

The Coloring of Jazz: Race and Record Cover Design in American Jazz, 1950 to 1970

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The thread of race runs throughout the business, culture, and aesthetics of jazz. Just as jazz has been called a typically American music, it shares the typically American problem of racial tensions that accompany its more positive aspects of freedom and diversity. This isn't to say that all interactions between black and white jazz figures were negative; if anything, jazz helped foster relationships between groups that might not have collaborated otherwise. However, the fact remains that the time period in question—from 1950 to 1970—was a difficult and critical juncture for race relations in the United States.¹

Although jazz-inspired artwork has been explored by several authors, the more commercial aspect of jazz visual art—album cover design—is a largely unexplored topic. This medium became an essential aspect of jazz culture with the invention of the LP in the early 1950s. For the next twenty-plus years—until the proliferation of cassette tapes and other alternative media—album covers provided a visual identity for both the music and the musician.

For the most part, race was not a subject for album cover illustration; abstract designs and neutral photography lent an air of racial ambiguity for much of the 1950s and '60s. In the late 1960s and '70s, however, the Civil Rights and Black Power movements stimulated changes in both the sound and image of jazz. Some record labels upheld the status quo; the message of the music didn't always correspond to the covers, particularly when the tone of the music was one of black rebellion. But a few labels began to draw on black culture for their album cover designs, emphasizing African motifs, African-American hairstyles, and other symbols of black pride.

I will argue that this more visible "blackness" of jazz and jazz musicians probably had more to do with the increasing commodification of black culture than an increase in African-American participation in the field. Very few black graphic designers were involved with album cover design—even in musical genres that have been traditionally linked to black culture and roots. The motivation and means of expression for African-American artists and musicians developed parallel to each other, but came together infrequently in album cover design. Although black artists and musicians shared a common tension between the expression of their racial identity

1 For a more comprehensive study of the relationship between jazz and American social life, see Burton Peretti, *Jazz in American Culture* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997) and Geoffrey Ward, *Jazz: A History of America's Music* (New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 2000). These volumes, particularly the former, address issues of race and social change in the context of the development of jazz as a musical genre.

Figure 1
Back o' Town album cover, 1946. Designer unknown; *The Barbershop* by Jacob Lawrence, Riverside/Fantasy Records (RLP 12-130). Cover courtesy of Concord Music, Inc. © copyright 1946.



and the desire to be appreciated as a skilled individual, they rarely collaborated in the commercial art world. An album cover like the one for Jelly Roll Morton's *Back o' Town Blues* (Figure 1), which uses a painting by African-American artist Jacob Lawrence, is the exception rather than the rule. This disparity can be accounted for in the power structure of the jazz industry as well as the relationship between black artists and the world of commercial art.

- 2 Rober G. O'Meally, "Jazz Albums as Art: Some Reflections," *International Review of African-American Art* 14: 3 (1997): 39.
- 3 Coleman Andrews, "Pioneers," in *Graphics Record Covers: The Evolution of Graphics Reflected in Record Packaging*, W. Herdeg, ed. (New York: Hastings House, 1974).
- 4 O'Meally, "Jazz Albums as Art: Some Reflections," 40. Another important factor in the boom in record production was the end of the wartime rationing of shellac and vinyl—both materials necessary for the manufacture of records. Additional changes in recording technology, including the introduction of "long play" discs in 1949 that allowed studios to record eighteen to twenty-five minutes of music per side, further stimulated the growth of the jazz recording industry.

Jazz Album Covers As Art

Album covers, in the format we know them today, were an innovation in both the music and art worlds—they were a new form of packaging for a new form of media.² Prior to the introduction of the 78 rpm record, records were packaged alone in plain gray or tan paper sleeves or as "albums" of sleeves bound together in a rectangular package.³ While some of the earlier records did incorporate visual elements into their packaging, as can be seen in examples of "tombstone" labels from the 1920s, it was not until the introduction of self-service record retailing that the attractiveness and appearance of the outer sleeves had any real impact. Around 1945, music stores shifted from having their products located behind the counter with their thin spines outward to an arrangement where customers were allowed to browse through racks of colorful record jackets.⁴

Album design was important for the marketing of jazz music because it typically lacked lyrics; one had to "read" the cover in order to gain some insight about the mood, tone, and style of the

music inside. Record covers as commercial art, though, had few distinct precedents. They may be likened to product packaging design in their need for catching the consumer's eye and conveying a sense of their contents, but record covers were conceived as more durable and useful than a throw-away cereal box. Book covers had a similar form, but were displayed spines out, mandating different graphic priorities.⁵ Album covers' unique function and status as a new medium made this time period a significant era in the development of album covers as an art form.

