Jazz Perspectives
Vol. 3, No. 2, August 2009, pp. 87–122

George Handy Composes *The Bloos*

Benjamin Bierman

The life of the jazz composer-arranger-pianist George Handy (1920–1997) is similar to that of countless freelance musicians in that his rather itinerant career involved the somewhat predictable ebb and flow of work, unemployment, success, and frustration.[1] Handy's highs and lows, however, were particularly dramatic, as Handy rose to the top of his profession, disappeared precipitously, and eventually found a home as a bandleader in the Catskill Mountains resort hotels.

In this article, after a biographical sketch, I examine one of Handy's most important compositions, *The Bloos* (1946).[2] After contextualizing the work historically, I focus on Handy's incorporation of advanced compositional resources in this imaginative and inventive work. The piece is an idiosyncratic and deconstructed blues with a wonderfully personal orchestrational sensibility, and the composition is free of many of the typical restrictions of jazz and blues forms.

George Handy in Context

George Handy burst onto the music scene in the mid-1940s in a stunning manner, surprising the big band world with an individualistic brand of experimentalism.[3] Handy's approach during this period makes him an important member of a small group of composers and arrangers—including Eddie Sauter (1914–1981), Pete Rugolo

[1] In this article, the term freelance musician refers to musicians who work for a number of employers in such fields as jazz, Broadway musical theater, recording (television and radio jingles, movie soundtracks, pop, etc.), single engagements (concerts, parties, weddings, corporate functions), pop music, etc.

[2] *The Bloos* (George Handy, 1946), released on *The Jazz Scene*, Mercury Records 2076, 1949, 78 rpm vinylite box set; reissued on Verve Records 314 521 661–2, 1994, compact disc. Recorded October 1946, Hollywood. Handy's title for this work was *Bloos*. His score indicates this, as does the BMI registration, as well as the publisher's registered title (Associated Music Publishers, Inc.). How and why the title was changed for the record is unknown to this author. Since the work is known through its inclusion on *The Jazz Scene*, I refer to the composition by its recorded title. *The Bloos* has rarely been publicly performed. On October 17, 2006, the Manhattan School of Music sponsored a concert devoted entirely to Handy's works and featuring performances by the school's Concert Jazz Band under the direction of Justin DiCioccio. The author, who curated the concert, served as narrator for the event, which featured a rare live performance of *The Bloos*. The piece has also been performed on three occasions in Amsterdam (including a performance in the Concertgebouw) by Werner Herbers's Ebony Band between 1996 and 1999.

[3] In his overview of Handy's works at this time, Barry Ulanov states that Handy "wrote scores that showed an astonishing growth beyond what he had been doing for the band in New York a year earlier. He had begun to write in earnest, utilizing his playing experience in his native city, New York, and his intensive pursuit of modern musical ideologies at New York University, The Juilliard School of Music, and in private lessons with Aaron Copland. The ideologies were omnipresent: there were echoes of Bartók and Stravinsky, rolled into captivating hollers, in his arrangements of *There's No You*, and *Out of this World*…. he was emerging as a jazz thinker of striking originality." Barry Ulanov, *A History of Jazz in America* (New York: The Viking Press, 1952), 309–10.

ISSN 1749–4060 print/1749–4079 online
DOI: 10.1080/17494060903152354

(1915-), Ralph Burns (1922–2001), Bob Graettinger (1923–1957), Gil Evans (1912–1988), and Gerry Mulligan (1927–1996)—working in what is generally referred to as a "modernist" or "progressive jazz" big band compositional style in the late 1930s through the 1950s. This style emphasized such advanced compositional resources as atonality or centricity in place of tonality,[4] metrical sophistication, and experimentation with form. In addition, it was not unusual for improvisation to play only a minor performance role in this music.[5]

From approximately 1945 to 1947, Handy was considered one of the top arrangers and composers in the jazz field. He received awards for best arranger from both *Down Beat* and *Metronome* magazines in 1946, and in 1947 he also received *Esquire* magazine's Silver Award for best arranger. During this period, he was primarily writing for the Boyd Raeburn Orchestra, an important but commercially unsuccessful band that combined progressive jazz arrangements and compositions alongside more standard dance-band music. After that time, except for brief periods of activity in the 1950s and 1960s, Handy largely disappeared from the music world almost as quickly as he had arrived. The collapse in his career as a composer and arranger partly demonstrates the normal vagaries of the music business, but this situation also reflects numerous difficulties in his personal life, and, perhaps most significantly, a life-long battle with substance abuse.[6] After this fall, he never returned to composition and arranging in an artistically significant manner. While active, however, his works were influential, and compositions such as *Dalvatore Sally* and *The Bloos* are still recognized by jazz-composition aficionados as seminal works in the progressive genre.

Musicians, critics, and scholars generally acknowledge Handy's artistic merit and importance as a postwar jazz modernist, yet in many ways he has remained in the shadow of other celebrated arrangers who also wrote for the Raeburn band, especially Burns, Johnny Mandel (1925-), and Johnny Richards (1911–1968), all of whom became extremely successful commercially. While not necessarily more important or progressive than these other writers, Handy nevertheless made a major contribution to the evolution of jazz composition by means of his incorporation of sophisticated harmonic and rhythmic devices, along with a willingness to move past traditional jazz compositional and arranging forms.[7] Perhaps because his mercurial career brought him in and out of the musical limelight so rapidly, this contribution has been over-

[4] Centricity is a term that describes music that focuses on a particular pitch, pitch class, pitch-class set, nonfunctional triad, etc. In place of functional harmony, such techniques as frequency of use, rhythmic or metric stress, and sustain create centricity. Composers such as Igor Stravinsky, Béla Bartók, and Anton Webern have each employed this technique.

[5] See Max Harrison, "Progressive Jazz," vol. 20, *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., eds. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), 402. See also Leonard Feather, *The Encyclopedia of Jazz* (London: Quartet Books, 1984), 349–50.

[6] Though Handy's creative period was relatively short, during this time he was quite productive, as is evidenced in the fact that he registered 73 compositions with BMI.

[7] See the following: Steven Strunk, "George Handy," vol. 2, *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, ed. Barry Kernfeld (London: Macmillan, 2002),148; Harrison, "Progressive Jazz"; Gunther Schuller, "Arrangement," vol. 1, *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, ed. Barry Kernfeld (London: Macmillan, 2002), 75–81; Gunther Schuller, "Third Stream," vol. 25, *New Grove Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed., eds. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), 401; Feather, *Encyclopedia of Jazz*, 349–50; Ulanov, *Jazz in America*, 309–10.

looked and is in need of re-evaluation. Such an examination is the purpose of the research and analysis reflected in this article, as I investigate a wide range of issues to better understand Handy's music and his place in the world of jazz writing.[8]

It is challenging to assess Handy's influence on other jazz composers, as the number of composers and performers who had contact with him and his music is relatively small. In addition, Handy was such an individualist and iconoclast that direct influences upon or from him are difficult to trace. Perhaps his work lingers not as a direct influence, but rather as a tantalizing and inspirational notion that allows for the articulation of a personal musical vision and the creation of compositions free from genre restrictions. I posit that Handy's free and individualistic spirit, and the fierceness of his independence, is perhaps his greatest legacy. He inspired a group of composers—many of whom have spoken of Handy reverently—that went on to create a significant repertory of important jazz compositions.

Handy's early listening focused largely on contemporary classical composers. He states that "discovering Stravinsky was a big thing for me," as was listening to Ravel and Bartók.[9] Handy closely studied these composers' works, and also spent time developing a large classical piano repertoire which he could play from memory for hours on end (he had perfect pitch and an outstanding musical memory).[10] This is significant, as the study of twentieth-century art music composers, and the incorporation of compositional techniques garnered from this study, is at the heart of much of the "progressive" movement in jazz composition. In connection with this, it is interesting to note that a number of important jazz composers from this period had studied in universities and conservatories—as well as privately—with important twentieth-century art music composers.[11] This connection is one important element that distinguishes much of the progressive jazz repertoire from the jazz compositions that precede it. (This is of course a fertile topic for another paper.) As a result of his personal studies and his professional work in the jazz field, Handy drew from an unusually wide palette of compositional sources and techniques, particularly for a jazz composer working in the 1940s and 1950s. He continued to mine these sources throughout the various stages of his career.

In addition, several consistent elements in Handy's music are particularly responsible for his highly recognizable style. Handy had an unusual approach to chords, and chromatic voice leading dominates many of his harmonic progressions. In conjunction

[8] For a more complete discussion of Handy and his music, see Benjamin Bierman, "The Music of George Handy" (Ph.D. diss., The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, 2006). An earlier version of this article was published as "George Handy's *Bloos*" in *The Institute for Studies in American Music Newsletter* 36, no. 1 (Fall 2006). (The *Newsletter* is now titled *American Music Review*.)

[9] "George Handy Oral History," interview by Bill Schremp, 1980, Oral History Project transcript, the Institute of Jazz Studies, John Cotton Dana Library, Rutgers University, Newark ("IJS"), 8.

[10] Hal McKusick, telephone interview by the author, June 29, 2005, New York. Eddie Caine, telephone interview by the author, June 30, 2005, New York.

[11] For example, George Handy attended New York University and The Juilliard School and studied with Aaron Copland; Ralph Burns studied at the New England Conservatory; Eddie Sauter studied at both Columbia University and The Juilliard School; Johnny Richards received a master's degree from University of Southern California, where he studied with Arnold Schoenberg; Russell Garcia attended San Francisco State College (now University) and also studied privately with Ernest Krenek; and Pete Rugolo also attended San Francisco State College and studied privately with Darius Milhaud.

with this smooth voice leading, interval class 1, (e.g., minor-seconds, major-sevenths, and minor-ninths), is an essential element.[12] Semitones are crucial to Handy's style, both melodically (as a melodic motive) and harmonically (as a source of resolution, in place of the dominant to tonic relationship); major-sevenths are used to create both consonance (as a chord tone in a variety of inversions) and dissonance (as open intervals in exposed passages); and the dissonance and resolution of minor-ninths are vital compositional elements. As a result, though Handy's music is comprised of elements that are traditionally associated with tonality (such as triadic harmony and harmonic progressions), it is nonetheless frequently difficult to identify a key or centric area.

Biography

George Handy was born in Brownsville, Brooklyn, in 1920. His neighborhood friends included such high-profile musicians as vibraphonist Terry Gibbs, tenor sax players Al Cohn and Frank Socolow, and drummer Tiny Kahn. Beyond a primary education, his academic career also included short and unsatisfying studies at The Juilliard School and New York University, as well as private composition lessons with Aaron Copland. Handy's feelings about his formal classical studies are amusingly summed up in his comments for the liner notes of *The Jazz Scene*, the 1949 record set that included a recording of the premiere performance of *The Bloos*: "Studied privately with Aaron Copland for a while, which did neither of us any good."[13]

Some of Handy's important early work as a performer was with bandleader Raymond Scott, trombonist Jack Teagarden, and cornetist Muggsy Spanier. Handy also wrote arrangements for Scott and Teagarden, and vibraphonist Lionel Hampton had some early Handy charts in his book. However, the most significant professional association of his career was with the Boyd Raeburn Orchestra, and he notably produced the majority of his important compositions during his tenure with this ensemble. Handy was with this band as pianist, primary composer and arranger, and musical director, for two one-year stints (1944–1946), which were separated by a six-month hiatus that allowed him to concentrate on songwriting in Hollywood for Capitol Records and the music division of Paramount Studios.

Though he was primarily a bandleader, Raeburn played the saxophone as well (predominantly the baritone and bass saxes). He had commercial bands as early as 1933, when he began by playing middle-of-the-road popular music for Chicago hotels. The character of his repertoire changed dramatically though around 1943 when both Eddie Finckel and Ralph Flanagan joined the band. The arrangements they wrote—and

[12] Interval class is an abstract method of grouping a family of intervals. Each interval class contains many pitch intervals. Intervals larger than an octave are considered equivalent to their counterparts within the octave (e.g., the interval of C4-Db5, a minor ninth, is equivalent to C4-Db4, a minor second, and both are interval class 1). Also, within an octave, intervals larger than a tritone are considered equivalent to their inversions (e.g., C4-B4, a major seventh, is equivalent to C4-B3, a minor second, and again both are considered interval class 1). For a more thorough explanation of interval class, see: Joseph N. Straus, *Introduction to Post Tonal Theory*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson-Prentice Hall, 2005), 10–15; and Stefan Kostka, *Materials and Techniques of Twentieth-Century Music*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson-Prentice Hall, 2006), 186–188.

[13] Norman Granz, liner notes to *The Jazz Scene*, n. p.

the influence they wielded over new personnel hires—transformed the Raeburn band from an undistinguished dance orchestra to a dynamic and experimental jazz big band.

Raeburn's mid-1940s band had a certain degree of success, but it had commercial difficulties in rising above the second rank. Musicians, however, thought well of the band, and there was positive critical reaction to the orchestra as well. The Raeburn orchestra was a white band, but a number of African American instrumental stars played with the group when it was in New York City, including Roy Eldridge, Oscar Pettiford, Benny Harris, Trummy Young, and Charlie Parker. In addition, trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie's composition, *Interlude* (which would eventually be called *A Night In Tunisia*, and was one of Gillespie's biggest hits), was first recorded by Raeburn, and this performance featured Gillespie as soloist. Other instrumentalists who were to go on to jazz stardom were regulars with the band, such as Serge Chaloff, Shelly Manne, and Al Cohn. Aside from these budding jazz stars though, the biggest attraction of the band was the alto saxophonist Johnny Bothwell (who was at times dubbed "the white Johnny Hodges," after Duke Ellington's well-known lead alto player).

After becoming disenchanted with songwriting in Hollywood, Handy rejoined the Raeburn band in June 1945. At this point, Raeburn's pianist had been injured during an engagement at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco, and saxophonist Hal McKusick and Johnny Mandel (who played trombone in the band and also contributed arrangements) convinced a reluctant Raeburn to rehire Handy.[14] Handy recalls:

> I went back and rejoined the band and he wanted a chart on *There's No You* and I sat down and I can't tell you what happened but there was a click in my life, something clicked, all the fences went down and I could see, my horizon was limitless, I could write anything I wanted anytime.[15]

This moment was a major turning point for Handy, and it marks the beginning of the most productive and important part of his compositional career. Before even beginning to arrange "There's No You," Handy realized he had crossed a barrier, and he felt great artistic freedom. Handy recounts that when the band played the chart, the musicians were surprised, and that "everyone was delighted."[16] This belief is echoed by saxophonist Hal McKusick, who recalls being shocked and amazed by what Handy had produced. McKusick states that he and Johnny Mandel (who sat in the trombone section, directly behind McKusick) both felt that the world was changing right before their eyes. McKusick states "we were enthralled," and he recalls saying to himself, "This is it; period. And we are a part of it. How much nicer can it get than this; and then it did. It was a new music, a new expression."[17] Handy states that after arranging "There's No You," many of his most important compositions, such as *Dalvatore Sally*, *Yerxa*, *Gray Suede, Special Maid*, *Hey Look I'm Dancing*, and *Key F* (*Keef*) "just poured out of me at that point."[18]

[14] McKusick, telephone interview, June 29, 2005.
[15] See Schremp, "Handy Oral History," 98–99.
[16] Ibid., 101.
[17] McKusick, telephone interview by the author, February 2, 2006, New York.
[18] See Schremp, "Handy Oral History," 101.

