

I am Jazz
By Cory Bowles

I am Jazz.
I am The Beginning.
I am West Africa...

I am the soul, expression, life, drum, can you hear it?
Ceremonial, grounded, uplifting, invoking spirits.
Come near it, I'm infectious. Sophisticated, rhythm complex.
I am the current through body when foot flexed and ground connects.
I am both music and dancer combined,
Intertwined... The first of my kind.
I speak through the rhythm and sing with my torso
My mantra my force is
"Dance on bended knee lest you be mistaking for a corpse".

I am Jazz.
I am The Raid...
When Europeans invade, and move our bodies for trade,
we meet Irish sailors and make sounds with our feet...
way down below ship decks in darkness I still manage to glow...
and grow
and what do you know...
I'm sowing seeds for tap,
but we'll come back to that.
For now hit new land and my hands are clapping.
I season myself with Caribbean and Latin
and gain satisfaction through
hips, body, love, lust and passion. Sexy, hot, and spicy.
A new recipe...
but still me

I am Jazz.
I am Tradition...
I am the transition
with musicality, vitality, growth, maturation.
I am a slave dancing in secret on plantations.
Where upstairs and downstairs mix at sundown, to sarcastically comment.
My cakewalks, my sound is accented on downbeats,
All rally spirits through call and response.
Sweet chariots Swing Low, my grace is amazing.
I am west African and European successfully phasing
And still...
I move on

In time I find
I'm now free. Inclined to do what I choose.
No longer in chains and sung out in fields. I move

to New Orleans and reflect on my blues.
My blues.
Yeah,
the blues with all sorts of new hues.
You know me know as the one who still use west African grooves.
And stories return,
that strike nerves.
Singing about my baby
leaving and such
Mmmhmm. oh yeah.

But wait...I'm in two places at once.
Cause over there I got
Horns and brass bands and much
celebration and clutter and bang
I'm
Marching in the saints
and becoming ragtime.
I strut.
Got my turkey trot. Light-hearted chaos
cluttered with creativity joining my blues...
and we fuse.
New page.
A new rage, a new entity as...
I am reborn
a new era of jazz.

I am Jazz.
I am an Era...
I am Political...
I am Outspoken.
And I Charleston and strut like there ain't no tomorrow.
I pluck from all cultures.
Stay true, trust and borrow,
and take it to the stage they brand me as vaudeville.
While I bring down the house they go nuts, they applaud 'till,
they decide that they'll take me and make me their own.
Not borrow,
but steal.
Not real, but all wrong.
I fight for integrity
while they're taking me and making me stiff

Freezing my torso, and locking my hips.

There's too many I can't stop it I'm losing control.

Lose all my movement

But I still got my soul.

So gather my belongings and open up new shop.

I take my partner by the hand and do the Lindy Hop.

Now, we the cats in the corner of
the Savoy ballroom where the big bands will swing,
and the songbirds will sing as we do our thing
on the floor until we can dance no more.

But

no more...

is because

we all go to war.

I am empty,

alone with no dancers...

no music shows.

They tax my dance floor
and my dance halls close.

My dance

Is now song.

My song is now music.

My music is changing.

I find new ways to use it

I am Jazz.

I will not stop...

I am in clubs

where they listen to me and christen me with the name Be-bop.

Where I'm faster

and innovative. Hard to contain.

Improvise and realize my aesthetic

has transferred fully into music that's kinetic and frenetic...

and magnetic.

Using my scat...

I'm sometimes confusing

but cruising,

With no choice but to move once again.

And get low.

Like real low.

Grounded.

Hoofing.

Talking to the floor.

To ground making sounds with my feet once more.

I am percussive.

I am drum. I am rhythm.

I am shuffle ball change. I am flap.

I am drop roll heel.

A new instrument.

My body.

My tap.

Like that.

And that.

But not that. See that?

It's lost all the riff.

Taking me to places I'm not comfortable with.

And that right there's another false image of me.

Where they forgot how to feel and they only see...
the pedagogy.

Meaning steps and rules in studios and schools,
that fuse out my soul, my roots and my tools.

Line us up like fools. I can't even speak
when I see them incorporate some other technique
of image and look.

It seems they forgot

that soul and feeling just can't be taught.

And they got me lined up in chorus line fashion

In kick lines and Broadway where I'm losing passion

Losing my roots.

My flavourful mixture now watered down juice
with unnatural taste, a waste, a disgrace.

A history in danger of being erased.

When we improved through music and song. Don't you get it?

When body would go where the music would let it.

When elements combined traditions whose echoes are residual and
celebrate each voice as one individual.

But I will not give up.

I move on and mature.

My change...

my next phase again

I am Jazz

I am New York...

I am rediscovered, and recovered, from being smothered.

Given new life with nuance.

Contractions, knee slides, isolations, runs.

They name them the fathers; they are really my sons.

I am Robbins, Mattox, Luigi, Cole, Thelonious, Dizzy, Ray, Wynton,
Maceo...

I am Jazz.
My family is well over a dozen.
Allow me to introduce you to my cousins:
Hip Hop. R&B. Funk. Rock n' Roll.
No need for straight lines,
my lines are straight soul
Bring this back.
Bring it back.
Bring it back.

Man happened to my beats, my drums, my torso, my hips?
I don't ever remember asking glitter and glitz.
And these bits with straight lines where body is stiff.
Man, I'm calling it quits
If it goes like this.
And I hate to diss,
but where is the bliss?
When the music's in my body like a slow sexy kiss?
Where rumba's not ballroom but down to the earth?
Where a clave and bell call and pelvis have worth?
Now I'm picking pieces since my spirit was lost.
A former list of critical bits.
Has now been crossed.
The Cost is no less than
tearing me apart.
Deteriorates my body...especially the heart.
No spirit no groove...
I can take it anymore!

I am Jazz.
I am ever changing.
I am rearranging.
I am the celebration but...
I am a wanderer
with very few homes.
I find on one of them here
Where those close to me won't let my soul disappear.
With joy and love, essentials and the beat,
a node where all my fundamentals meet.
So they can celebrate through me, giving my life new start.
It's a funny place to find jazz.
But you can tell
these people have it in their hearts.
I am Jazz.
We are Jazz.
You...Me...Everybody
Now...
Feel it