But images of jazz were not altogether unfamiliar to the jazz-consuming public. By the time the familiar 12-inch-square album packaging made its debut in the 1950s, a jazz aesthetic had already begun its development in the hearts and minds of Americans. Posters and concert bills were the first form of jazz graphics. In Europe, the "exotic" aspects of jazz were played up in racially insensitive images like these found in Paul Colin's posters for Josephine Baker in Paris during the 1920s.⁶ Musicians' so-called "black" features were played up in an attempt to lure white patrons into the nightclubs offering this somewhat subversive art form. In the United States, jazz imagery began in the same vein but changed over time; in fact, by the 1950s, the musicians' race was often downplayed in order to appeal to a wider audience.⁷

The overall trend in jazz record cover aesthetics paralleled stylistic development in the fields of fine art and graphic design. Modern, abstract styles were especially well-suited to illustrate the spontaneity, call-and-response rhythms, and dynamic energy of jazz—avant garde sounds were paired with avant garde imagery.⁸ Many covers during this period explicitly reference movements like cubism, surrealism, abstract expressionism, and pop art. The work of Jackson Pollock and Roy Lichtenstein, among others, was frequently recalled in jazz album covers of the 1950s and '60s. With the rising popularity of rock and roll music, more jazz album covers began copying the psychedelic art and re-invention of art nouveau graphics found in rock posters during the 1960s. These album covers, like the one for *Lightnin' Joe Hopkins* from 1973–74, designed by Pushpin Studio founder Milton Glaser, might easily have blended in with covers from the Who or The Family Band.

While a few key personalities emerged in the field—including Alex Steinweiss, David Stone Martin, and Reid Miles—the majority of record cover designers were doomed to obscurity.⁹ Many album covers are not attributed; fewer still are recognized as works of art in their own right. By one researcher's estimate, over half of the album covers produced between 1948 and 1960 will never be attributed.¹⁰ The industry was not prepared for the new design opportunity presented to them by the introduction of LP jackets; the artists were often making it up as they went along, drawing from experiences in other commercial art pursuits, and rarely specializing in the field.¹¹

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- 5 Andrews, "Pioneers," 24.
 6 Ward, *Jazz: A History of America's Music*, 156.
 7 Roger Dean and David Howells, *The Ultimate Album Cover Album* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1987) 15.
 8 *Ibid.*, 16.
 9 Eric Kohler, *In the Groove: Vintage Record Graphics, 1940–1960* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999) and Jennifer McKnight-Trontz and Alex Steinweiss, *For the Record: The Life and Work of Alex Steinweiss* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000) provide quite good condensed histories of some of the pioneers in album cover design. Several other books, including Dean and Howells' *Ultimate Album Cover Design*, volumes 1 and 2; Manek Daver's *Jazz Album Covers: The Rare and the Beautiful* (Tokyo: Graphic-Sha, 1994) and *Jazz Graphics* (Tokyo: Graphic-Sha, 1991); Graham Marsh and Glyn Callingham's *California Cool: West Coast Jazz of the 50s and 60s* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1992), *New York Hot: East Coast Jazz of the 50s and 60s* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993), *Blue Note: The Album Cover Art* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1991), and *Blue Note 2* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1997); and Strom Thorgeson and Roger Deari's *Album Cover Album* (Surrey, UK: Dragon's World, 1977), provide varied and comprehensive collections of album cover art from this period, but add little in the way of scholarship (art historical, musical, or otherwise). These collections do, however, give the researcher the opportunity to view the work of several designers in a wider context.
 10 Daver, *Jazz Album Covers* 12.
 11 Richard Cook, *Biography of Blue Note Records* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2001), 49.