This final stint with Raeburn, from approximately June 1945 through July or August 1946, was the apex of George Handy's career, and, correspondingly, the high point of the Raeburn orchestra's existence. It was a dramatic encounter, as Handy burst back onto the scene with an entirely new conception and musical freedom, briefly thrusting him and the Raeburn band into the forefront of the jazz scene and the progressive compositional movement. This period is largely responsible for Handy's reputation as a composer and arranger. The relationship between Handy and Raeburn was complicated, however.

Raeburn had at least two important reasons for regularly relying upon his various music directors to determine the band's musical direction: (1) he was extremely busy with the Herculean task of keeping a big band afloat; and (2), while Raeburn was an instrumentalist, he was also aware of his musical limitations.[19] He appreciated what Handy's arrangements and compositions brought to the band, and thus Raeburn gave Handy great freedom while also lauding him in the press.[20] That said, Raeburn appears to have quickly changed his opinion of Handy's worth to the band as the bandleader and his backers began to doubt the commercial viability of the band under Handy's musical stewardship.[21] Johnny Richards, an excellent and important arranger, took over the musical director job after Handy left, but, for a variety of reasons, the band began a downward slide and eventually trickled into obscurity.

In 1946, Handy was a bright light in the jazz-arranging world as a result of his writing for Raeburn, yet it seems as if he did not fully appreciate the value of the musical opportunities that Raeburn had provided him. Handy generally seems to have been bitter and angry when he spoke about Raeburn. Perhaps Handy's success went to his head a bit, and he may have had an unrealistic expectation of where his career could go outside of the Raeburn band. Consequently, the tension between the two men ultimately drove

[19] For example, Raeburn was quoted as saying, "For a musician idiot, I've got a great band!" Allen Scott, "Rediscovering Boyd Raeburn," *Radio Free Jazz*, July 1979, 13–14. For perspective on Raeburn's musical limitations and positive attributes, as well as the history of the Raeburn band, see J. Lee Anderson, "Boyd Watching," *Mississippi Rag*, January 1992, 1–8.

[20] As an example of this, Raeburn stated that "George Handy is writing the greatest music being written today. There's simply no one like him." Raeburn goes on to compare Handy's writing and the band's repertoire with contemporary classical music when he adds: "The stuff we are playing is modern classical music in 4/4 tempo. I agree with Hindemith's theories; his music and the music of guys like Stravinsky and Shostakovich emphasize exciting new sounds. Listen to 'Boyd Meets Stravinsky' and 'Dalvador [sic] Sally' and things like that. You'll see what I mean." In Auriel Macfie, "Boyd Cage Opens," *Hollywood Note*, May 1946, 4.

[21] In an article regarding Raeburn's new band under Johnny Richards's musical direction, Raeburn is said to have noted that *Down Beat*'s criticism of the band's recent record (with Handy as musical director) "for lack of continuity and too much reliance on effect" was correct. In addition, Raeburn was quoted as saying: "A lot of George's scores would sail along real wonderfully and then for no reason or to justify some of the things the clique around him told him, he would throw in effects that were not only pretentious but detracted from the music." See "'We'll Win With Right Kind of Music'—Boyd," *Down Beat*, date unknown (ca. 1946), 3. Around the same time, Raeburn continued to distance himself from the Handy era as he promoted his new band. Raeburn said, "Probably without knowing it, the people who condemned my last band were right. They weren't interested in experimentation—all they knew was that the band didn't add up. My band today is danceable…. And no matter what is going on underneath, we don't distort the melody!" See Dixon Gayer, "Comes the Revolution," publication, date, and page number unknown (ca. 1947). Both of these articles were found in the Boyd Raeburn clippings file at the IJS.

them apart, and it appears that a money issue was the final blow that led to Handy permanently leaving the band.[22]

Across his 1945–1946 creative apex, Handy wrote the majority of his seminal instrumental works, such as *Dalvatore Sally*, *Tonsillectomy*, and *Yerxa*, as well as some experimental and creative vocal compositions and arrangements, including "Forgetful," "I Can't Believe That You're in Love With Me," "I Don't Know Why," and "Temptation," amazingly quickly. Again, the importance of these works to the progressive jazz movement (and jazz in general) is difficult to pinpoint, but Handy's influence is perhaps best demonstrated by the interest shown in his compositions by other major period proponents of this style.

During Raeburn's Palace Hotel engagement, the bandleader Stan Kenton notably directed his musicians (who were also in San Francisco at the time) to attend Raeburn's rehearsals, as he felt that Handy's writing was leading jazz composition in a new direction.[23] Kenton's chief composer and arranger, Pete Rugolo (one of the more important of the "progressive" composers), was regularly present at these rehearsals and took notes while listening to the Raeburn band.[24] Kenton also commissioned a composition by Handy, but the work was never completed (or was perhaps lost or discarded).[25]

A similarly intense interest in Handy's work spread across the big band jazz community. The arranger-composer Eddie Sauter, who was writing important modernist compositions before and after Handy's sudden rise to fame, spoke openly of being envious of the compositional opportunities that Raeburn gave to Handy. Sauter describes never having had that kind of artistic independence, even with his own later band, the Sauter-Finegan Orchestra.[26] Tadd Dameron, an important composer and arranger of this period, cited Handy as one of his favorite arrangers.[27] Likewise, Duke Ellington thought highly enough of the Raeburn band to offer his financial assistance during a time of fiscal crisis, as did the singer and bandleader Billy Eckstine.[28]

Johnny Mandel, one of the premier arrangers and composers in jazz from the 1950s forward, speaks of Handy in wildly laudatory terms. At the same time, he expresses great frustration when he thinks about what could have been had Handy not been so badly addicted to drugs. Mandel describes Handy as being both ahead of everyone else writing at that time and as "extraordinarily gifted." Indeed, he claims that Handy was "definitely in the genius category. He was tremendous." When asked about important influences on Handy, Mandel remarked that "I can't think of any influences he might have had. He didn't sound like anybody else." Mandel adds that Handy was highly

[22] This is conjecture but is based upon my interpretation of various printed sources, Handy's oral history, phone conversations with Handy's colleagues (cited throughout this article), as well as a phone conversation with Boyd Raeburn's son, Bruce Raeburn, the curator of Tulane University's Hogan Jazz Archives (Bruce Raeburn, telephone interview by the author, January 14, 2008, New York).

[23] See Schremp, "Handy Oral History," 102–3.

[24] See Ira Gitler, *Jazz Masters of the 1940s* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1984), 211.

[25] Caine, telephone interview.

[26] See "Eddie Sauter Oral History, interview by Bill Kirchner," 1980, Oral History Project transcript, the IJS, 74–75.

[27] See Gitler, *Jazz Masters*, 275–76.

[28] Bruce Raeburn, "My Dad's Band," liner notes for Boyd Raeburn, *Boyd Raeburn and His Orchestra, 1944–45*, Circle 113, 1944, LP; reissued as Circle 113, 1995, compact disc.

respected by his contemporaries, and that younger writers—such as himself—were inspired by Handy's unique creativity.[29] Mandel also notably distinguishes Handy from Pete Rugolo, Bill Russo, and most of the others who wrote for Kenton's progressive bands of the late 1940s and early 1950s. He argues that the Kenton arrangers overintellectualized the process of composing, whereas Handy was more loosely creative and more interested in keeping the band swinging.[30]

When Handy spoke of his own music and his place in the music world, he appears to have had a very open mind about all styles and periods, and did not seem to make a habit of comparing himself to others or of criticizing the work of other arranger-composers. In fact, nothing in my research indicates that Handy had any kind of musico-political agenda, or that he was consciously reacting to, or against, older, or different, styles of music in his compositions. In fact, as he looked back on his career in an interview from 1980, he spoke fondly of the older style of musicians that he had played with. (Evidence of his open views on older jazz idioms can be seen, for instance, in his reminiscences of his time performing with Jack Teagarden.[31]) In sum, in the mid-1940s, Handy was primarily concerned with advancing his own writing and his career, and he seems to have paid little attention to any musical controversies of the day that may have been swirling around him.

The Bloos

Handy's 1945–1946 wellspring in productivity was capped by a major recording project that served as a bookend to his Raeburn tenure. Somewhere in this same period, the famous producer Norman Granz (1918–2001) commissioned Handy to write a composition for one of the most artistically ambitious recording projects ever undertaken in jazz, the multi-record, multi-artist album *The Jazz Scene*, which was produced by Granz and ultimately released in 1949. For this commission, Handy was given *carte blanche*—as was true for the album's other artists—in regards to content and instrumentation. Handy responded with a rich composition, *The Bloos*, which was written for an expanded jazz big band with strings and woodwinds. Though it is not clear whether Handy wrote *The Bloos* while he was still with Raeburn, the composition was recorded in October 1946, just shortly after Handy had left the Raeburn band. Handy's contribution to *The Jazz Scene* displays him at the peak of his creativity. *The Bloos* rates—along with *Dalvatore Sally*—among his most well-known compositions, and this work is arguably his most important composition for big band. While *The Jazz Scene* seems to have only received a limited amount of critical attention, these few reviews appeared in influential jazz magazines like *Down Beat*.[32]

[29] Johnny Mandel, telephone interview by the author, July 11, 2005, New York.
[30] I agree with Mandel's assessment.
[31] Handy enjoyed working with Teagarden and loved Teagarden as a player. Handy states that Teagarden's opening number, "Got a Right to Sing the Blues," gave him "a warm feeling every night." See Schremp, "Handy Oral History," 55.
[32] Two examples of reviews for *The Jazz Scene* are Michael Levin, "Calls 'Jazz Scene' Most Remarkable Album Ever," *Down Beat*, January 1950, 14, and Paul Bacon, "One Man's Panorama," *Record Changer*, February 1950, 14.
[32] Granz, *The Jazz Scene*, n. p.

As such, because of the critical recognition of the importance of *The Jazz Scene* as a key document of contemporary jazz trends, Handy's reputation as one of the most important and adventurous arrangers of the day was further solidified by his inclusion in this record set.

Granz was an ambitious and artistically-, commercially-, and socially-conscious music promoter.[33] He is perhaps best known for his successful and innovative work as a concert promoter and record producer, especially the long-running, popular touring jam-session-as-concert franchise he created, Jazz at the Philharmonic ("JATP"). Where JATP was conceived to have a wide appeal and to be a commercially viable franchise, *The Jazz Scene* was Granz's self-financed gift to the jazz world and was strictly intended for a more limited audience of jazz aficionados.[34] The players and composers were each given one side of a 12-inch, 78-rpm disc (roughly five-plus minutes recording time) to record whatever they chose, without commercial considerations or artistic limitations. The artists were equally free to choose the instrumentation of the session and their side musicians, without restrictions on the size of the ensemble or the studio time needed to record. Granz's objective for the overall project was to create a snapshot of the most important jazz being played and written in the late 1940s. In Granz's original liner notes for *The Jazz Scene*, he stated that his intention was "to get the artists best illustrating today's jazz scene to record the essence of themselves musically."[35]

The album includes compositions and performances by some of the most distinguished names in jazz of the early postwar period. In addition to George Handy, contributing composers included Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn, Ralph Burns, and Neal Hefti. The featured instrumental performers included Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins, Charlie Parker, Bud Powell, Nat Cole, Buddy Rich, Machito and his orchestra, Flip Phillips, and Willie "The Lion" Smith.

The recording sessions (held in several studios, both in Los Angeles and New York) took place sporadically, beginning in 1946. The final product, released in 1949 on Mercury Records, is a high-quality, limited edition folio (5,000, all numbered and signed) of six twelve-inch, 78-rpm "vinylite" records, encased in a simple cloth-bound

[33] Along with his desire to promote jazz as a business, Granz was politically motivated to battle racial discrimination in the jazz field. He also saw jazz as a powerful political tool to be used to promote better race relations in society. One manner in which Granz expressed his political and artistic agenda was through three contractual obligations that he insisted upon for his famous Jazz at the Philharmonic productions: proper remuneration for the musicians; no dancing at the concerts; and no racial segregation on the bandstand or in the audience. See Arthur Knight, "*Jammin' the Blues*, or the Sight of Jazz," in *Representing Jazz*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 26. In a letter to a number of important bandleaders, Granz also encouraged others to follow his lead regarding the contractual demand for a desegregated environment for the presentation of jazz. See David Stowe, *Swing Changes: Big-Band Jazz in New Deal America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 236.

[34] In his review of *The Jazz Scene*, Michael Levin underscores Granz's personal commitment to the project by noting that the expenses for the multi-record set exceeded twelve-thousand dollars, and that the project could, at best, break even. Levin, "Remarkable Album."

[35] Granz, *The Jazz Scene*, n. p.

hard cover with a ring binding that allows any item to be detached.[36] Each record is sheathed separately and is accompanied by both an art-quality photo of the featured artist and a liner-note profile by Granz. The photography is by the well-known French photographer, Gjon Mili (who then worked for *Life* magazine), and the folio concludes with sixteen additional album-sized photos of other prominent jazz musicians. The illustrator David Stone Martin also contributed artwork. The folio sold for the premium price of 25 dollars (approximately 220 dollars in 2009, adjusted for inflation).

Granz and Mili had previously collaborated on another important project that sought to document and promote the artfulness of jazz and jazz culture. Through his connections and resources as a film editor for MGM Studios, Granz coordinated "the first notable jazz documentary," *Jammin' the Blues*.[37] Directed by Mili, *Jammin' the Blues* is a ten-minute jazz-themed film short that features artfully-filmed, live jazz performances by Lester Young, Harry Edison, Illinois Jacquet, Sid Catlett, Jo Jones, Red Callender, and Barney Kessel. The film was critically acclaimed as "one of the few honest motion pictures about jazz,"[38] and it notably received an Academy Award nomination.

In many ways, as a personal statement about the art of jazz, *Jammin' the Blues* is a precursor to *The Jazz Scene*, as each was conceived as a high-minded project that attempted to uplift and broaden the public perception of jazz by exhibiting it as both high art and entertainment, while additionally presenting the musicians in a highly respectful manner. Political goals also bind these two projects, for both document jazz as an African American art form presented in a racially mixed artistic environment. In a recent essay on the film, the film studies scholar Arthur Knight discusses the political ramifications of the documentary. Knight notably states that "*Jammin' the Blues* functions as the first national advertisement for … oppositional inclusion and progressive consumerism."[39] I argue that Mili's approach in *Jammin' the Blues*, as well as this project's social and political goals, inspired Granz to further represent the current state of jazz through the combination of music and photography in *The Jazz Scene*.

In the original liner notes for the record folio, Granz states that "we intend to make *The Jazz Scene* a yearly affair presenting new jazz stars as they appear."[40] Despite this optimistic statement, because of the increased competition in the jazz record business, as well as general contractual difficulties, Granz's plans for a yearly release did not come to fruition.[41] Also, after the release of *The Jazz Scene*, Granz became a much more active record producer, which lessened his desire—as well as his sense of urgency, perhaps—to continue a series of representative samplers of the "jazz scene."[42]

---

[36] As the twelve-inch format was generally reserved for classical music, the obvious intent of using this record size—beyond the benefit of extended recording time—was to present jazz with an equally high level of artistic integrity. See Brian Priestley, liner notes to *The Jazz Scene*, Verve Records reissue, n. p.

