, Mangbetu, Yosee, Bali, Angoli, Biombii,
Mbole, Malinke, Mende, Masai, Masai, Masai

[41] White, "We Insist Freedom Now," 50.

"All Africa," was written as a response to the interest of Black Americans in African culture. It contains jazz-like melodic licks accompanied by technical African drumming and rhythm, which separates it from many traditional Western music practices. Much of the melody is based upon the F-blues scale and includes a considerable amount of polyrhythm. The song can be divided into two general sections, the latter one including a percussion solo in a style similar to practices of Western African tradition. The first section can be considered in two separate subsections, the first of which Lincoln sings about the creation of Black musical expression within an open meter. Upon singing the line, "They say it began with a chant and a hum / And a Black hand laid on a native drum," the second subsection begins at 68 BPM. This includes the entrance of all percussionists, who play a steady groove in 6/8 meter, inspired by traditional African drumming practices. Meanwhile, Lincoln chants the names of multiple African tribes and Olatunji responds with sayings about freedom from each tribe.[42] Part of the inspiration for the creation of this song was the sprouting Black Power movement that began in the 1960s. Roach, in particular, held Black Nationalist ideals that were inspired by the philosophy of figures such as Marcus Garvey, who was particularly idolized in the area of Brooklyn where Roach grew up.

[42] White, "We Insist Freedom Now," 51.

Track 5 – "Tears for Johannesburg" (9:46)

Finally, the last track on the album is entitled "Tears for Johannesburg" and is a tribute to the South Africans who were attacked in the Sharpeville Massacre while protesting apartheid. Hentoff wrote in the album's liner notes:

> "Tears for Johannesburg" sums up, in a large sense, what the players and singers on this album are trying to communicate. There is still incredible and bloody cruelty against Africans, as in the Sharpeville massacres of South Africa. There is still much to be won in America. But, as the soloists indicate after Abbey's wounding threnody, there will be no stopping the grasp for freedom everywhere.

The South African government would end up banning the album 1962 due to the statement of protest in this track, regardless of its lack of lyrical content. The structure of this song is relatively loose, becomes more rigid, and finally returns to its initial looseness over a B-flat minor ostinato vamp at 214 BPM. After two highly embellished statements of the melody the solos begin. The exploration of emotion through each instrument is extraordinary and the piece contains some of the most impressive improvisation of the album. Each of the solos are accompanied by the other instruments playing together in unison or at the octave. Prior to the B-flat minor bass ostinato that leads to the end of the piece, an artful trombone solo is followed by a thoughtful and musical drum solo. "Tears for Johannesburg" concludes as the album began, in 5/4 meter. This album is the most famous work of protest in Max Roach's career, yet it seemingly never received the recognition that it deserved. *We Insist!* was met with praise by jazz listeners, music critics, and civil rights activists following its release, but many also criticized Roach's approach. In

particular, the "Protest" movement in "Triptych" was received poorly.

Live performances of *We Insist!* were often scaled down from the intensity of the recordings and were met with mixed reviews. A reviewer for *Variety* wrote that these collection of pieces are "new-frontier club stuff and most likely a little too far out in uncut timber for most tastes."[43] Reporting on the first live performance of *We Insist!* in New York, January 1961, the *New York Times* wrote, "Jazz, which has often been called a music of protest, was in full remonstrating cry late yesterday afternoon at the Village Gate" and the critic admitted to being moved by the performance.[44] Later, the *Chicago Daily Defender* would publish positive reviews of the album, writing that *We Insist!* is "more convincing than any previous attempt to combine contemporary jazz and other art forms. It consciously employs jazz as a weapon in the good fight, and proves a potent one."[45] The album seems to have been highly influential in setting a blueprint for the avant-garde expression of protest in jazz that followed. *We Insist!* was preceded by notable jazz protest albums such as Charles Mingus' *Mingus Ah Um* (1959), and would inspire future works of protest such as Herbie Hancock's *Sun City* (1985).

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[43] Monson, *Freedom Sounds,* 173.
[44] John S. Wilson, "Jazz Composition of Protest Heard: 'Freedom Now Suite,' About Revolution in Africa, Has Premier at Village Gate," *New York Times* (January 16, 1961), 20.
[45] John H. Sengstacke, "Max Roach Fights Racial Battle in Song, 'Freedom Now Suite'," *Chicago Daily Defender* (November 7, 1962), 16.

CONCLUSION

The remarkable musical creativity and distinctly melodic drumming skills of Max Roach are often noted by musicians and music listeners. Those who are well versed in jazz history, or who are familiar with the compendium of Roach's work, may know of his civil rights activism and works of protest music, such as *We Insist!* However, as this paper explores, Roach's contributions are far more extensive and complex than they may appear on the surface. The work and career of Roach caused social reverberations that echoed through jazz and racial discourse. The juxtaposition of Roach's acts of "symbolic resistance" with his deliberate protests presents contrasting examples of the way in which music can influence society. While the results of symbolic resistance are unintended by the artist, protest music must have a specified goal. Without intent, the message of the protest might be lost and it would be impossible to determine whether or not the protest was effective. Other factors are also involved in any determination of efficacy in musical protest, such as audience reception, access to the recording, whether or not it's an enjoyable listening experience, and the ability to trace a direct cause-and-effect relationship between the protest and its desired outcome. There are essentially an infinite number of factors that make it impossible to reach an objective notion of efficacy in a work of protest music, but enough evidence can be gathered to get a general idea. For example, *We Insist!* was intended to be an album that pushed the boundaries of protest in the jazz genre and advocated for civil rights by performing a variety of Black musical expressions and conveying the revolt against centuries of Black

oppression. The album received mixed reviews when it was released, but is generally considered to be one of the greatest jazz protest music albums. It would inspire other jazz protest music of the 1960s, with similar works by Coltrane, Simone, and Rollins. The passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 would also fulfill the intent of the album, however there is no way to prove that the album actually had any effect on such legislation being passed.

I argue that Roach's acts of symbolic resistance have had a more lasting impact than his musical or non-musical works of protest. For instance, Roach dismantling the racist view of "primitivism" in drumming had not only social implications, but musical implications as well. Through his approach and musicianship, Roach was able to put the drum set on equal footing with other instruments, while simultaneously shutting down bigoted notions of drum playing. Roach did not provide critical commentary on class and the role of capitalism in the racist systems that he identifies, however his work in rebuking such systems are intellectually powerful and compelling. Max Roach was brilliant as a drummer, musician, activist, and educator. In a way, the objects of his protest are still quite relevant today with the over-policing of predominantly Black neighborhoods, mass incarceration of Black Americans, and continued prejudice. Protest music will always exist as long as unjust power structures, violence, and the denial of freedoms exist. As such, it is necessary to research and analyze the work and protest music of past activist musicians, to better inform the methods of resistance and the role of protest music in the present and future.

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