It is unclear how much interaction took place between the musicians and the artists who designed their album covers. Even the “masters” of jazz album design did not consistently consult with the musicians whose work they were visually representing.¹² Although there are a few key instances of jazz musicians commissioning their own covers (Thelonius Monk, for example), and creating their own covers (like Gil Mellé), for the most part there existed a gulf between the two most creative endeavors of jazz record production.¹³ The management of the record label and the art director (if one existed) determined how musicians were presented to the public on the cover of their albums.

Race and Record Cover Design

The impact of African-American instrumental artistry in jazz is rarely questioned, but the influence of black visual artists—graphic designers, art directors, and photographers—is a murky and largely undocumented topic. During the postwar period, African-American artists and musicians were confronting the same issues in their respective fields: how to retain their identity as black Americans while being recognized as skilled artists regardless of race; how to convey their own personal experiences; how to overcome discrimination; how to succeed in their field, and how to express pride in their African heritage—all without the aid of words.¹⁴ These two groups also mingled in the same clubs, read the same books, and listened to the same music.¹⁵ The actual connection between the two worlds, however, seems tenuous, at best:

Given the long and close association between jazz musicians and African American artists, the paucity of the visual artists’ work on the album covers of jazz LP records is remarkable.¹⁶

Although jazz has been heralded as a distinctly African-American musical form, the art used on jazz album covers does not necessarily take on a distinctly African-American aesthetic. But what is an “African-American aesthetic”? This terminology is reductive, to say the least. Art historian Richard Powell suggests that while there is perhaps no boundary that defines African-American art, there may be what he calls a “Blues Aesthetic.” To put it quite simply, he says, “Some Afro-Americans are interested in Afro-American culture, and some Afro-Americans are not.”¹⁷ In fact, practitioners of the Blues Aesthetic need not be black—they need only have an abiding interest in African-American culture and a feel for the blues (or in this case, jazz). Working within a Blues Aesthetic allows artists to communicate the realities of being a minority in American culture and to resist cultural commodification—as well as characterization as either “black” or “white.”

12 Dean and Howells, *The Ultimate Album Cover Album*.

13 O’Meally, “Jazz Albums as Art: Some Reflections.”

14 Sharon F. Patton, *African-American Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 183–185.

15 Jon Panish, *The Color of Jazz: Race and Representation in Postwar American Culture* (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 1997).

16 O’Meally, “Jazz Albums as Art: Some Reflections,” 40.

17 Richard J. Powell, “The Blues Aesthetic: Black Culture and Modernism,” in *The Blues Aesthetic: Black Culture and Modernism*, R. J. Powell, ed. (Washington, DC: Washington Projects for the Arts, 1989) 21.

Figure 2
Coltrane album cover, 1957–58. Esmond Edwards, designer, Prestige (7105). Cover courtesy of Concord Music, Inc. © copyright 1958.



It is interesting to note, then, how few jazz album covers use original artwork that conveys any sense of the jazz community, even when the artist is black. Considering many African-American artists' interest in social realism and folk art forms in the 1940s and beyond, the lack of cover art presented in these genres is rather surprising. One explanation comes from Jon Panish, who postulates that African Americans and whites view jazz in different ways.¹⁸ According to Panish, whites tend to decontextualize the musician and place him in an heroic position as an innovator and an individual, one man against the odds. Blacks, he argues, pay more attention to contexts and connections among community members, audience members, and family members.¹⁹ Therefore, art inspired by jazz might not prominently feature a musician on a stage, but rather the feel of the music or the artist's recollection of a neighborhood street—a perfect example of the Blues Aesthetic.

