'UNACKNOWLEDGED UBIQUITY': THE SAXOPHONE IN POPULAR MUSIC

by

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ABSTRACT

What connotations are evoked when a saxophone solo or riff is heard in a mainstream hit such as Jason Derulo’s 'Talk Dirty', Kendrick Lamar’s 'Alright', or Katy Perry’s 'Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)'? This project investigates the ways in which the saxophone and saxophonists shape perceptions surrounding contemporary popular music and culture in the United States via the instrument's historical and symbolic associations by utilising ethnographic data and media discourses to frame the analysis of three case studies. Musical instruments act as expressive, meaningful cultural artefacts and intermediaries of socially assigned characteristics in music, and three overarching themes are examined here that the saxophone has historically represented in commercial contexts: the concepts of cool and kitsch; gendered identities and sexuality related to the saxophone and its performance; and considerations of race in American popular music. The outcome of this study is an illustration of the ways in which the saxophone operates as a consequential aural, visual, and social component of contemporary mainstream music.
Examining the role of the collective voice of prominent professional saxophonists in relation to the implication of the instrument in mainstream discourses serves to augment the scholarship related to both the saxophone and popular music by presenting data collected in interviews of musicians that have previously been under-represented in scholarly studies.

I dedicate this paper to my family: Derek, Mom, Dad, Tricia, Libby, Joyce, (and Bob!), I could not have done this, or anything really, without you. I love you all so much.

To the saxophone community: I hope that this research contributes in a meaningful way to the past, present, and future of the scholarship and performance of our beloved instrument.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A noticeable addition to mainstream popular music occurred in 2011 when several widely circulated songs by artists such as Katy Perry and Lady Gaga featured the saxophone—an unmistakable and distinctive sound that had been absent from the *Billboard* Hot 100 charts in the United States for almost two decades. It seemed to be a sonic signifier of pop music's shift toward referential, nostalgic sounds of the 1980s, as the saxophone was regularly heard in music of that decade but faded from mainstream pop in the 1990s and early 2000s. The instrument's return to popular music was measurable and inspired me to research the trend further. I was not the only one to take note; many reports commenting on the saxophone's conspicuous reappearance were published in major mainstream news and entertainment media outlets, such as *Rolling Stone* magazine, *MTV*, *The Guardian,* and Pitchfork.com.

The saxophone is more than a metal tube with tone holes, it is an expressive intermediary between the players and the music, the essence of which can be comprehensively explored through analysis of the social structures and cultures surrounding the instrument (Linn, 1991, p. xi). As Bates noted, the work of theorising musical instruments is valuable and not carried out often enough considering the sheer amount of '…social relations [that] are mobilized around material objects and the thing-power[1] that they possess' (2012, p. 388). This study aims to analyse the interrelationship between the instrument, the performers, sound objects, and particular musical environments in which the saxophone functions, in order to explore the ways in which it signifies the key themes of cool/kitsch, race, and gender/sexuality within the soundscape of contemporary American popular music (Johnson, 1995). Interestingly, very little research regarding the saxophone in American popular music has been undertaken up to this

point, and none of this research has utilised an ethnographic approach to the instrument's use in recent commercial environments and the performers' experiences thereof. Much of the scholarship concerning saxophone has presented historical, biographical, and pedagogical approaches, primarily focusing on performers and composers active in either Western art music or jazz spheres.[2] This scarcity in research is also of personal relevance, considering my own experiences as a saxophonist. Therefore, this project utilises an emic research approach to contribute to scholarship concerning the role of a very popular and recognisable instrument in contemporary mainstream contexts in the United States.

The examination of the saxophone's connection to the key themes in recent examples of popular American music is carried out by analysing ethnographic interview data collected from saxophonists working in this musical environment, combined with the presentation of case studies that investigate three widely circulated popular songs featuring the instrument. The songs explored in the case studies are 'Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)' (2011) by Katy Perry, 'Talk Dirty' (2014) by Jason Derulo, and 'Alright' (2015) by Kendrick Lamar. The impact of this research is to update and expand the footprint of the saxophone discourse with the addition of ethnographic data that illuminates the convergence of contemporary popular music, culture, and musicians. An ancillary aim of the project is to render more visible those actors who play a crucial supporting role in generating the soundscape of today's popular music. Lastly, exploring the instrument's connotative function in the case studies will help to better interpret its symbolic nature and significance in contemporary popular music culture in the United States.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The central questions to be answered in this project are how does the saxophone affect

perceptions of American popular music? What impact does it have on contemporary listeners when they hear a saxophone featured in American popular music in the twenty-first century? How has the relationship between the performers and the instrument contributed to the saxophone's iconic status as a meaningful object with particular symbolic associations? What are the aesthetic principles shaping saxophone performance practice that inform its character and reception? The instrument has accrued a collection of connotations over its history that combine to construct identities built upon social, cultural, and musical factors. Similar to the way in which Jacqueline DjeDje's seminal text on fiddling in West Africa asks essential questions relating to how musical instruments operate in particular cultural contexts, the questions above serve to elaborate on the fundamental queries that arise from an investigation of the saxophone and further illuminate its contributions to contemporary American popular music and its surrounding culture (2008, p. 7).