[37] Chuck Berg, "Jazz and Film and Television," in *The Oxford Companion to Jazz*, ed. Bill Kirchner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 718.

[38] Whitney Balliett, *The Sound of Surprise* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1978), 6.

[39] Knight, *Jammin' the Blues*, 37.

[40] Granz, *The Jazz Scene*, n. p.

[41] A number of artists that Granz would have liked to include in this project were unable to take part because of various record label commitments. Tad Hershorn, "Let Freedom Swing" (an unpublished manuscript, 2005), 264.

[42] Priestley, *The Jazz Scene*, n. p.

For his contribution to *The Jazz Scene*, Handy took the commission seriously enough to write an entirely new work for an ambitiously extended big band.[43] Moreover, as was his custom, he appears to have written the piece rather quickly.[44] He was, after all, one of the country's top arrangers at the time and he was riding a wave of critical success.[45] Alternately, this commission might have been just one more gig for Handy in a long line of writing projects. Regardless, *The Bloos* turned out to have been Handy's last major work for full (or extended) big band. Coming at the end of both his tenure with Raeburn and his greatest period of commercial and artistic success, *The Bloos* could be seen as his crowning big band composition.[46]

As noted, Handy was allowed to choose any instrumentation for this Granz project without any commercial restraints. Handy recalled that Granz had said "I want to give each of you people a side on the twelve-inch record, carte blanche. If you want fifty men, fifty violins, a symphony, you've got it. If you want to … just sit at the piano, you've got it."[47] An excellent band was at Handy's disposal, as arranger Ralph Burns had already assembled a fourteen-piece ensemble—for an earlier session the same day—to record his own contribution, *Introspection*, for the Granz project. Burns's group consisted largely of members (or veterans) of Woody Herman's big band, as Burns was just coming off a long stint as Herman's primary arranger.[48] Handy further augmented this band to 27 players, as shall be discussed below.[49]

---

[43] Not all the compositions performed on the record set were written specifically for *The Jazz Scene* project.

[44] The manuscript has the distinctive look of the professional arranger: quickly rendered, yet clear. There are a number of typical shorthand techniques used in the manuscript, such as those referring to already composed sections to be repeated verbatim. When I look at the score, I sense quick decisions being made confidently. The fact that sections Handy was dissatisfied with were not changed or edited tends to support this (to be discussed during the analysis section). Further, Handy was known to have been a swift composer and arranger. Hal McKusick spoke of copying manuscripts for Handy as the composer wrote. While working through the night, they could complete two full charts (meaning both score and parts), all the while collaborating on a pastel drawing. McKusick, telephone interview, June 29, 2005. The autograph score resides in the George Handy Archives, a collection in the IJS. I am indebted to Tad Hershorn and Annie Kuebler, respectively, for bringing the collection to my attention and for archiving the many items in the collection, as well as for their support of this project.

[45] Success is of course a relative term, but Handy was steadily employed, was winning awards, was being lauded in the press, and musicians were excited about his music.

[46] In his article on jazz composition practices in this era, Doug Ramsey states that "*The Bloos* for Norman Granz's *The Jazz Scene* (Verve) album of 1949 was his last masterpiece." Doug Ramsey, "Big Bands and Jazz Composing and Arranging After World War II," in *The Oxford Companion to Jazz*, 407.

[47] Schremp, "Handy Oral History," 231.

[48] The liner notes for the album list three violins and one cello, but the instrumentation was actually the reverse. A source confirms that Harry Bluestone played violin (Levin, "Remarkable Album"), so I am surmising that the other string players all played cello. No alto sax was used, and according to Hal McKusick, he played the clarinet while Klee played flute. Hal McKusick, telephone interview, February 2, 2006.

[49] The instrumentation of *The Bloos* is described as being for 28 players in the liner notes for the record set. The twenty-eighth part on the autograph score is labeled "Piano 2," but this set of staves appears to be a conductor's part. I posit that Handy conducted rather than played. In the liner notes to the *Jazz Scene*, the listed personnel for the ensemble of "George Handy and His Orchestra" are: Jules Jacobs (oboe); Robert Swanson (bassoon); Arthur Fleming (contra bassoon); Harry Klee (flute); Hal McKusick (clarinet); Herbie Steward, Lucky Thompson (tenor saxes); Chuck Gentry (baritone sax); Conrad Gozzo, Sonny Berman, Pete Candoli, Al Killian, Dale Pearce (trumpets); Vincent DeRosa, Evan Vail (horns); Bill Harris, Ed Kusby, Ollie Wilson (trombones); Jackie Mills, Jimmy Pratt, Don Lamond (percussion); Harry Bluestone (violin); Robert Jamison, Carl Walker, Arthur Krafton (cellos); Arvin Garrison (guitar); Red Callender (bass); Dodo Marmarosa (piano); and George Handy (conductor).

The five-hour recording session for *The Bloos* must have been grueling, especially considering that the band had recorded Burns's piece earlier in the day.[50] This composition, characterized by Doug Ramsey as "breathtakingly difficult and very funny,"[51] seems to have taxed the highly skilled band's abilities. While the subsequent Handy recording is very well-played in general, and while it has a spirited and exciting quality, there are sections that are notably not correctly performed. The expanded 1994 Verve reissue of *The Jazz Scene* (which expands the original 12 recordings of the 1949 release to 38 tracks over two compact discs) provides added insight into the work and the recording process, as it includes an alternate take of *The Bloos*.[52]

In Handy's case, the freedom Granz allowed the artists regarding instrumentation also extended to his liner-note profile. In the original liner notes for *The Jazz Scene*, Granz writes,

> In all of these short profiles about the artists and the music set to record, I've attempted to give some sort of an insight into the man's inner character, and how this character is manifested in the music the man produces. Thus, when I started the descriptive sketches, I asked each man to send me pertinent information about himself. Occasionally, a man's description of himself hits the mark. George Handy sent me a short note which was so succinctly perfect in explaining his music, his attitude about the world around him, that I'm reprinting it in lieu of my writing my [own] impression of him; I couldn't improve it. It explains, at least in part, the bitterness, the confusion, the groping, and the solid musicianship in all of his music. Here it is: "Born in Brooklyn in 1920. Schools—Erasmus High, N.Y.U., Juilliard. Studied privately with Aaron Copland for awhile which did neither of us any good. Raeburn, Babe Russin, Alvino Rey, Buddy Rich, Benny Goodman are some of the bands I've written for. None of them play anything of mine now. Only thing worth while [sic] in my life is my wife Flo and my son Mike. The rest stinks including the music biz and all connected. I'm still living. George Handy." When we did the record date, Handy told me that he was tired of everyone doing the blues in the same, conventional way. He said he'd do something different with them. Even his title is wryly different–it's called *The Bloos*.[53]

Handy's comments, presumably written approximately three years after the recording session, present a stark reality. The speed with which Handy went from the zenith of the music business (at the time of the recording in 1946) to a seemingly embittered and under-employed musician (around the time of the release of the record set in 1949) is remarkable (as was his quick rise to the top). The pathos of this personal and professional slide becomes even greater when one also learns that even "the only thing worth while in [Handy's] life" would soon turn sour after the release of *The Jazz Scene*, eventually resulting in Handy's divorce from his wife, Flo, and his estrangement from his children.[54]

[50] Hershorn, "Let Freedom Swing," 266.
[51] Ramsey, "Big Bands," 407.
[52] *The Jazz Scene*, Verve Records reissue.
[53] Granz, *The Jazz Scene*, n. p.
[54] George and Flo Handy also had two other children, Danna and Peter.

Though there was little critical reaction to either *The Jazz Scene* or to *The Bloos*, the available reviews are favorable to both. For instance, in his review for *Down Beat* magazine, Michael Levin called *The Jazz Scene* "the most remarkable record album ever issued."[55] Levin also speaks highly of *The Bloos*, but beyond some brief descriptions of the music, his discussion is primarily built around his opinion that the work is "a brilliantly sustained job of satire," and that *The Bloos* "is a raw commentary on what George Handy thinks of the gentry who keep leaning on the blues for musical assistance in composition."[56] Judging from Handy's own comments (seen below in this essay's discussion of the work's orchestration), as well as from my own impressions of the music, I do not agree with Levin's assessment, and I feel that the work is an expression of Handy's impressions of the blues rather than a commentary or satire of how other arrangers/composers have approached this genre.

As implied in Levin's review, common reactions to Handy's music by listeners and critics alike routinely include characterizations such as "humorous," "satirical," "ironic," and "tongue-in-cheek." Such character traits certainly play an important role in some Handy compositions, and the humorous aspects of his works naturally need to be acknowledged and appreciated. In his oral history, for example, Handy does say that he hears humor in his music, but he also states that he hears anger.[57] He does not mention, however, the particular importance of these elements in any of his pieces, including *The Bloos*.

During my research interviews, musicians who knew Handy and played his music did not emphasize such "humorous" qualities. They generally concentrate on heaping high praise upon him for writing a type of music that was fresh and wildly exciting for the time. For instance, Paul Bacon praises the collection as a whole (while disparaging the original price of *The Jazz Scene*), and he characterizes *The Bloos* as an "intense, nervous abstraction of the blues."[58] His description of Handy is just as colorful (and accurate): "George Handy is an agonized character with a frightening personal history and a peculiar musical reputation; he has followers as devoted as the Apostles, and he is considered, by a lot of other people, to be a writer of movie-type trivia."[59] This latter criticism perhaps stems from Handy's tendency to move quickly from theme to theme. Though *The Bloos* is an example of this, and the numerous themes can initially seem disparate and unrelated, the overall episodic design of the composition flows well from one idea to the next. The work is approximately four-minutes and fifty-seconds long, but—because of the multi-thematic nature of the piece—it has the feel of a longer composition with a distinct and varied series of events. This is a trademark of Handy's writing, though it is less evident in his later, more "classically"-oriented works (such as *The Caine Flute Sonata* and his saxophone quartets).

The work begins with an AABA melodic statement in 6/8 (a more detailed discussion of the form follows in the orchestration section below). The A sections feature a bluesy

[55] Levin, "Remarkable Album."
[56] Ibid.
[57] Schremp, "Handy Oral History," 44.
[58] Bacon, "One Man's Panorama."
[59] Ibid.

oboe melody, while the B section contrasts a disguised version of this melodic statement in a full-throated passage by the entire orchestra featuring the trumpets screaming in their upper register. This AABA statement is followed by a driving, syncopated, off-kilter section that employs the brass, saxophones, and percussion. This texture involves a melodically static eighth-note figure, still in 6/8, with powerful and unpredictable accents. This pattern is broken up though by a series of rapid, scalar, alternating flurries in the woodwinds, strings, and brass, which in turn impart a meter-less quality that contrasts strongly with the previous figure. This section is then repeated. A subsequent short string interlude leads into a slow, lyrical violin cadenza, which in turn is followed by a ballad-style, composed trombone solo and cadenza (played by Bill Harris) in 4/4. A brief reprise of the driving, accented 6/8 figure closes this latter section, and the work then transitions to two improvised tenor sax solo choruses over a twelve-bar blues (played by Herbie Steward). The number then closes with a restatement of the opening oboe melody.

Orchestration

Because of the freedom accorded the commissioned composers for *The Jazz Scene*, Handy had the rare opportunity to employ any number of instruments he might desire for his composition. As a big band composer-arranger, Handy built the core of his ensemble from a standard instrumentation of trumpets, trombones, reeds, and rhythm section. Handy did take advantage of his freedom, however, in that he augmented this ensemble with strings, woodwinds, horns, and additional percussionists, yet he was economical in these choices.

The make-up of the string section for *The Bloos* recording is highly unusual. Handy chose to use a bottom-heavy string quartet, consisting of one violin and three cellos. He also incorporated an expanded woodwind quintet of flute, clarinet, oboe, bassoon, contrabassoon, and two horns. In essence, Handy created a chamber ensemble within the confines of a big band. The addition of this colorful, yet somewhat delicate, inner ensemble demands a careful deployment of resources. In order to integrate them effectively, they must not be subsumed by the much louder and heavier big band texture.

In the aforementioned 1980 interview, Handy discussed the compositional content and his orchestrational choices for *The Bloos*:

> Coincidentally with Norman making me this offer, I had been thinking about a composition dealing with what I felt were many of the blues feelings or forms, many of the essences of blues, and I wanted to put all these things in one composition and it seemed to me in the colors that I saw that I would need the instrumentation that I decided on. It was just a feeling that this three cello sound was important to me and I didn't feel that I needed more than one violin for what I heard, for what I required. That's how it came about.[60]

Handy's deployment of fine orchestral detail and colorful combinations of timbres was certainly not unprecedented. By 1946, Duke Ellington had long since set the

[60] Schremp, "Handy Oral History," 233–34.

standard for this fine art in the big band context. Bill Challis and Ferde Grofé, for Paul Whiteman's expanded big band in the 1920s, Eddie Sauter, for Red Norvo and Benny Goodman in the 1930s and 1940s, and the big bands of Tommy Dorsey, Earl Hines, and Artie Shaw also carefully combined their orchestrational resources in unusual and colorful ways. By 1946, however, in the field of jazz composition there was little precedent for *The Bloos* in regard to its combination of modernist tendencies and the smooth integration of an unusually disparate instrumentation.[61] The influential Charlie Parker "with strings" experiments (which also included Julius Jacobs, the oboist who played on *The Bloos*) were not begun until 1947, with the majority of these sessions being recorded in 1949. Kenton's 40-piece Innovations in Modern Music Orchestra was formed in 1950, and Bob Graettinger's final version of his extended modernist work (with an expanded orchestration), *City of Glass*, was written for, and recorded by, Kenton in 1951.[62]

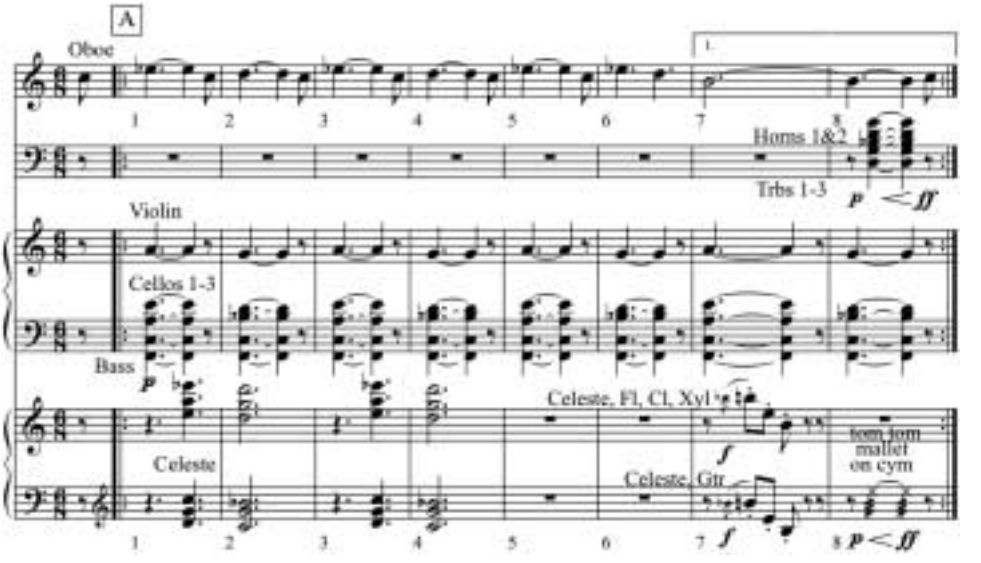
The instrumentation and orchestration of *The Bloos* are two of the more important and salient aspects of this work. In this piece, Handy manages to coalesce his interests in both jazz and classical music into a very personal and unique musical statement. Though his late works for saxophone quartet and the *Caine Flute Sonata* (1955) have a similar crossover quality (to be discussed below), these compositions are written for ensembles commonly found in the classical world. For this reason, *The Bloos* is perhaps Handy's most successful synthesis of his various influences within the confines of a big-band jazz composition. The composer and jazz historian Gunther Schuller notably cites *The Bloos* as one of six key examples (from 1933–1956) of a style "in which attempts were made to fuse basic elements of jazz and Western art music."[63] It appears that the lack of restrictions on instrumentation, combined with the freedom from commercial restraints—such as playing for dancing (though he never seemed to worry much about this) and the limits of a song on a normal 10-inch 78-rpm record side—allowed Handy to express the full range of his orchestrational, harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic sensibilities, all of which I will discuss below. In sum, Handy employs instruments with extremely varied timbral qualities subtly and intelligently. The means by which he does so are exemplified in the opening section of *The Bloos*.