Because the predominantly white art directors and record executives made the final decisions in album cover design, cover art depicted their own conception of jazz and jazz musicians. While a Blues Aesthetic does not necessarily preclude the participation of whites, most likely the individuals in the upper management of the major record labels tended toward Panish's "white" perspective of jazz musicians as creative individuals rather than members of a vibrant community. These disparate views of jazz may help explain the predominance of "brooding-musician" photographs on jazz album covers (Figure 2). Photographic covers in muted, neutral tones showing musicians looking away from the camera in serious

18 Panish, *The Color of Jazz: Race and Representation in Postwar American Culture*, xix.

19 *Ibid.*, 80–81.

contemplation were quite common for the Blue Note label—particularly in the work of photographer Francis Wolff.²⁰ The same images, even something as “objective” as a photograph, may tell different stories to black and white viewers.

Another factor that contributed to the absence of African-American album cover designers is the lack of a tradition in corporate design among the black artist community. According to Floyd Coleman, African-American art students were usually more focused on expressing themselves in the fine arts media.²¹ The black absence in the academy and museums was felt strongly; many artists were concerned with filling this void with images of African-American life and representations of alternative artistic traditions. As a result, many of the creations of African-American artists—whether commercially oriented or not—were consumed within the black community or labeled as “outsider art.” A combination of minimal outside opportunities, outright discrimination, and a tendency toward self-isolation meant that few African-American artists were recognized as excellent artists in their own right.²²

According to Richard Powell, African-American artists found a kind of relief and freedom in the world of abstract art.²³ In the abstract expressionist mode especially, painters were able to express their moods, frustrations, and individuality—beyond racial boundaries. The connection between abstract expressionism and jazz was made among bohemian artists and writers who frequented the same Harlem cafés and went to the same Greenwich Village parties. In fact, Jackson Pollock was said to have listened to Charlie Parker and “Dizzy” Gillespie as he created his action paintings.²⁴ Record companies also linked the movements and often used abstract art to illustrate album covers, drawing from diverse modernist traditions to illustrate the new forms of bebop and progressive jazz. At least one musician agreed with this assessment. Ornette Coleman, a jazz saxophonist, was also a painter whose work sometimes appeared on his own album covers (Figure 3). His work is characterized by splashes of bright color and broad brush strokes that mirror his exuberant playing style.

Some artists, however, believed that abstraction was one form of “selling out” and becoming part of the mainstream art world without acknowledging their heritage as African Americans. As a result, several of these artists turned to figural painting or various forms of protest art, calling more attention to issues of race and ethnicity than their abstract counterparts. Because of their position outside the economic and political power structure of the highly segregated recording industry, work from such artists was rarely developed as commercial art.

As noted earlier, jazz album cover designers were rarely acknowledged for their work, and many outstanding designs in the field are still attributed to “unknown” artists. It is not surprising,

20 The photography of Francis Wolff, as used on jazz album covers, is covered excellently in Marsh and Callingham's *Blue Note and Blue Note 2*. A brief description of his career can also be found in Richard Cook, *The Biography of Blue Note Records*.

21 Floyd Coleman, “Black Colleges and the Development of an African-American Visual Arts Tradition,” *International Review of African-American Art*, 11: 3 (1996): 31–38.

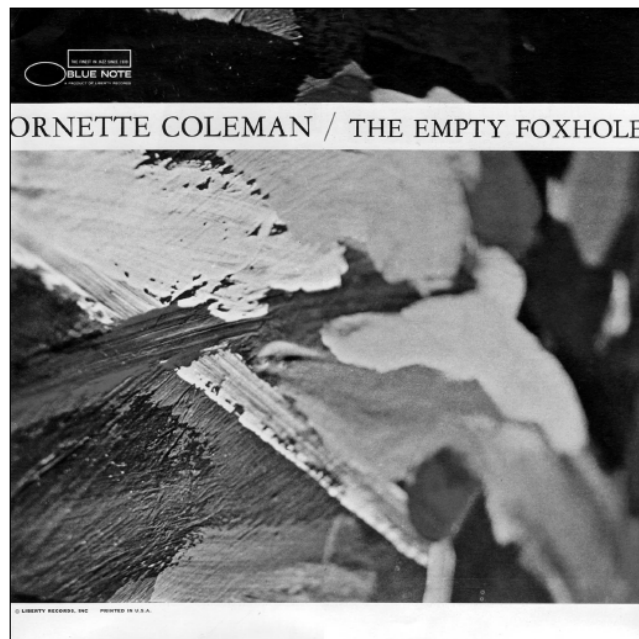
22 Sylvia Harris, “What is It? Searching for a Black Aesthetic in American Graphic Design,” *International Review of African-American Art* 11: 3 (1996): 38–42.