BACKGROUND

This thesis draws its title from Richard Gehr's 2014 article in *Rolling Stone*, 'Balkan Beat Box on Their "Talk Dirty" Sample and Why the Sax is Back' (2014). Gehr interviewed band members Tamir Muskat and Ori Kaplan of Balkan Beat Box about their music being sampled by artists in two hit songs that were in heavy rotation on pop radio stations at the time. Gehr mentions how the band had 'reached a new level of unacknowledged ubiquity' thanks to Kaplan's saxophone riff heard in 'Talk Dirty' by R&B and pop artist Jason Derulo. The riff had originally been recorded for the band's song 'Hermetico' in 2007, but the Derulo track brought considerably more attention to the band, to Kaplan, and to the saxophone due to its wide dissemination as a song that charted in the top ten of the singles charts in several countries in 2013. This phrase,

'unacknowledged ubiquity', applies to the saxophone itself in terms of mainstream popular music, or more specifically in this case, songs featured on *Billboard* Hot 100. By interviewing the members of the group and writing this article Gehr has played a part in redressing this lack of acknowledgement, for both the band and for the saxophone, placing it at the forefront of the conversation about the sound of pop music at that point in time. Kaplan commented that 'The saxophone hasn't been heard much in rock since the Eighties and it's coming back in a different way, all crooked and broken' (Gehr, 2014). In this passage, he is referencing the saxophone's return to mainstream commercial music and the unique way that both performers and producers choose to utilise its versatile sound, in acoustic and digitally altered versions as well as in the form of fragmented riffs and brief samples. His bandmate, Muskat, simply quipped, 'The saxophone is back, baby' (ibid.).

The saxophone has enjoyed a noteworthy and, at times, notorious reputation over the years. Historically speaking, the saxophone and its performers have been stigmatised through the often-unfavourable connotations of the instrument. It earned a bad reputation for featuring prominently in music that was considered to be of low social class in the United States in the early twentieth century; to many it was an overt representation of sex and general debauchery, likely a reflection of its connection to the Black community of musicians who performed on the instrument. This reputation is reflected in a few key examples, such as the ban of the instrument from the Catholic church by Pope Pius X in 1903 because of its potential to 'give reasonable cause for disgust or scandal' (Segell, 2006, p. 283), or the poor treatment by Claude Debussy of the 'Saxophone Lady', Elise Hall (Cottrell, 2012, p. 244). The instrument was invented in Europe but did not find a propitious musical niche until it was adopted by American jazz musicians in the 1920s, rendering it synonymous with the genre and in some ways, with America itself in the twentieth

century. This association with jazz and Black male musicianship shaped how it was received and integrated into other musical genres as well as public culture at large, and questions surrounding its intersecting representations of race, cool/kitsch, and gender/sexuality dialectically relate to perceptions surrounding the instrument's legitimacy, level of prestige, and popularity. Although this project is primarily concerned with discourses surrounding contemporary American popular music, the saxophone's considerable role in the history of jazz music of the twentieth century played an integral part in shaping its cultural narrative and therefore warrants some discursive treatment here. The saxophone was there in rhythm and blues, it was there for the birth of rock and roll, and it has continued, sporadically, as a part of mainstream American popular music since the early twentieth century. A critical look at the instrument, some of the key players through the years, and its more recent appearance in mainstream music substantiates the instrument's contributions to the broader environment of contemporary popular music and culture.

As a saxophonist, I immediately noticed the inclusion of the instrument in hit songs of the early 2010s; the instrument that had featured so prominently in the music of my youth. I grew up in central Illinois in the 1980s and 1990s and, while my career trajectory as a professional saxophonist did not lead into popular music, the saxophone solos that I heard on a regular basis in that decade were undeniably influential. The main reason for not performing in popular styles was that I did not see, nor was there an opportunity, to pursue the path to that type of career. Instead, I joined the school band at the age of ten and proceeded to play mostly symphonic band music and classical saxophone repertoire for the next twenty years. I struggled to imagine a link between practicing the technical minutiae required by the concert repertoire and playing a brief improvised solo in the middle of an Aretha Franklin song. My first professional performance as a

saxophonist was in 1996, when I was hired to perform Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* with the Illinois Symphony Orchestra. It was the first time I had ever been paid to perform and it was a formative experience. Although I have been a professional saxophonist for many years like each of the participants in the study, the perspective that I bring to the project is that of a classically trained musician which is further explained below.