The work begins with the chamber-like texture of an oboe melody over a simple string chordal background (see Example 1). This orchestral texture is quite reminiscent of the alto saxophone solo that dominates the introduction of French composer Darius

[61] This is not to say that strings and other instruments more often associated with classical ensembles had not been previously employed in the context of jazz or jazz-related music. Among many others, Paul Whiteman had used strings in his ensemble from the 1920s; Artie Shaw regularly experimented with various string configurations in the 1930s and 1940s; and during the 1940s, Earl Hines, Tommy Dorsey, Harry James, Gene Krupa, and Lionel Hampton all briefly included string sections in their big bands.

[62] J. Bradford Robinson, "Stan Kenton," vol. 13, *New Grove Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed., eds. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), 480–81.

[63] Schuller, "Third Stream," 401. Schuller's interest in *The Bloos* is also seen in the fact that he published a facsimile of the score through his company, Margun Music, in 1996. The other third stream works that Schuller cites as important examples of the genre are: Red Norvo's *Dance of the Octopus* (1933); Ralph Burns's *Summer Sequence* (composed for Woody Herman, 1946); Bob Graettinger's *City of Glass*; Alec Wilder's *Jazz Suite* (1951); and Rolf Lieberman's *Concerto for Jazz Band and Orchestra* (composed for the Sauter-Finegan Orchestra, 1956).

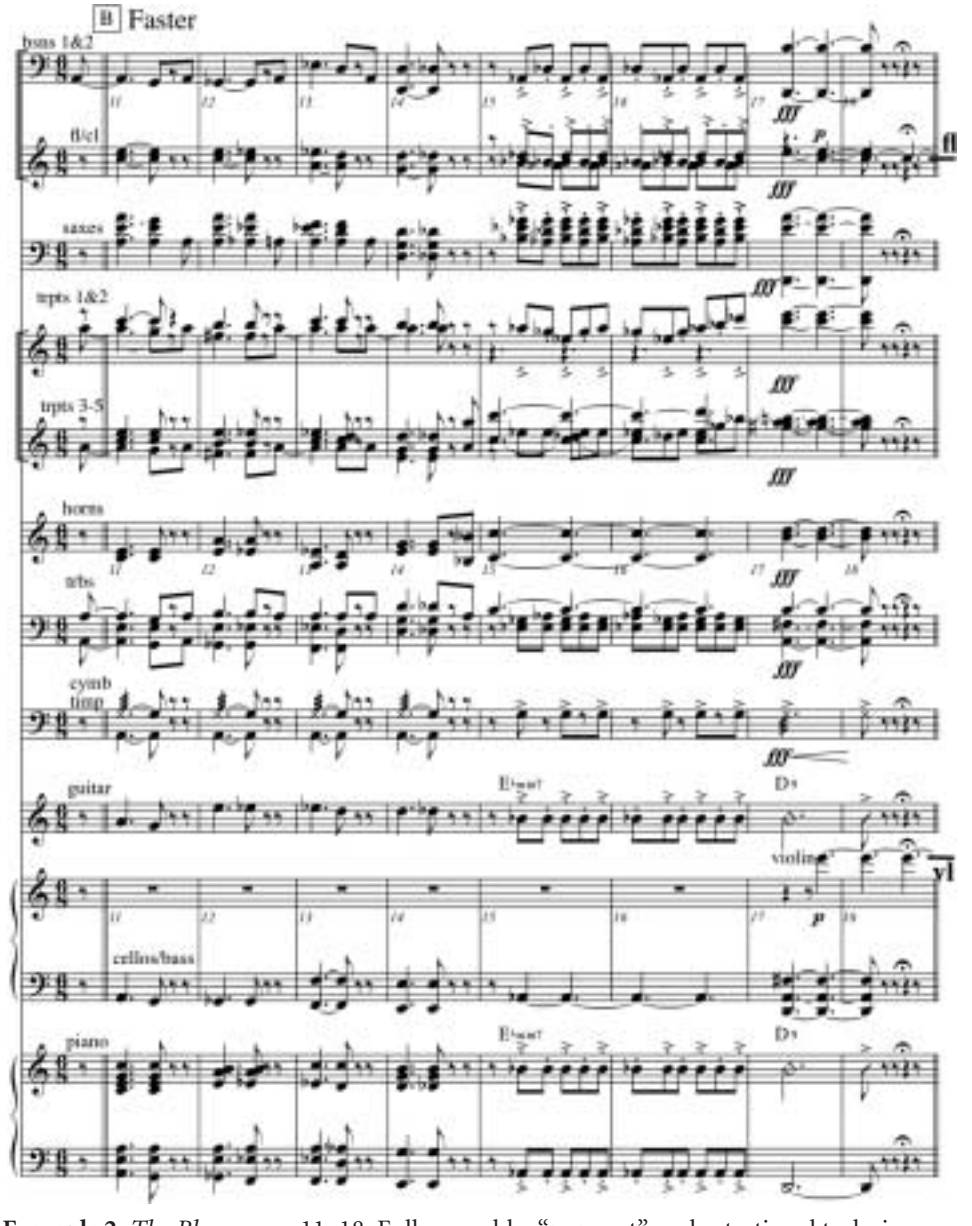


Example 1 *The Bloos*, mm. 1–8. Oboe melody with string accompaniment. All examples from *Bloos*, by George Handy, are reprinted by permission. Copyright © 1956 (Renewed) by Associated Music Publishers, Inc. (BMI). International Copyright Secured. All Rights reserved.

Milhaud's famous 1923 composition, *La création du monde*. While the jazz-trained Handy invokes an instrumentation that speaks to the importance of traditional orchestral textures to *The Bloos*, Milhaud's earlier approach—as a classically trained composer—approaches a similar texture from a somewhat different cultural perspective, by using an instrument (the saxophone) that is more readily associated with jazz. More importantly, Handy's oboe melody, which ultimately dominates *The Bloos* as a whole, is a paraphrase (at pitch) of an essential motive, most frequently presented as an oboe solo, from the second section of *La création du monde*. Additionally, the interspersed accompanimental celeste chords of the introduction (mm. 1–8) call to mind Gershwin's use of the celeste in the orchestrated version of *American in Paris* (1928).

Measures 11–18 bring in the entire ensemble (see Example 2), and present the melody's motive in a rather disguised fashion. The tempo speeds up at m. 11, and the full ensemble interrupts the previously gentle texture by way of a bombastic melodic brass passage with trumpets one, two, and three now presenting the motive as a hocket, transposed up a major-sixth (mm. 11–15, Example 3). The strings and woodwinds are buried in this section, but they of course add to the overall texture.[64] Handy, however, abruptly drops the *fortissimo* dynamics of this brass-led section with a sharp cutoff of all instruments except for the violin and flute, which continue to hold through a fermata (see m. 18, Example 2). I have chosen to call this unusual design Handy's "pop-out technique." It is used regularly by the composer in a variety of his compositions (e.g., in

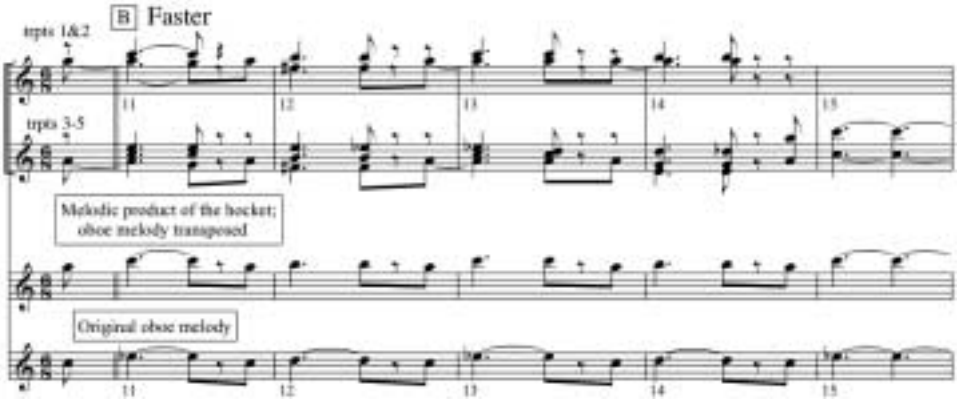
[64] While the woodwinds are largely functioning as part of the reed section, for clarity's sake I am differentiating the saxes from the woodwinds in my analysis.



Example 2 *The Bloos*, mm. 11–18. Full ensemble; "pop-out" orchestrational technique.

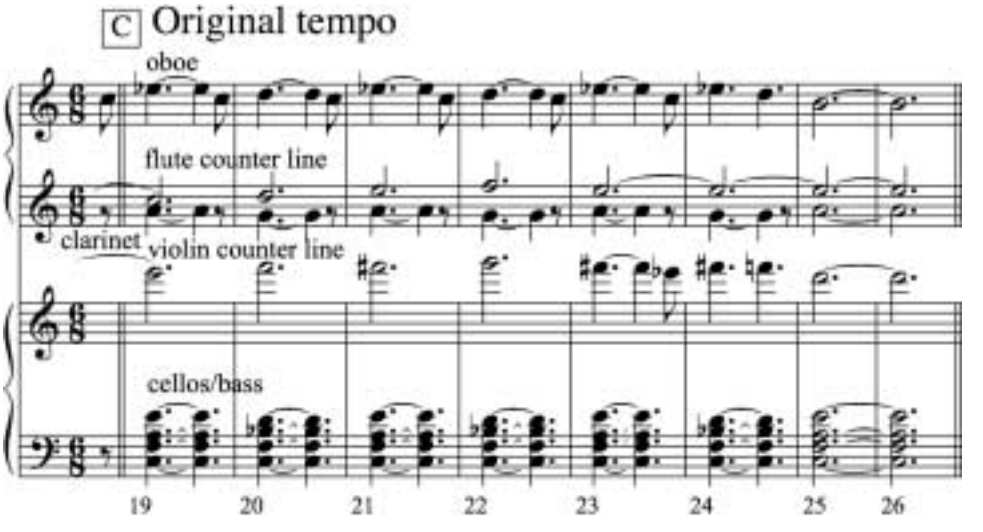
Dalvatore Sally), and it is featured so prominently throughout this piece that it becomes a formal and motivic element. This technique also notably frames certain "pop-out intervals" or " pop-out chords" in two contrasting settings, and these features typically enhance a harmonic ambiguity that is regularly present (to be discussed below).

As seen in Example 2, the pop-out technique purposefully buries the quieter instruments (in this case, the flute and violin) within the overall sound of the full ensemble, and then Handy allows these softer orchestral instruments to "pop out" of the texture



Example 3 Trumpet hocket; variation of oboe melody transposed up a major sixth (mm. 11–15).

as all the other instruments are percussively and sharply cut off (see m. 18, Example 2).[65] The held flute and violin notes here lead directly to a repeat of the oboe melody (see Example 4) with a slightly varied orchestration, and this varied texture helps to create one of the work's most subtly beautiful sections. Here, the clarinet replaces the violin in the previously all-string chords, thereby adding a variety of color to the chordal texture. The violin and flute continue over this new texture, however, by adding an ascending counterline that moves in and out of consonance and dissonance with the oboe. Also, the ambiguity of the tonal relationship between the oboe melody, the flute and violin counterline, and the accompanying chords (e.g., Fmaj^7, with an added Eb and F#, in

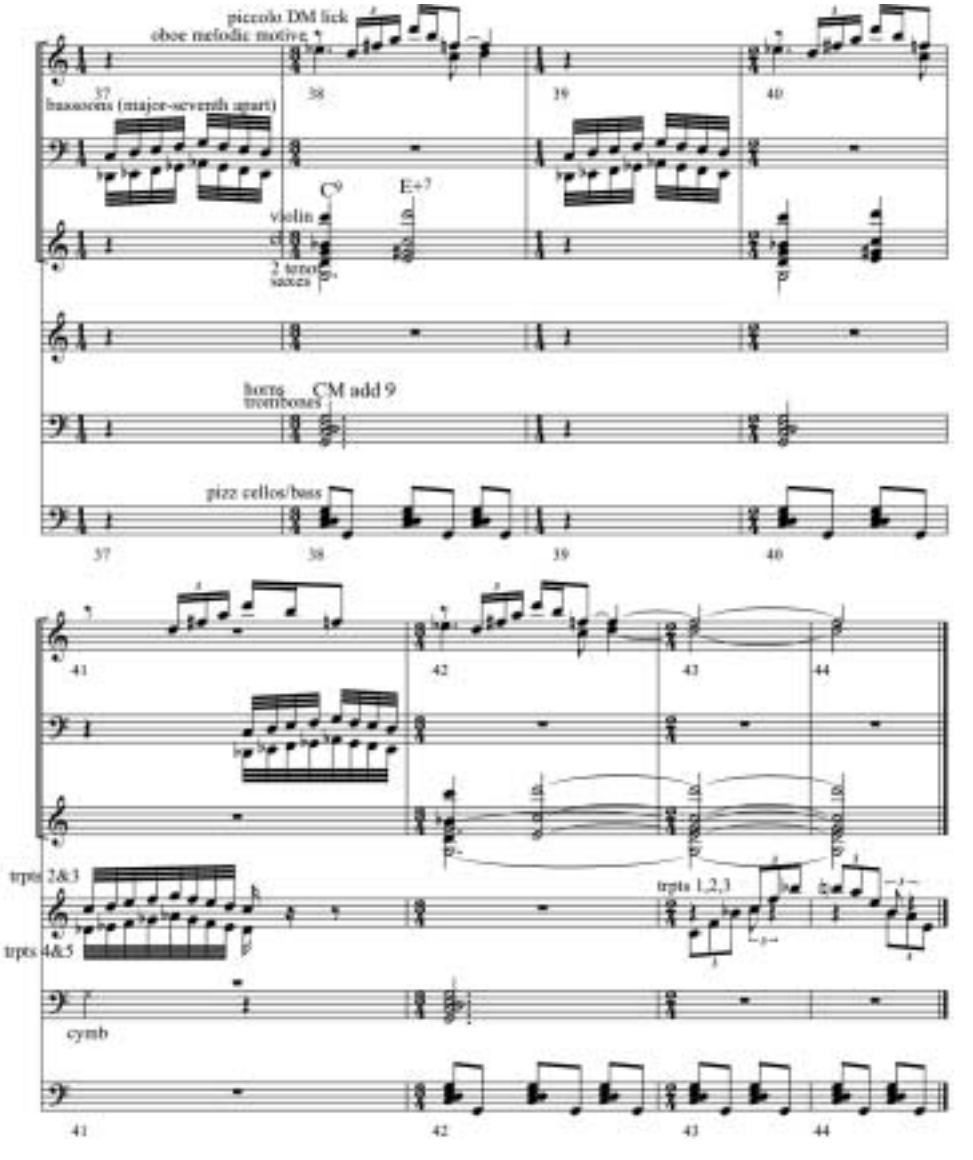


Example 4 *The Bloos*, mm. 19–26. Variation of orchestrational texture; restatement of oboe melody.