23 Patton, *African-American Art*; Richard J. Powell, *Black Art: A Cultural History* (London: Thames & Hudson, second edition, 2002).

24 O'Meally, “Jazz Albums as Art: Some Reflections,” 41.

Figure 3

The Empty Foxhole album cover, 1966. Bob Fuentes, designer; Ornette Coleman, painter, Blue Note Records (BLP-4246). Cover courtesy of Blue Note Records © copyright 1966.



then, to find few African-American designers recognized for their work in the field. If African-American designers were involved in album cover design, chances are it would be difficult to distinguish their work from that of white designers. Georg Olden, a graphic designer for CBS during the 1950s, tried to downplay his identity as a black man in order to succeed in a cutthroat corporate environment.²⁵ In the racially charged atmosphere of the 1960s especially, the difficulties of overcoming prejudice in the business world outweighed artists' concerns of being recognized as pioneers in their communities. According to Sylvia Harris, "Most of these intrepid souls were so concerned with surviving within a hostile profession that their work expresses little that is uniquely African-American."²⁶

A few African-American artists did create names for themselves in the field of album cover design, including the painter/illustrator known as Richard "Prophet" Jennings. Two of his covers, dating from 1960, reference the art of Salvador Dali: Eric Dolphy's *Out There* (Figure 4) and *Outward Bound* (Figure 5). The dreamlike qualities, visual distortions, and strange juxtapositions of Jennings' landscapes reflect Dolphy's particular brand of free jazz. Surrealism may also have appealed to Jennings for other reasons; Richard Powell notes that several African-American artists, including Gertrude Abercrombie and Hughie Lee-Smith, were drawn into a quasi-surrealist style because it allowed them to express their alienation from society.²⁷

25 Julie Lasky, "The Search for Georg Olden," *Print* March/April (1994): 21–28, 126–29.

26 Harris, "What is It? Searching for a Black Aesthetic in American Graphic Design," 40.

27 Powell, "Blues Aesthetic," Powell, *Black Art*.

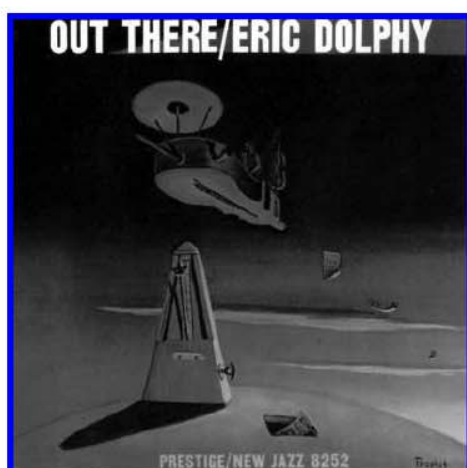


Figure 4
Out There album cover, 1960. Richard "Prophet" Jennings, designer, Prestige/New Jazz (NJLP-8252). Cover courtesy of Concord Music, Inc. © copyright 1960.



Figure 5
Outward Bound album cover, 1960. Richard "Prophet" Jennings, painter, Prestige/New Jazz (NJLP-8236). Cover courtesy of Concord Music, Inc. © copyright 1960.

Charles Stewart is a West Coast success story; his photographs appear on dozens of jazz album covers, several of which have earned him critical acclaim.²⁸ Stewart's cover for Lee Morgan's *Expoobident* is compelling in its use of African-American slang ("expoobident" meaning "extraordinary or phenomenal") as well as the fact that the musician, photographer, and record company were all African-American (Figure 6). Many of his photographs also include elements of irreverence and humor. For example, the cover for *Jimmy & Wes: The Dynamic Duo* from 1966 features two men linking arms and "chowing down" on messy sandwiches.