The classical music education I received in my younger years led me to become a saxophone 'denier'. I was defensive about any perception of the saxophone being cheesy, kitschy, loud, ungainly, or somehow lowbrow—in other words, an instrument not to be taken seriously. Saxophonists still strive for acceptance and respectability within the Western art music traditions, and the instrument remains a parvenu: it does not have the breadth and depth of canonical performance repertoire of the flute, the clarinet, or the oboe. What we, as saxophonists, have, is something quite different: a rich and storied involvement with vernacular music in the United States. One issue is that some classical saxophonists, in an effort to achieve respect in the world of Western art music, have attempted to repudiate other styles of saxophone performance rather than embrace them for their vibrant contributions to the history of the instrument. I was one of these saxophonists for a time, forsaking other styles that were not Western art music or what I deemed 'serious' jazz. While I enjoyed hearing the sax solos of the 1980s and beyond on the radio, I simultaneously judged them for their uncomplicated sounds. The primary concern in my professional performing life was achieving respect for the instrument in the classical world in which I had been trained and was making a living. This meant performing the canonical works of composers such as Jacques Ibert or Paul Creston or executing the solos with symphony orchestras in *Pictures at an Exhibition* and *Bolero* with surgical precision and a supreme sense of

musicianship—much like a clarinettist would approach a performance of works by Mozart, Beethoven, or Brahms.

After two decades of working as a professional musician, I came to the realisation that it is possible to strive for the elevation of the saxophone's reputation while still extolling the virtues of the instrument's versatility in all musical genres. In this light, there is much to be learned from studying the perspectives of those 'popular' saxophonists who have been heard and beloved by millions of people worldwide. They have found and are pursuing a path different from my own, and yet, as revealed in the interviews I conducted for this project, we all share similar close connections to the instrument. Interestingly, it was while performing with orchestras that I finally realised that to eschew certain aspects of the history of the saxophone was to omit crucial fragments of its singular sound. In other words, every musical genre in which the saxophone has been prominently featured must be integrated into our performance practices if we are to do the instrument justice. Consequently, the reconciliation or unification of my classical training with my deep appreciation for popular music has led me to combine these two divergent perspectives of saxophoning into a study of the things that most interest me: the saxophone and saxophonists. Aspects of our shared aesthetic beliefs pertaining to the performance of the instrument transcend genre, and it is puzzling that I had not embraced this earlier in my musical career. The question then became, how do I go about researching the saxophone in popular music? The answer was to use my experiences and knowledge as a member of the group of professional saxophonists to investigate the meanings signified by the instrument through the experiences and knowledge of other saxophonists.

The saxophone is a remarkably popular instrument; it circulates as a polysemous object, revealing a few principal significations throughout its history. Due to its versatility, it is heard in

genres from Western art music to Afrobeat to electronic dance music to Carnatic music. Its inclusion in a broad range of musical styles around the globe, its association with pre-eminent jazz figures of the twentieth century, and its frequent appearance in a broad range of popular music styles, news and entertainment media, and advertising, demonstrates that the saxophone warrants deeper investigation. This requires investigating the instrument not only as a reflection of its cultural contexts, but as an 'interactive entity' that is perpetually renegotiating its roles in performance modes, sound ideals, and symbolic meanings (Racy, 1994, p. 38). It is pervasive in popular music and yet its role in commercial genres has received scant scholarly attention. 'Unacknowledged ubiquity' is thus a fitting title for this study which aims at examining the saxophone as a musical artefact that typifies various socio-cultural touchstones, some of which emerge from the lived experiences of its players and some of which are assigned by various types of media from its portrayal in movies and television, to its frequent representation in the news, entertainment media, and advertising.