[65] In big band writing, it is a common convention that a tied eighth-note implies a sharp cut-off on a beat, and in this case, m. 18, beat one (see Example 2).

mm. 21 and 23) creates an instability that enriches the largely gentle nature of the passage.

Across mm. 37–44 (see Example 5), Handy creates a series of melodic gestures that alternate with chords punctuated by pizzicato strings. In this section, Handy demonstrates his distinctive tastes in orchestral colors, as well as his rich abilities to create interesting instrumental combinations. The bassoons here present a melodic gesture that involves an ascending major-scale pentachord voiced a major-seventh apart.[66]



Example 5 *The Bloos*, mm. 37–44. Distinctive orchestral colors.

[66] The use of interval-class 1 relationships will be discussed in the musical analysis section below.

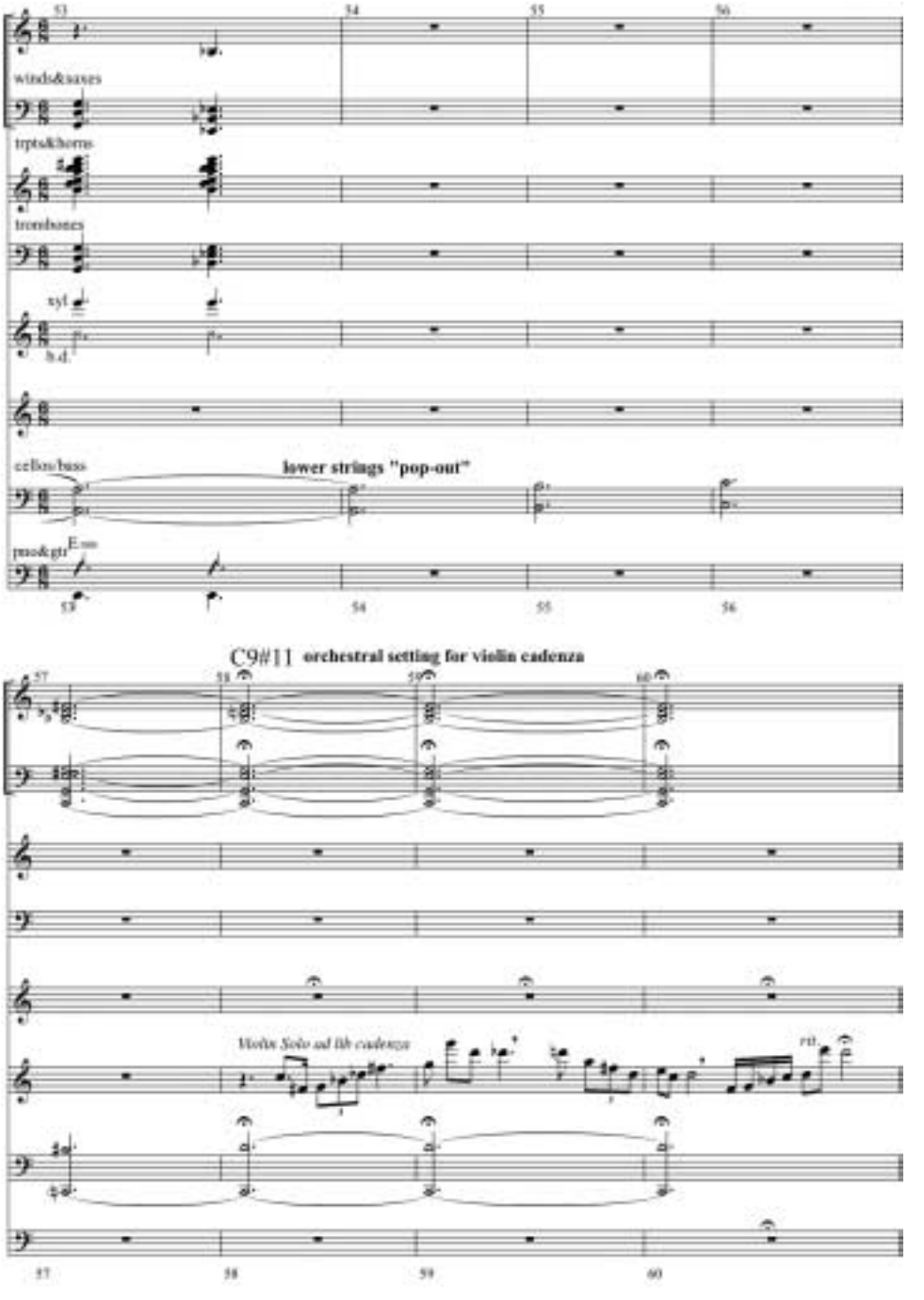
Alternating with this are two distinct groups of chords, the first orchestrated for violin, clarinet, and two tenor saxes (tenors), and the second primarily for horns and trombones, both punctuated by pizzicato cellos and a bass accenting chordal pitches. While the brass (accented by cellos and bass) maintain a dark, lower-register $Cmaj^{(add\ 9)}$ chord, the violin, woodwind, and sax group moves from a C^9 to an $Eaug^7$. Over this colorful harmony, the piccolo—heard for the first time—plays a bluesy D-major lick (perhaps presaging the tenor sax blues solo in D major later in the piece), and the oboe adds its melodic motive from mm. 1–10 and 19–26 (with its own ambiguous harmonic implications). This richly layered texture ideally exhibits Handy's proclivity for juxtaposing harmonies.

After two chords from the full ensemble, the lower strings pop out of the previously heavy texture (see m. 54, Example 6). After an ascending line, they are joined by the winds and saxes to create a colorful chordal accompaniment ($C^{9\sharp11}$) for the solo violin cadenza (mm. 58–60). The chord, with its reliance on woodwinds and strings, is very much an orchestral color, and, coupled with the violin solo, would be as at-home in a classical orchestral setting as it is in this big-band jazz work. In fact, the violin cadenza again recalls the first movement of Gershwin's *American in Paris*, which employs a similar texture and melodic character.

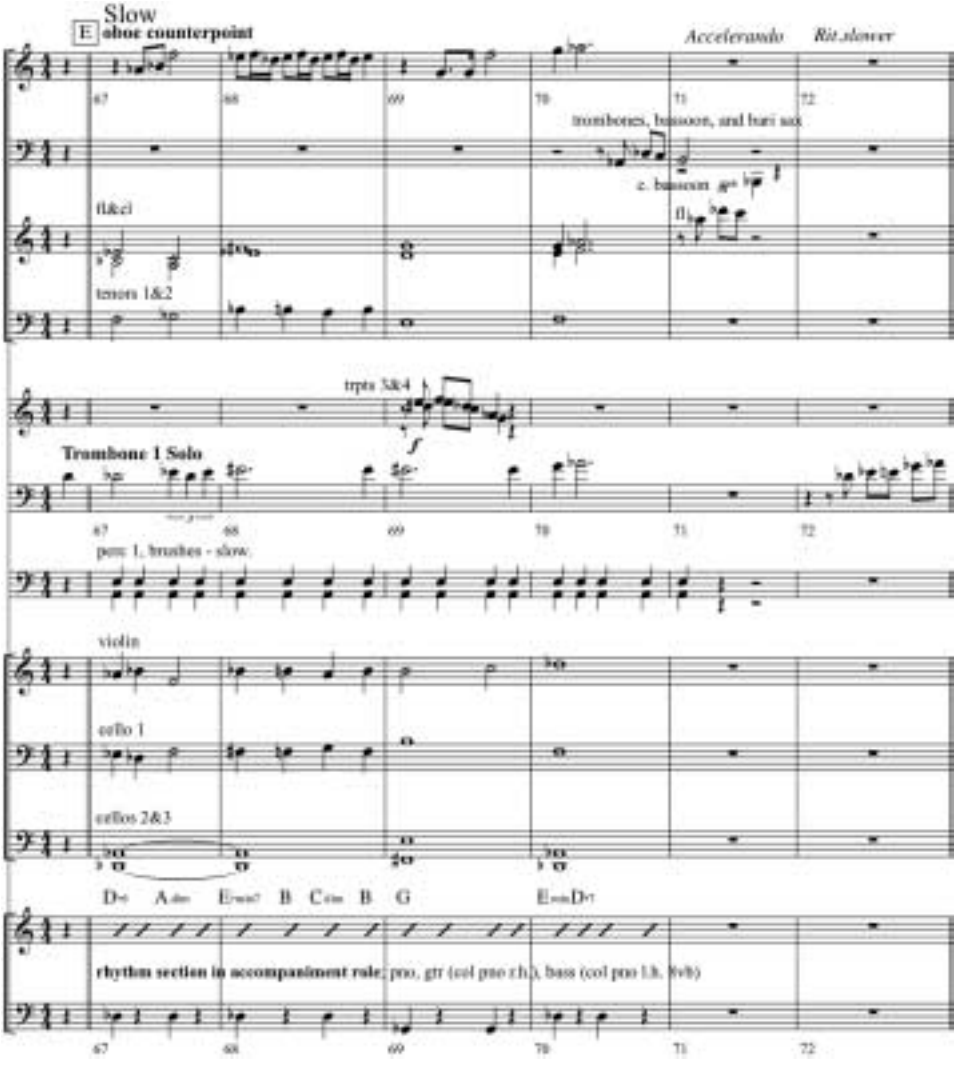
After again employing the pop-out technique (this time with trombone 1 emerging from the ensemble), the composed trombone solo in mm. 67–80 is set against another orchestral-like texture (see Example 7). Here is an example of a melody in a jazz style (i.e., the trombone solo) set over an orchestral texture (where this accompaniment is dominated by woodwinds and strings). This simultaneous stylistic juxtaposition clearly exhibits the overall crossover character of the piece. The string, woodwind, and tenor sax background gives ample support for the soloist, but its timbre is soft enough to allow an intimate presentation of the melody as might be heard in a small-group setting. An oboe counterpoint is also present. In addition, this passage is one of only two places in the work (the other is a tenor-sax blues solo in mm. 99–109) where the rhythm section is called upon to play in a typical jazz accompaniment role (see Example 7).[67] The texture soon thins out (m. 73, Example 8), giving way to just trombone and strings with occasional interspersions from the ensemble.

While Handy never discussed a desire to expand the big band palette into a hybrid jazz-and-classical ensemble, his extensive use of woodwinds and strings throughout *The Bloos* clearly shows a proclivity towards this ideal. Another example of this inclination is seen in his scoring of percussion in *The Bloos*. While the instrumentation of big bands varies (e.g., a trumpet section may have anywhere from two to five trumpets), ensembles in this tradition have always had one drummer. In jazz, of course, with the use of the drum kit, one drummer is able to play the role of several percussionists. In *The Bloos*, however, without precedent within the big band tradition, Handy calls for three percussionists, and no one plays the kit. For his scoring of the percussion parts, Handy essentially splits up the drum set, assigning the various instruments (snare

[67] They are given a standard lead sheet-type of notation, which normally provides a chordal (and perhaps rhythmic) outline, rather than a specific, completely notated part.



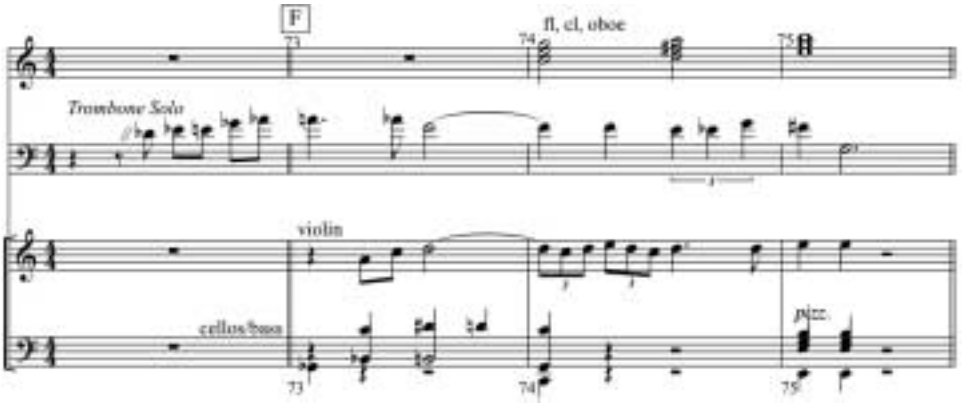
Example 6 *The Bloos*, mm. 53–60. Orchestral setting of violin cadenza.



Example 7 *The Bloos*, mm. 67–72. Trombone solo with orchestral texture.

drum and snare rim; cymbal, struck with mallets and sticks; and tom tom) to the three percussionists. The score also atypically indicates timpani. For the recording session, however, for an unknown reason (perhaps because of a lack of availability), a kick (bass) drum replaces the timpani, and thus this recording-session solution completes the composite drum kit. Another distinctive percussion choice in the score is the addition of a xylophone, which plays an important coloristic role.[68]

[68] Vibraphone is also called for in the score, but this instrument is replaced by the xylophone throughout the *Jazz Scene* recording. Hal McKusick feels strongly that none of the listed percussionists knew how to play the xylophone, and that an additional (uncredited) studio player must have been hired for that particular part. McKusick, telephone interview, February 2, 2006.



Example 8 *The Bloos*, mm. 73–75. Trombone solo with strings.

Though the instrumentation of the percussion section is not particularly distinctive, the principal role of the percussionists in *The Bloos* stands in significant contrast to the role of a drummer within the jazz tradition. A big band drummer's customary responsibility is to articulate and highlight accents in the context of playing "time."[69] However, except for a later passage where time is kept behind a tenor sax soloist (to be discussed below), *The Bloos* eschews the typical drummer's job of keeping time for the big band. It is likely for this reason that Handy split up the various responsibilities of the drum set. More specifically, he did not want a drummer tied to his kit and playing time, but preferred—as is the case for orchestral percussionists—to have each player free to switch instruments and play different percussion roles.