Beginning in the late 1950s, some jazz musicians embraced the Civil Rights movement wholeheartedly and adapted their music to reflect their goals of racial equality and freedom. The "hard bop" style developed by musicians like Charles Mingus and Max Roach had a connection to the rise of militant African-American identity and an increasing call for separation from the white norm—both socially and musically.²⁹ Occasionally we can see this attitude reflected in the album cover illustrations. For example, the cover of Max Roach's *Freedom Now Suite* pushes the then-controversial issue of integration to the forefront with a photo of a lunch-counter sit-in. The bold constructivist style of typography reasserts the rebellion and urgency of the album's title, *We Insist!* and makes the cover appear almost as a newspaper front page, screaming the message of equality.³⁰

Thelonious Monk's *Underground* cover tends toward the chaotic, politically charged iconography found in the rock album covers like the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (Figure 7). This image is also significant in its positioning of Monk, an African-American man, as a revolutionary freedom-fighter. Although ostensibly the enemies depicted in the photo are the Nazis in Vichy

- 28 O'Meally, "Jazz Albums as Art: Some Reflections," 44.
- 29 Charley Gerard, *Jazz in Black and White: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Jazz Community* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 130–135.
- 30 While it is difficult and perhaps irrelevant to examine any racial correspondences to type, a brief study of jazz album covers from the period in question does reveal a few differences by region and specific style of jazz. The use of typography on jazz album covers would be an interesting topic for another essay, particularly examining the way type is used as a design element to reinforce the content and composition of the graphics and images.

Figure 6
Expoobident album cover, 1961. Charles Stewart, photographer; Vee Jay Records (VJS-3015). Cover courtesy Vee Jay Records © copyright 1961.



France, one might imagine that the scenario could also represent the ongoing African-American resistance movement and fight for civil rights.

The musician's political beliefs, however, did not always make it onto their album covers. One 1959 album by Charles Mingus, *Mingus Ah Um*, contains the song "Fables of Faubus" that refers to and criticizes the segregationist governor of Arkansas (Figure 8).³¹ The purely abstract cover, while perhaps conveying a sense of Mingus's powerful and somewhat chaotic style of playing, does not reflect his musical message of rebellion against the racist policies of the South. It is unclear whether disregarding the strong political statement of the musician was a conscious decision by the record label; however, this example demonstrates again the gap between the music and the marketing of jazz.

A renewed interest in African themes was also visible in jazz record album covers during this period. For example, a 1963 cover by Woody Woodward for Curtis May's *Katanga!* bears a photograph of an African mask that corresponds to the album title's reference to a province in the Republic of Congo (Figure 9). Other more abstract images invoke the modernist proclivity for "primitive" and African figures, as seen here in the 1962 for *Herbie Mann at the Village Gate*.

In 1970, paintings by Abdul Mati Klarwein provided Miles Davis with two highly symbolic and somewhat controversial album covers that used African imagery in fantastic settings. These albums mark the beginning of Davis's foray into jazz fusion and his willingness to both compete with and emulate the strategies of commercial rock albums.³² The complex symbolism of these covers, like the cover for Santana's *Abraxis* (also illustrated by Klarwein), is more typical of rock-and-roll album covers. Their use of African motifs, however, make them worth noting as a new way of presenting jazz graphics.

31 Gerard, *Jazz in Black and White: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Jazz Community*.

32 Ward, *Jazz: A History of America's Music*, 445–446.

Figure 7
Underground album cover, 1968.
John Berg/Dick Mantel, designers; Horn/
Griner, photographers, Columbia Records
(CS-9632).
Cover courtesy SONY BMG Music
Entertainment © copyright 1968.



Interestingly enough, Klarwein is white—born in Germany and raised in Palestine. He was, however, exposed to a variety of world cultures throughout his life, and later converted to Islam, where he may have found an affinity with some of the ideas of the Black Power movement.³³

Both covers use black and white figures that are inverted, opposed, and/or balanced on the back cover of the album. On the *Live/Evil* cover, a pregnant African-American woman wearing an African headdress is kissed by the swooping waters of the sea, while on the reverse what appears to be a gluttonous white frog wearing an ammunition belt and sporting a blond bouffant squats menacingly over a gaping orifice (Figure 10). The former likely represents the “live” portion of the title, with its reference to the life-giving powers of women and the renewing cycles of the sun and moon. The latter might symbolize the “evil” of European society, the warlike and greedy nature of those who carefully guard the material world. *Bitches’ Brew* is similarly rife with potential interpretations of the oppositions presented on the back and front of the album. Black and white faces stare out from the spine of the album, and flow into a pair of intertwined hands. Inverting the colors, the sweat on the black face becomes what looks like splattered blood on the white face. The figures on both sides are depicted in tribal African costume.

Elements as basic as a hairstyle can also signify black pride. Covers like Forlenza Venosa Associates’ *Total Eclipse* are important

33 “Zeitdokumente, Seite 2,”
www.matiklarwein.com, downloaded
June 12, 2003.

Figure 8

Mingus Ah Um album cover, 1959. Don Schlitten, designer, Columbia Records (CS-8171). Cover courtesy SONY BMG Music Entertainment © copyright 1959.

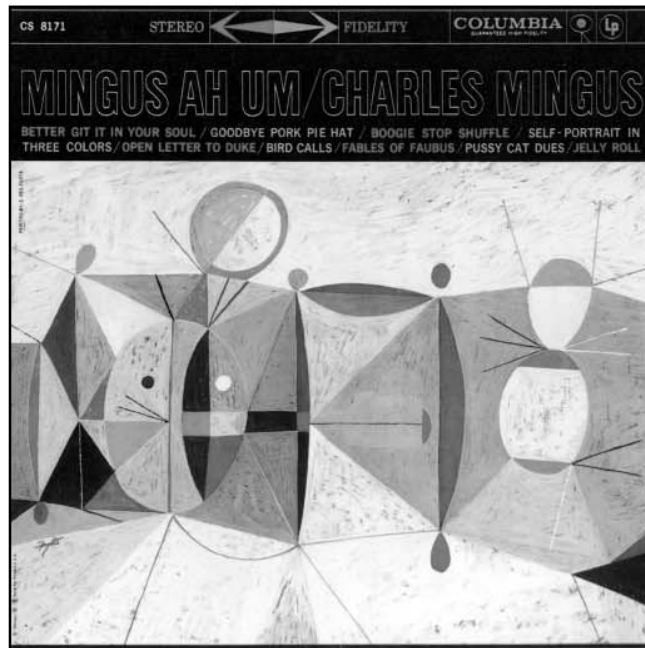
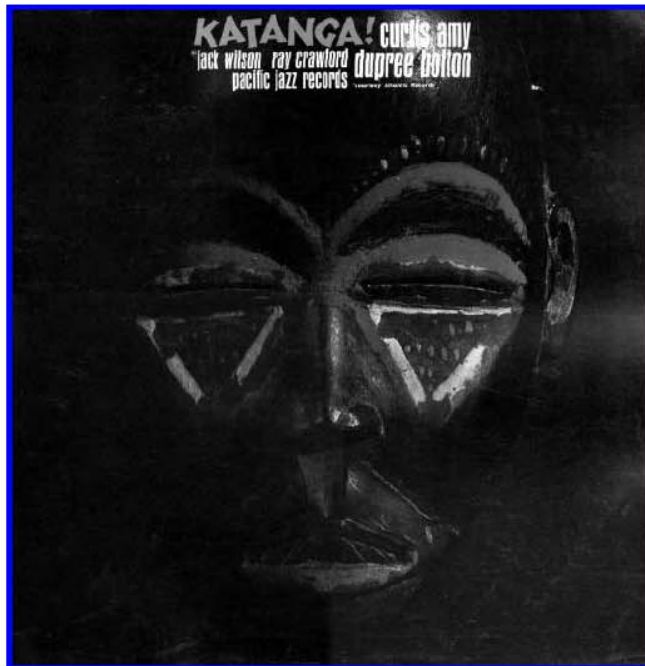