One crucial difference between the jazz and classical traditions is how the rhythm of a work moves forward temporally. In jazz, the rhythm section is traditionally responsible for creating this movement. In *The Bloos*, however, Handy holds the melodic ensemble (brass, woodwinds, saxes, trombones, strings) rhythmically responsible for itself, thereby relying upon melody and the harmonic rhythm of the work to create a rhythmic pulse and flow, and he in turn employs the percussion for added coloristic effect. This orchestrational concept extends to the entire rhythm section, as the piano, bass, and guitar also do not fill their expected roles as timekeepers and accompanists. This design is critically important to the compositional style of the work, and is highly unusual, particularly for 1946.

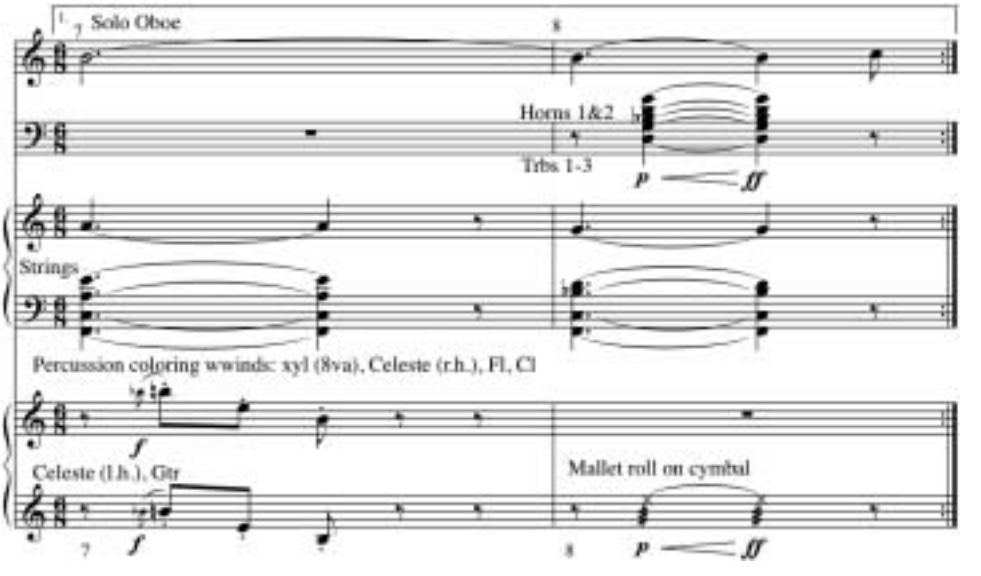
Even when the rhythm section is accompanying the aforementioned later tenor sax solo (mm. 98–109), the task of playing time is broken up between the three percussionists. One musician is directed to use sticks, presumably for the snare drum (for backbeats and fills on the snare), one to use brushes (to play a time pattern on the snare), while the third is directed to play time on the high hat cymbal (on the recording,

[69] "Time" is an expression used to describe the swing rhythmic patterns that a drummer plays behind a soloist or ensemble. It is generally indicated in the score by the word "time," and might be further notated with forward-slashes from the second to the fourth line of the staff, one for each beat of the time signature, or by quarter notes (again one for each beat). Important rhythmic figures are usually notated on the first space above the staff (stems up).

however, the ride cymbal is used instead of the high hat). In effect, it sounds like a drum kit, though there are two differences. Most importantly, there is no bass drum present. Typically, the bass drum would be playing a strong quarter-note pulse.[70] This effect is not missed, however, as the bass and guitar both fill that role by playing steady quarter notes (the bass "walking" and the guitar solidly strumming with a pick). Secondly, and less significantly, with one kit drummer, we would have either the snare fills or the brushes pattern, but in Handy's three-percussionist scoring, we can have both.

The coloristic function of the rhythm section produces one of the major stylistic characteristics that enable *The Bloos* to stand out as a unique jazz composition of its era (and to this day as well). It again exemplifies Handy's individualistic approach to composition and orchestration, which results from his extensive exposure to, and interest in, the worlds of both jazz and classical music. Handy's coloristic technique is seen in the percussion section's initial entrance (see Example 9). Here, the flute's and clarinet's quirky melodic fill (m. 7) is doubled (an octave above) by xylophone (percussion 3), as well as by celeste and guitar. The xylophone's sharp, percussive character enhances the rhythmic quality of this line and it contrasts strongly with the legato oboe and string melody. The score also indicates that the rhythm is doubled on the rim of the snare (percussion 1), but I do not hear this color in the recording. Percussion 2 follows with a dynamic mallet roll on the cymbal (m. 8), emphasizing and coloring the sharp crescendo of the horns and trombones.

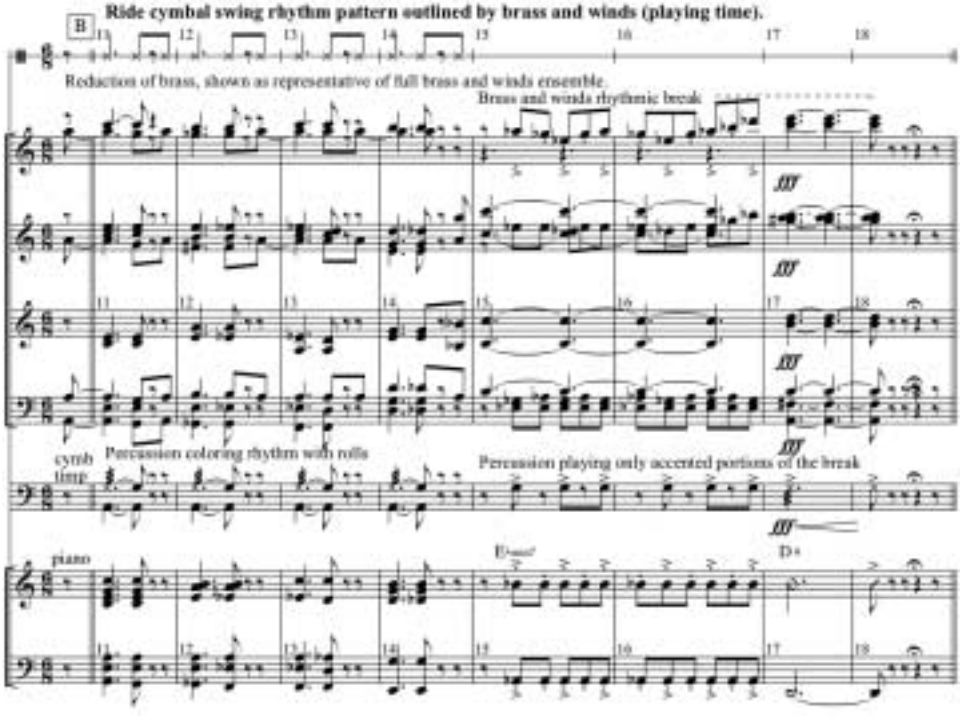
As mentioned above, a typical drummer's role in a big band is to articulate and highlight accents in the context of playing time. Another example of Handy extricating the



Example 9 *The Bloos*, mm. 7–8. Use of percussion as orchestrational "color."

[70] Perhaps this is influenced by the fact that as of the mid-1940s, with the advent of bebop, the bass drum role, particularly in small bands, had been freed from the role of timekeeper and had begun to be used for rhythmic accent.

percussion from the role of delineating time (thus allowing the percussion section to concentrate solely on color and accent) is seen in mm. 11–18 (see Example 10). Here, the non-rhythm instruments (meaning all except piano, bass, guitar, and percussion) take on the role of playing time, as they precisely articulate a typical ride-cymbal swing rhythm (mm. 11–14), which is notated in 6/8. Instead of playing time, the percussion section is limited to coloring the rhythm with rolls that accent the downbeats (mm. 11–14, 17–18). As the implied meter leaves the 4/4 swing rhythm and the 6/8 becomes overt, reeds, brass, and woodwinds perform a syncopated, accented "break" (mm. 15–16) with percussion highlighting the accents of the phrase (see Example 10).[71] All three percussionists play only the accented portions of the rhythmic break. As is usual with a break, Handy generally relies upon the listener to feel an implied pulse, as opposed to the syncopation being clearly juxtaposed against steady time. In this case, however, the accepted roles have been reversed, as it is the melodic ensemble that has established the rhythmic pattern against which the break's implied time is felt. Even the downbeat of the beginning of the break (m. 15, beat one), which is crucial for understanding the implied rhythmic feel of the syncopation (and would normally be played by some or all of the rhythm section, such as the bass, bass drum and piano), is played by brass instruments.



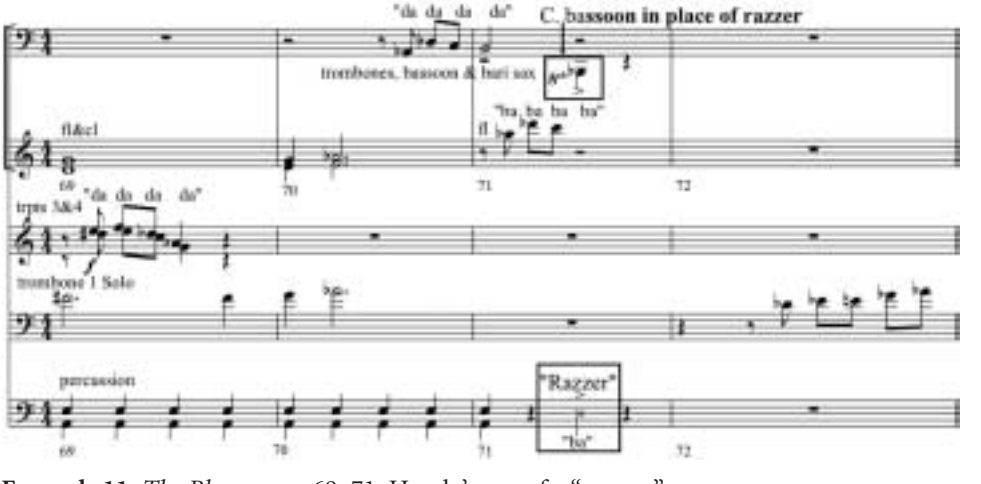
Example 10 *The Bloos*, mm. 11–18. Reeds, brass, and woodwinds play "time."

[71] A "break" is an interruption—often of one, two, or four measures—during which the rhythm section ceases to play time, allowing for a written or improvised solo (or a rhythmic pattern) to stand alone. The solo or pattern continues over an implied rhythm and harmony that was previously established.

As a final note on orchestration, the third percussion part contains an interesting use of a "razzer," which is more of a toy than an instrument.[72] The appearance of this device in the score, and the incident that it sparked in the recording studio, is illuminating. In his 1980 interview, in the context of noting the humorous and angry qualities that he hears in his music, Handy discussed the (written) trombone solo in *The Bloos* (see Example 11). He claims that he found himself using too many blues clichés (across mm. 69–71), so he decided to add the bray of a razzer (in m. 71) to blow these ideas out of the way and as a signal to get back to something more meaningful. Handy relates the reasons for his choice of the razzer:

> I was discussing blues, all the things that blues could be and I got into something deep, momentarily deep and suddenly from out of that came the cliché blues phrases, that everybody and his uncle is using which was like a momentary aside. I went into a cliché phrase, da-da-da-da. I put it in the trumpets and I think I put it in the bones and I put in the flute ba-ba-ba. And then the hell with it, razzer … the hell with this cliché crap, let's get back to reality.[73]

According to Handy, this scoring sparked an incident in the recording studio. Barry Ulanov, an influential writer for *Metronome* magazine, was visiting the session, and when he heard the razzer being used he burst out of the control booth screaming "Stop! … You can not do that, that's Dadaism!" It eventually became clear that Ulanov was equating the use of the razzer with the concept of employing found objects and nonsensical juxtapositions in art, and was declaring that this Dadaist principle had no place in music composition. Handy respected and liked Ulanov, and while he disagreed, Handy did not feel strongly enough about the use of the razzer to argue for its use and risk damaging the recording session. While seeking to placate Ulanov, Handy discovered



Example 11 *The Bloos*, mm. 69–71. Handy's use of a "razzer."

[72] A razzer is a whistle that creates a rude, derogatory sound.

[73] Schremp, "Handy Oral History," 44–45. Example 11 details the figures that Handy sings ("da-da-da-da") in this quotation. The figure occurs twice, as well as in a third presentation (flute) where the phrase is interrupted, with the final note to be played by the razzer.

that an acceptable solution would be to provide a substitute "razz" from one of the traditional instruments, and ultimately found his solution with the lowest note of the contrabassoon. The story as a whole reveals a lot about Handy's relaxed attitude toward his writing and his easy-going and respectful relationships with his colleagues.[74]

One of the most illuminating aspects of the story behind the composition of this trombone solo passage is the fact that though he was unhappy with what he was writing at the time, rather than revising, Handy simply chose to "razz"—or playfully tease and taunt—the music he did not like and move on. Although he was a thoughtful composer, he expended little effort in second-guessing himself, and seemingly wrote in a stream-of-consciousness manner.

Harmonic and Melodic Analysis

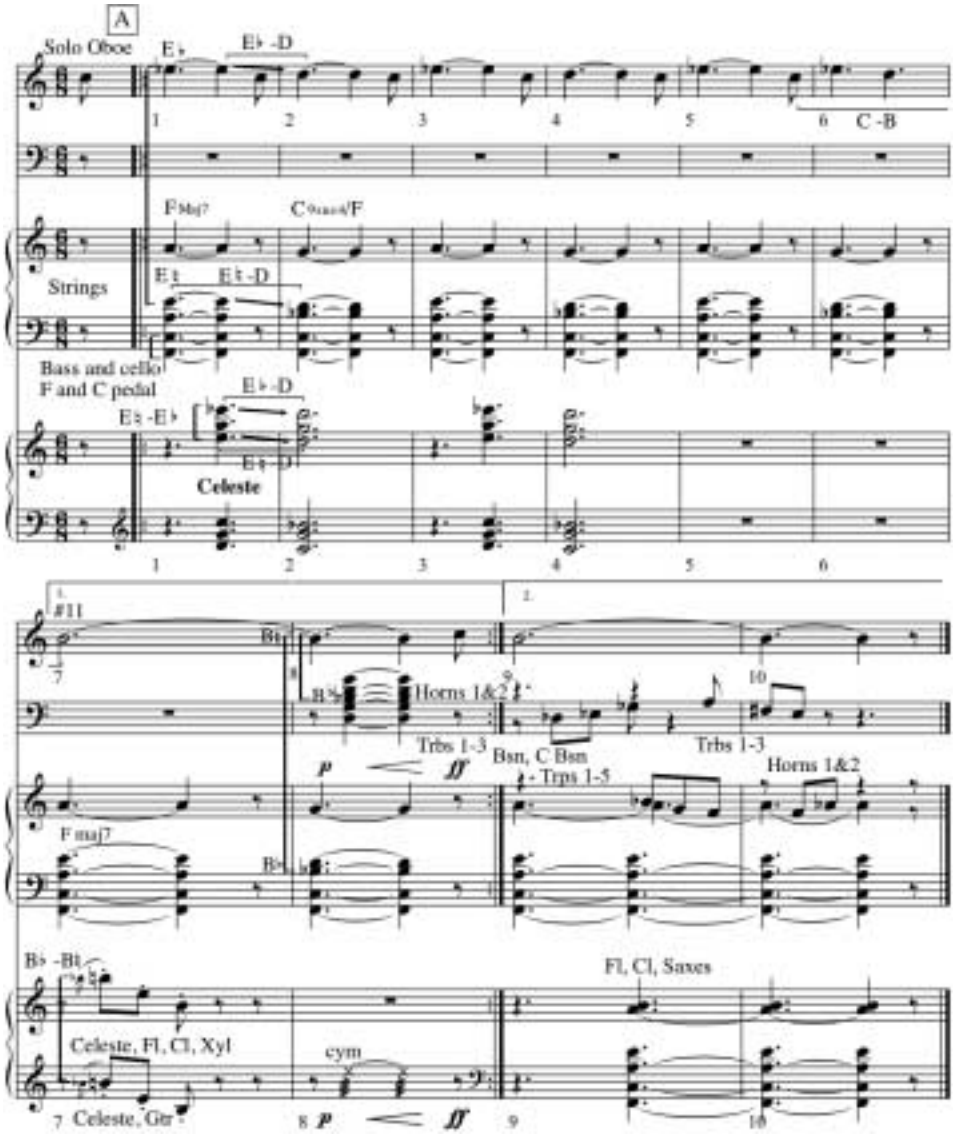
In *The Bloos*, it is rarely possible to declare clear key centers for any given passage. This quality can be seen, for instance, in the opening phrase of the work, which immediately reveals that Handy's proclivity for creating an ambiguous tonality or centricity is an essential element of his compositional style. Here he accomplishes such tonal ambiguity by various means, including the superimposition of triads and by presenting conflicting tonal implications. Handy also typically creates a dual functionality for intervals or chords as they "pop out" of a larger texture.