Figure 9

Katanga! album cover, 1963. Woody Woodward, designer, Pacific Jazz (ST-70). Cover courtesy of Blue Note Records © copyright 1963.



visual reminders of the cultural differences between blacks and whites (Figure 11). The incorporation of the “Afro” in album cover design more than likely started with the Vince Cullers agency in the 1960s. This black-run advertising agency, working for Kent cigarettes, developed a campaign to appeal to black consumers with images of hip, young African-Americans—many of them sporting Afros. While this commodification of black culture was not new to jazz—having been long predated by the “Race Records” phenomenon of the 1920s—it does mark a shift in approach whereby cultural differences become an asset rather than a weakness.³⁴

Toward the end of the 1960s, more album covers featured images of African-American females—on male recording artists’ products. These images were sometimes overtly sexual, other times more innocuous. During this time the image of the strong black woman—a “soul sister”—was also prevalent among representation of African-Americans on jazz album covers (Figure 12). In this cover from 1968, the central figure is a woman with an Afro, wearing ethnically inspired jewelry. Although this woman is meant as an object of desire, her posture indicates pride and independence. This trend might be seen in a negative or a positive light; on one hand, the presence of African-American figures reduces the previous tendency toward invisibility, but on the other hand, images like these strengthen the propensity toward objectification of the female body. Another round of research would be needed to further illuminate the role of gender and representation as it relates to the hypermasculine jazz culture.

34 Cultural commodification in relationship to jazz worked in the reverse as well; early white jazz bands were often purposefully represented with racially ambiguous images to appear to the consumers—both white and black—many of whom felt that only black musicians had a feel for the rhythms of jazz music.



Figure 10
Live/Evil album cover, 1970, John Berg, designer; Abdul Mati Klarwein, illustrator, Columbia Records (PG-30954). Cover courtesy SONY BMG Music Entertainment © copyright 1970.



Figure 11
Total Eclipse album cover, 1967. Forlenza Venosa Associates, designer; Fred Seligo, photographer. Blue Note Records (BST-84291). Cover courtesy of Blue Note Records © copyright 1967.



Figure 12
Love Call album cover, 1968. Havona, designer; Francis Wolff, photographer. Blue Note Records (CDP-7843562). Cover courtesy of Blue Note Records © copyright 1968.

Conclusion

Race and jazz are inextricably linked in American history and potentially visible in the images displayed on jazz records. Because jazz album cover design was and still is an obscure profession, it remains unclear to what extent African-American designers were involved in the field. The evidence from analyses of jazz culture, the recording industry, and graphic design in general, however, indicates that any substantial participation is unlikely.

Today, jazz recordings make up less than ten percent of industry sales, but other genres, including rap, hip-hop, and reggae, have become highly successful venues for the proliferation of minority and urban culture. Changes in recording technology have also led to an increase in small, independent record labels specializing in little-known musicians and styles. This shift in focus, from the large corporate label to “indie” production, has the potential to allow individual musicians a greater opportunity to express themselves. However, the commodification of African-American culture is still rampant as advertisers and corporations appropriate imagery and exploit it to sell products. The use of “gangsta” clothing, music, and slang in advertisements and music videos, for example, appeals to a certain segment of whites (and blacks) who want to experience something of the glamour and danger of a far-removed lifestyle.

The nature of album sales has also changed in the last two decades. Customers no longer browse racks of albums but frequently buy their music online, basing their decisions not on the covers of the CDs, but the song clips they download onto their computers. While

some authors have heralded the CD as an “irremediable set back” in the realm of music graphic design, the change in format may not be a completely negative phenomenon.³⁵ These new media, while not offering as large or as visible a format as the old LPs, do offer opportunities for interactive design and computer animation as a part of the listening experience. Technology has changed such that anyone with a computer and a printer can produce their own CD; the democratization of the digital age might indeed be a blessing to groups of people who haven’t traditionally had access. Whether in jazz, punk, or rockabilly, the real emphasis should be on grassroots participation and the importance of control over the means of representation of one’s self, one’s culture, and one’s identity.

35 Daver, *Jazz Album Covers*.