While separating the discussion of the tonal implications of the melody from that of the accompanying chords may seem counter-intuitive, my ear seems to insist upon doing so in this opening phrase of *The Bloos*. The prominent pitches of the melody, Eb descending to D (see mm. 1–6, Example 12), give a strong sense of heading towards a resolution on the pitch C. However, this resolution is evaded, as the phrase ends on a B that can also be heard as having a leading-tone function (first and second endings, mm. 7–8 and 9–10, Example 12). This movement towards C, as well as the avoided resolution, creates a sense of being in C minor or a bluesy C major.

The accompanying chords in this opening passage tell a different story, however. Over an F-C pedal (cello 3 and double bass, mm. 1–10, Example 12), the strings have a two-bar repeated I-V progression, $Fmaj^{7}$–C^{9sus4} (the sus4, an F, is in the bass pedal point). This progression leads to a reading of the phrase in F. The second ending further supports this analysis with two measures of $Fmaj^{7}$ (mm. 9–10, including woodwinds and saxes doubling the chord), though the brass and bassoons confuse this F major reading with their dissonant interjections.

As noted, the pop-out technique is another favorite context where Handy typically introduces harmonic ambiguity. Across mm. 17–18 of *The Bloos*, for instance, the pitches C and E (flute and violin, respectively) function as the 7th and 9th of a colorful $D^{13/\sharp 11}$ (see Example 13). When left on its own, the C major quality of the [C E] dyad pops-out in a startling manner. This moment in turn serves as an efficient and quick

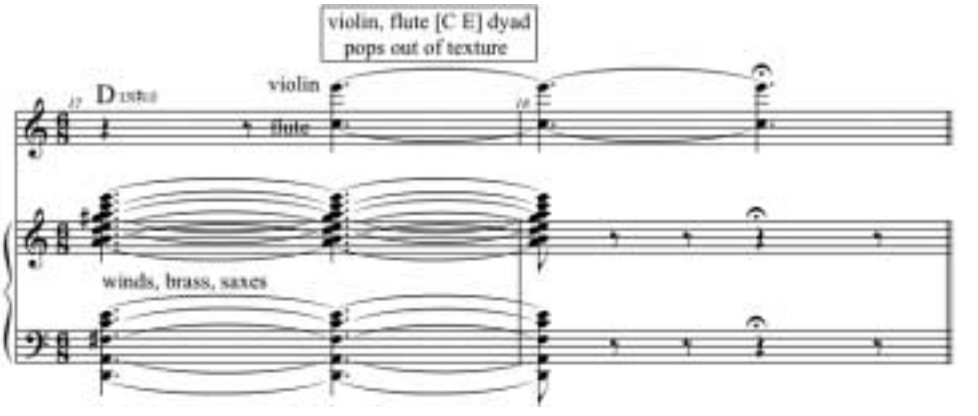
[74] This anecdote is based on Handy's recollection of the event in Schremp, "Handy Oral History," 46.



Example 12 *The Bloos*, mm. 1–10. Ambiguous tonality; alternation of consonance and dissonance; harmonic and melodic ic1 relationships.

harmonic device that leads to the final A section of the opening, whether one chooses to interpret the oboe's A section melody in the key of F or C.

These types of tonal ambiguity help to give Handy's compositions their unique character and depth. Depending on what our ear focuses on in a given listening, or how we hear any given passage, alternate readings of the centricity are equally possible and valid. Beyond the brief example above, Handy has other compositional devices that he regularly employs as well, and one—the extensive use of minor seconds, major



Example 13 *The Bloos*, mm. 17–18. Pop-out [C E] dyad; harmonic ambiguity.

sevenths, minor ninths, and diminished octaves—can be seen in his approach to the blues in this specific work.

Both the title of *The Bloos* and Handy's comments to Granz about his reasons for writing the piece (discussed above) require that the work be examined for its relationship to the blues as both a formal genre and a musical style. In fact, the connection is somewhat abstract, as Handy studiously avoids the twelve-bar I-IV-V blues progression, with the notable exception being the tenor saxophone solo in mm. 98–109. In light of the title's unavoidable demand that a listener hear the work in terms of some relation to the blues, this significant avoidance of blues form musically exemplifies Handy's desire to create a new approach to the form.

Jazz has been inextricably linked with the blues since the early twentieth-century,[75] and during the 1940s—and in the Swing Era in general—the blues was a staple of the swing band. For example, Ellington based many of his works, in one way or another, on the blues; Count Basie's hard-swinging riff-style music was heavily weighted towards, and steeped in, the blues; and bebop, a music that Handy was heavily involved with (as evidenced by his work with Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie in Los Angeles, as well as by his own compositions), also relied upon the blues. In all of these instances, the standard form of the blues is the twelve-bar form. Paul Oliver states that the twelve-bar form "is so widely known that 'playing the blues' generally presupposes the use of it." Oliver additionally notes that "the term 'blues' is also used to identify a composition that uses blues harmonic and phrase structures but which is intended to be performed as written,"[76] pointing out that a blues can be a fully composed piece with no improvisation. *The Bloos* fits Oliver's criteria, as Handy includes the twelve-bar form as the work's penultimate section, while also creating an idiosyncratic

[75] See Peter Muir, "'Crazy Blues': Commercial Blues in America, 1850–1920" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Graduate Center, City University of New York, 2004). Muir discusses the many forms of the blues leading up to this period.
[76] Paul Oliver, "Blues," vol. 3, *New Grove Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed., eds. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), 730.

compositional approach to harmonic and melodic structure that must be interpreted in its relation to the blues. With respect to the varied phrase structures of this specific piece, along with the twelve-bar blues passage, Handy also includes a number of eight-measure sections. That said, however, in this work and others, he frequently shows little concern for composing in standard phrase lengths such as these, and many sections of *The Bloos* are of irregular length.

The tenor sax solo over two blues choruses, the only twelve-measure section in the piece, occurs near the end of the composition, at mm. 98–109 (the passage is repeated). This section greatly contrasts with the rest of the piece, almost feeling out of place, though it occupies a significant portion of the work. The blues choruses involve the work's only improvisational material, and contain no written-out parts, thereby creating a significant contrast with the work's greater emphasis on composition. This section is also one of the few moments that the rhythm section plays a traditional accompanimental role.

In his 1980 interview, Handy was confronted with criticism that the inserted twelve-bar blues passage in *The Bloos* was compositionally interruptive. In defense, Handy replied: "I didn't feel that way, I felt it had its place among all the other phases. It … [is] the only form that they'll accept. They'll scream for the rest of their life if the other parts are not genuine blues…. It was important to me; that's why it was there."[77] As implied in this quotation, it appears that Handy was concerned with how this work might be received by critics, composers, and musicians. This concern seems a bit out of character for the composer, particularly his insistence that it was virtually required to include the twelve-bar form in a work focusing on blues expression. Though Handy did not elaborate further on this point, I suggest that perhaps the twelve-bar blues represents the culmination of the blues gestures that dominate the rest of the piece, or that perhaps he intended it to represent the conflict between old and new approaches to the blues.

Much of the blues "feeling" in the blues (in major keys) comes from the juxtaposition of the major quality of the tonic chord and the key's flatted-third and flatted-fifth scale degrees, the "blue notes." In *The Bloos*, Handy uses this semitone relationship (e.g., in C major, E and Eb, and G and Gb) to indulge his fascination with minor seconds, minor ninths, major sevenths, diminished octaves, and augmented unisons—i.e., various members of interval class 1 (ic1)—and the result is a highly individualistic exploration of the character of blue notes. Such traits can again be ideally seen in the opening section of the work.

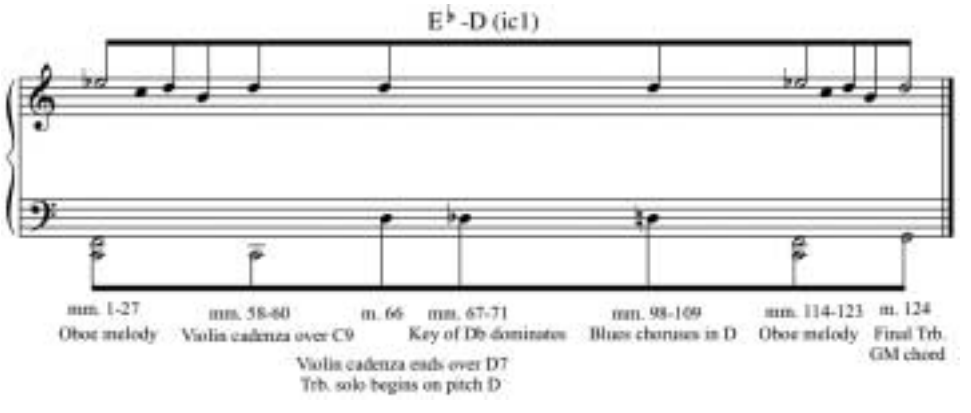
Though the strings begin with what seems to be a clear-cut $Fmaj^7$ (see m. 1, Example 12), the Eb in the oboe melody confuses this reading, as does the celeste chord. The E (the seventh of the $Fmaj^7$) and Eb both descend to D (mm. 1–2) creating what becomes a repeated alternation of dissonance ($Fmaj^7$ plus Eb) and consonance (E and Eb both descending to D, see Example 12). Over the same string progression in mm. 7–8, the oboe's B creates a different type of tension with the $Fmaj^7$ (functioning as the ♯11, m. 7). More importantly, in the next measure (m. 8), Handy creates a new

[77] Schremp, "Handy Oral History," 234–35.

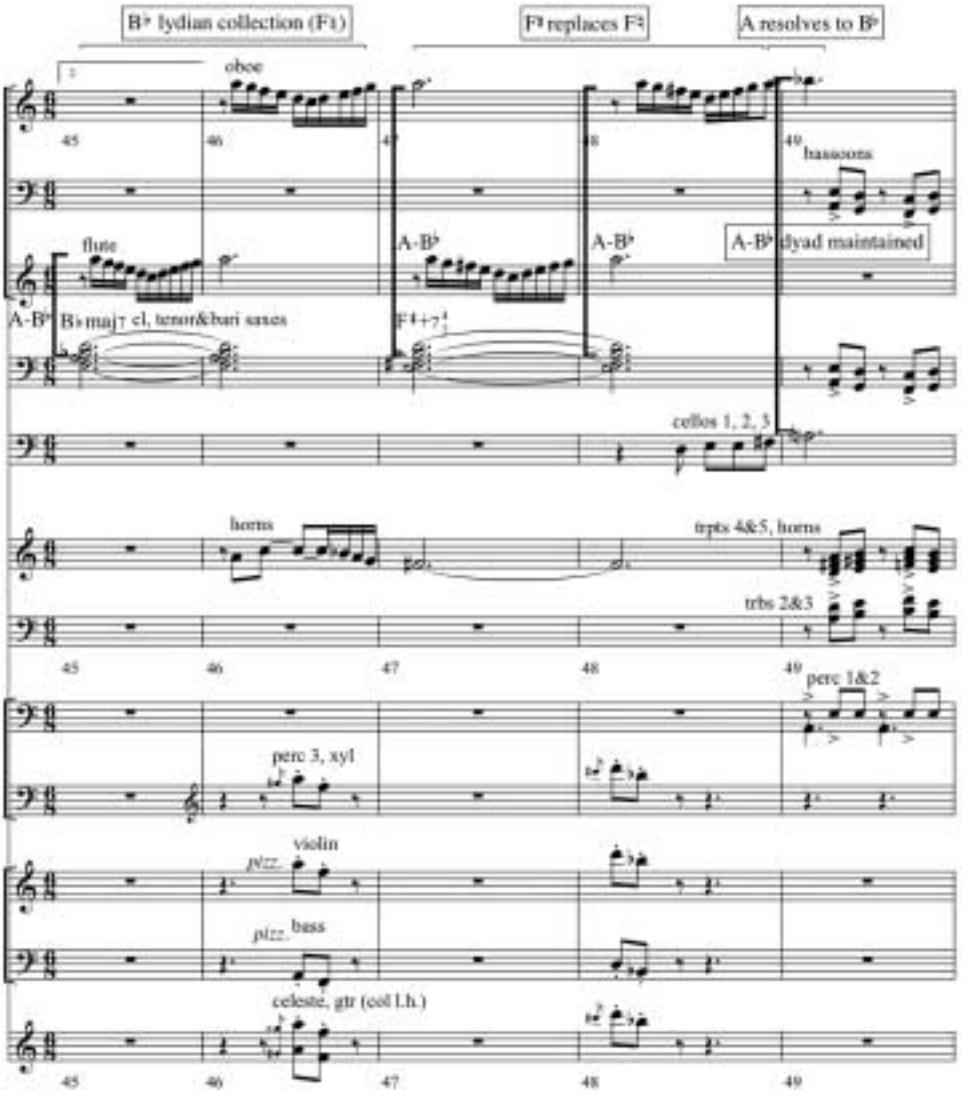
ic1 relationship, with B and Bb (in oboe, cello 2, and trombone 1), which is presaged by a colorful melodic fill in the flute, clarinet, guitar, and celeste (m. 7). This first melody (mm. 1–10) focuses on these ic1 relationships (and in the case of the E and Eb, the descent to D), and they function as bluesy intimations, as sources of harmonic ambiguity, and—at times—as points of dissonance and resolution. While Handy is not employing blues form here, he is relying on the ic1 relationship extracted from the blues idiom as a basis for much of the piece, and deriving from it both harmonic and melodic material. The latter is exemplified in this first section as well. The oboe melody in mm. 1–10 consists of two ic1 dyads, [D Eb] and [B C]. As in the harmony (in the strings and celeste), the Eb of the melody consistently descends to D, and the C in the oboe melody has a delayed descent to B (mm. 7 and 9).

When looking at the melodic structure of *The Bloos* in a reductive fashion, one can see a long-range melodic structure that duplicates a crucial local melodic event, as shown in Example 14. Eb, D, and B are the focal points of the oboe melody across mm. 1–10, 19–26, and 114–24. This theme begins and ends the composition, and is the most repeated element of the work. Additionally, Eb, D, and B are the concluding pitches of those sections and, consequently, of the entire composition. Because of the episodic nature of the central part of the piece (mm. 27–109), this phrase, and its key pitches, structurally dominates the work, eventually creating a large-scale descending line from Eb to D (Example 14). This descending line mirrors the local descent, and the consequent resolution of dissonance, of Eb to D, that dominates the all-important oboe melody, as discussed above. This design also speaks to the significance of ic1 in this work.

In another major Handy composition, *Dalvatore Sally* (1945, and notably the theme song for the Boyd Raeburn Orchestra), an emphasis on ic1 is also present, and is used to create a conflict between F and F# in the context of the Bb Lydian and Bb whole-tone collections. Handy briefly explores this relationship again in *The Bloos*. In this latter instance, Handy clearly separates these two collections, as seen in Example 15. Bb Lydian is employed here by alternating flute and oboe scalar melodic flurries accompanied by



Example 14 Melodic reduction of *The Bloos*; large-scale Eb descent to D (with significant bass pitches).



Example 15 *The Bloos*, mm. 45–49. Bb Lydian and whole-tone character created by use of F and F#; resolution of A and Bb dyad.

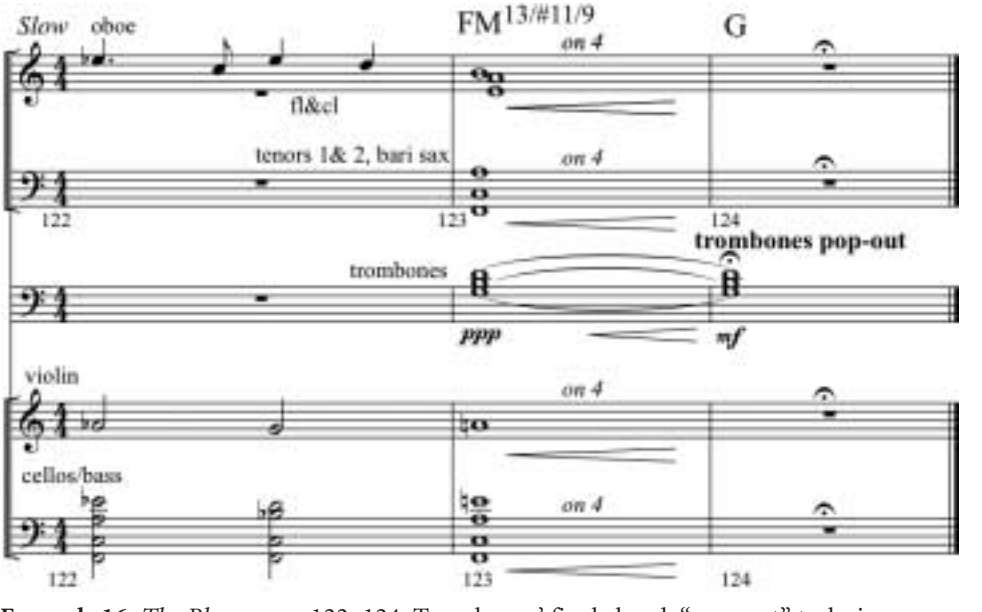
a closely-voiced Bbmaj^7 chord (in the clarinet and saxophones, mm. 45–46). The woodwind lines are repeated (mm. 47–48), but their F is replaced by an F#, and the accompanying chord, while retaining two common tones and employing smooth voice leading (a common Handy characteristic), becomes an F#aug^7 voiced in third inversion. The only non-shared pitch classes between these two-measure phrases are the F and F#. One of the results of this change is the whole-tone character of the second accompanying chord, F#aug^7.

The Bb Lydian collection, used in *Dalvatore Sally*, is also mimicked in *The Bloos*, as seen in the flute, oboe, and accompanying chord, across mm. 45–46. A whole-tone

fragment from *Sally*, consisting of Bb, C, D, E, and F#, also stays intact, but, in *The Bloos*, a G and A are added (in the flute and oboe, mm. 47–48), resulting in an underlying collection that is a mode of G-ascending melodic minor. The addition of the A throughout the phrase creates a new ic1 relationship, as an [A Bb] dyad is prominent throughout these four measures. Bb is in both chords, the Bbmaj^7 contains the [A Bb] dyad (mm. 45–46), and all of the melodic flurries begin and end on A. This dyad also figures largely in the resolution of this four-bar phrase.

In mm. 45–49, the pitch classes F and F# are what differentiate the two collections (as was also the case in *Sally*). In this example, with the addition of the A, Handy creates a non-tonal, yet functional, half-step "resolution" from A to Bb (in the oboe, mm. 48–49).[78] This gives the illusion of resolution, but, with the cellos taking over the A (m. 49), the [A Bb] dyad is also maintained. The first instances of this dyad (mm. 45, 47, and 48) are consonant in the context of the Bbmaj^7 chord, while the final instance (m. 49) is much starker, as the cellos and oboe create a dissonant minor-ninth (plus an octave).

It is interesting to see, in two of Handy's most important compositions, his infatuation with the ic1, coupled with the repetition of the Bb Lydian and B-flat whole-tone juxtaposition. He clearly found such details to be an important part of his vocabulary, yet he manages to alter his treatment of the ideas in a subtly effective manner. The ambiguous resolution in this example from *The Bloos* (in *Dalvatore Sally* the resolution is more complete) is in keeping with the rest of the work. A final example of this approach can be seen in the concluding sonority, as the trombones pop out of the chordal texture with a root position G-major triad, as seen in m. 124 of Example 16.



Example 16 *The Bloos*, mm. 122–124. Trombones' final chord; "pop-out" technique.

[78] The F#aug^7 chord is misspelled to maintain the spelling of the collection.

In the final reprise of the opening oboe melody across mm. 114–124, the question of key (C or F) is, of course, still present. The final melody pitch (B, m. 123) ends on an $Fmaj^7$, perhaps leading to an interpretation of the piece being in F (see Example 16). Similar to the aforementioned [C E] flute and violin dyad, the pitches of the G-major triad in the trombones function initially as the ninth, sharp-eleventh, and thirteenth of F major. When the trombone triad pops out of the texture, however, it takes on a disembodied quality, with implications that are difficult to discern, and we are left with a lack of resolution. Perhaps, along with its role in the extended $Fmaj^7$ chord, this final G-major triad is also a reference to C, as its dominant, thus maintaining the ambiguity regarding key that has been present throughout. I suggest that this unresolved ending of *The Bloos* can be seen as a metaphor for Handy's unresolved, and not fully realized, career. It is a sad irony that, as a result of this lack of harmonic resolution, it is as if we are waiting for the next great George Handy big band composition that fails to materialize.

The Bloos, as a part of an expensive, limited-edition record set, was not particularly visible to either the general public or to musicians. In addition, this work has rarely been performed in public (see fn. 2). Consequently, determining the influence of this work upon composers of the period is difficult. How the piece fits into Handy's compositional output, however, is much clearer.

The Bloos, with its rarely paralleled success in incorporating orchestrational and compositional resources more commonly associated with classical composition into a jazz work, is a transitional composition for Handy. This composition notably caps his big-band period and it marks his movement toward works that further stretch, or move out of, the jazz category. As he seemingly became more intent upon fitting his work into more traditional, classically-oriented forms—as can be seen in his later one-movement saxophone quartets and the *Caine Flute Sonata* (more information on each below), all of which are fully-composed (containing no improvisation)—his style evolved. The relaxed and off-hand quality of his Big Band Era writing disappeared, and his work took on a more serious tone that differed from the exciting, fun, and almost improvisatory quality of his earlier writing, all of which greatly added to its significant appeal.

Biography, Continued

After leaving the Raeburn band in 1946, Handy returned to New York. By this time Handy had begun to experiment with heroin, and once he was back in New York, his use grew into a serious addiction that lasted for eighteen years. Consequently, it is not surprising that after leaving Raeburn, Handy's life and career went into a downward spiral. In the early 1950s, in an attempt to end his drug addiction, Handy spent time in Lexington, Kentucky, undergoing substance abuse rehabilitation.

Handy's battles with substance abuse were a back-and-forth affair, but he managed to continue working and composing. In the mid-1950s, he recorded the only two albums that were released under his own name, both on Label "X," a subsidiary of RCA. The 1954 *Handyland, U.S.A.* album, written over the course of several days, was

intended to be a "reflection of the standardized jazz of the day."[79] The record consists of simple arrangements (i.e., a melodic head statement, solos, and an outro repeat of the melody) of original melodic lines set to the chord progressions of standard songs (e.g., "There Will Never Be Another You"). In 1955, a follow-up record was commissioned, and resulted in *By George! (Handy of Course)*.[80] This set of compositions for tentet is extremely sophisticated, and in its own way this release could be considered the apex of Handy's writing. His use of innovative form here is at its height, as is his harmonic and melodic invention. Also, Handy incorporates improvisation into these numbers in a sophisticated manner. Soloists are not necessarily featured, but are instead employed as one more part of the compositional fabric. In addition, the works involve unique reed and woodwind doublings along with the use of violin.

Also during this period, Handy was asked by ABC-Paramount to conceive and produce an album for his close friend, the saxophonist Zoot Sims. The album, *Zoot Sims Plays Four Altos*, which Handy produced, consisted entirely of Handy compositions.[81] He recorded Sims and a trio (with bass, drums, and Handy on piano), transcribed Sims's performance, and then wrote three additional alto parts to harmonize and accompany the original Sims performance. Sims then overdubbed himself three times to complete the compositions. While now a common practice, at the time of this recording session, overdubbing of this type was an innovative procedure. Handy and Sims made two other records together, all recorded between 1956 and 1957.[82]

By the mid- to late-1950s, Handy was in the final stage of his compositional career. His musical world and his personal life had shrunk to a small circle of friends and admirers, and most everything he composed from the mid-1950s until the mid-1960s was written for a very small but impressive group of musicians. Essentially, he wrote only for his own band, for Zoot Sims, or for the players involved with the New York Saxophone Quartet (NYSQ) whom he had known for many years. Shortly after *By George!* Handy began work on what was to become a four-movement work for flute and piano, the *Caine Flute Sonata*, written for Eddie Caine.[83] He also embarked on a series of three saxophone quartets (*Saxophone Quartet*, Nos. 1, 2, and 3) and a saxophone suite (the *New York Suite*, an eight-movement work), all composed for the NYSQ.[84] This group's interest in extended, jazz-oriented—yet compositionally and

[79] H. J. Morrison, liner notes to George Handy, *Handyland U.S.A.*, Label "X" LXA-1004, 1954, LP; reissued as RCA BGI 0011122, 2004, compact disc.

[80] George Handy, *By George! (Handy of Course)*, Label "X" LXA 1032, 1955, LP; reissued as *Pensive*, Fresh Sounds FSRCD 438, 2007, compact disc.

[81] Zoot Sims, *Zoot Sims Plays 4 Altos*, ABC-Paramount ABC 198, 1957, LP.

[82] Zoot Sims, *Zoot!*, Riverside Records RLP 12–228, 1957, LP; also issued as *Zoot Sims Quintet*, Jazzland Records JLP 2, 1957, LP; reissued as Fantasy/OJC 2282, 2005, compact disc. Zoot Sims, *Zoot Sims Plays Alto, Tenor and Baritone*, ABC-Paramount ABC 155, 1957, LP; reissued (with additional material) as *Zoot Sims Quartet: That Old Feeling*, Chess, GRD-807, 1996, compact disc.

[83] This work invites a comparison to Poulenc's Sonata for Flute and Piano (1956). The two works were written at virtually the same time and have strikingly similar styles.

[84] George Handy, *Saxophone Quartet No. 1*, released on The New York Saxophone Quartet, *The New York Saxophone Quartet (Jazz-Classical)*, Twentieth-Century-Fox 3150, 1965, LP. George Handy, *Saxophone Quartet No. 2*, unreleased recording, New York Saxophone Quartet, ca. 1964–1965. There is no known recording of *Saxophone Quartet No. 3*. There is a cassette copy of portions of the *New York Suite* (not intended for release) in the Handy archive at IJS.

technically rigorous—music was particularly well-suited for Handy's compositional aesthetic. Also, the group's members wanted to help Handy artistically and financially as best they could. After these 1954–55 record projects, and besides the sporadic production of the works mentioned above, Handy largely disappeared from the music scene, apparently a victim of his personal habits and frustrations.

In late 1968, Handy was offered work that allowed him to extricate himself from the high-pressure world of the New York music business. He accepted a job as pianist in the house band at Grossinger's Resort, one of the "Borscht Belt" hotels in the Catskill Mountains. Handy and his second wife, Elaine, took to the area, and eventually settled there. This type of resort hotel work was still a legitimate employment option for freelance musicians, and a number chose, as did Handy, to move to the area on a permanent basis, both for the steady work and the change in life style that it provided. The latter was exemplified when Handy spoke of the Catskills fondly: "It seems to take all the tension and anxiety out of life; I felt at peace working up at the Catskills."[85]

From the late 1970s through the mid-1990s, the work opportunities in the Catskills were diminishing, and the type of bands that Handy was involved with there were gradually being replaced by smaller ensembles that were catering to changing musical tastes. It was in this latter environment that Handy ended his musical career, and this contrasts starkly with his brilliant work in the jazz scene of 1945–1946, when he wrote such important compositions as *The Bloos*.

Abstract

The life of the jazz composer-arranger-pianist George Handy (1920–1997) is similar to that of countless freelance musicians in that his rather itinerant career involved the somewhat predictable ebb and flow of work, unemployment, success, and frustration. Handy's highs and lows, however, were particularly dramatic, as Handy rose to the top of his profession, disappeared precipitously, and eventually found a home as a bandleader in the Catskill Mountains resort hotels.

George Handy burst onto the music scene in a stunning manner, surprising the big band world with an individualistic brand of experimentalism. Handy's approach during this period makes him an important member of a small group of composers and arrangers—including Eddie Sauter (1914–1981), Pete Rugolo (1915-), Ralph Burns (1922–2001), Bob Graettinger (1923–1957), Gil Evans (1912–1988), and Gerry Mulligan (1927–1996)—working in what is generally referred to as a "modernist" or "progressive jazz" style in the late 1930s through the early 1950s.

In this article, after a biographical sketch, I examine one of Handy's most important compositions, *The Bloos* (1946). After contextualizing the work historically, I focus on Handy's incorporation of advanced compositional resources in this imaginative and inventive work. The piece is an idiosyncratic and deconstructed blues with a wonderfully personal orchestrational sensibility, and the composition is free of many of the typical restrictions of jazz and blues forms.

[85] Schremp, "Handy Oral History," 236.