In terms of the ethnographic aspect of this study, it is the saxophone that connects us, not only the performers but the listeners as well, through its emblematic status. The prominent participants in this study—Mike Burton, Mindi Abair, Jeff Coffin, Lenny Pickett, Kirk Whalum, Jeff Watkins, Carlos Sosa, Branford Marsalis, and Sal Lozano—stand on the shoulders of the hundreds, if not thousands, of virtuosic performers whose playing styles contributed to the development of such vast and significant musical genres as jazz, rhythm and blues, and rock and roll. The involvement of the instrument, with its particular sonic signature, in these genres and many others speaks to its role in music-making. Similar to the way Shannon discusses the engagement that performers have with music and identity in Syria, each saxophonist's playing and the way that they talk about it in this study provides a window into understanding

contemporary American popular music and culture (2006, p. 27). As Dawe affirms, 'the joy of playing musical instruments is a joy that comes from exhilaration felt at physical, emotional and social levels' (2005, p. 60). The stories and narratives collected from the players are what '…hold an object together, giving it cultural meaning' (Woodward in Bates, 2012, p. 366)

DEFINITIONS

While the saxophone has signified various meanings over the course of its existence in different types of music and through its vast iconography, three principal themes have emerged and comprise the key theoretical strains investigated in this project as they relate to contemporary American musical cultures**: cool/kitsch, race, and gender/sexuality**. The saxophone is investigated here in terms of the three key themes and how they manifest themselves now, in contemporary contexts, and this approach references A. J. Racy's idea that musical instruments are adaptive and idiosyncratic, interact logically with physical and cultural realities, and continually negotiate and renegotiate their roles in various societal structures (Racy, 1994, p. 38).

Three contemporary popular songs by Katy Perry, Jason Derulo, and Kendrick Lamar were chosen as case studies in this project, and each study presents evidence towards understanding how the saxophone reinforces social and cultural constructs through its association with the aforementioned key themes and the way that they intersect with one another. The themes are briefly defined below and explored throughout the project.

COOL/KITSCH

The concepts of cool and kitsch are grouped together in this project because they represent

a related divergence. In this context, that refers to the contrasting value judgements that shape how the saxophone has been historically perceived. The two qualities are not exact opposites of one another, but they do emerge from disparate places in the public consciousness; on a fundamental level, cool is a positive, desirable quality while kitsch is a negative, sometimes disparaged, quality. In instances where kitsch is considered in positive terms, it is often still devalued and linked with cheapness. Kitsch manifests as comedy, farce, or humour, and typically elicits feelings of nostalgia and sentimentality. It is something that is known, common, and comfortable, while cool is rebellious and autonomous (Warren & Campbell, 2014, p. 604). Some theories suggest that coolness is connected to behaviours collectively demonstrated by members of particular subcultures, but Warren and Campbell posit that a certain level of 'bounded autonomy'—just slightly outside of society's conventions—leads to a perception of coolness (ibid.). This explanation plays into the notion that the two qualities represent difference: kitsch is familiar or common while cool represents a sense of fearlessness and exclusivity.

The saxophone is often considered to be 'cool', and it is thus necessary to briefly define the concept here as well as explain how it is connected to the instrument. Cool can be a behaviour, a way for a person to act or to be, or a general aesthetic value for things. It can be attributed to both people and objects and is a concept that has been considered by researchers of various disciplines including cultural studies, American studies, African and African American studies, gender studies, fashion, marketing, and advertising (Thompson, 1973; Alexander, 1997; Haselstein, 2013; Dinerstein, 2014; Brown, 2000; Warren & Campbell, 2014). It has social and economic implications and has the ability to make things popular or contribute to commercial viability; it is a way to assign a positive value to objects and people (Hill, 2001, p. 458). In terms of people, cool is most often defined as a behavioural characteristic: a form of affect control that

results in a sense of detachment from one's physical and social surroundings, a performative act that is both subversive and magnetic.

The concept of cool can be allocated to people, brands, products, and trends all over the world, and Haselstein and Dinerstein both attribute contemporary definitions of the word to twentieth century Black cultural practices, specifically Black jazz musicians of the 1940s (Warren & Campbell, 2014; Haselstein, 2013; Dinerstein, 2014). This is the initial thread that connects the saxophone to cool, because it is a material object that, in many ways, is literally and figuratively representative of jazz and the zeitgeist surrounding it in the mid-twentieth century. Saxophonists such as Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, and Dexter Gordon helped to define cool in music and in embodied comportment in the 1940s as they navigated racism in America. Their contributions to the construction of cool personified notions of race and gendered expression. Examining the intersectionality between each of these themes and how they are related to saxophone performance aids in understanding how the saxophone is perceived to make a meaningful contribution to music. Despite the instrument's connection with famous saxophonists in the early and mid-twentieth century, its identification as cool in mainstream popular culture has been intermittent; at times, it has been considered very uncool.

As Pountain notes, part of the difficulty in defining cool is its mutability (2000). So, what happens to something when it is not considered cool anymore? It may come to be considered kitsch. Kitsch is sometimes simply defined as bad taste, but who, through what means, and exactly how is this determined ('Kitsch', 2020)? Kitsch relates to the concept of cool in that it is also a socially constructed attribute bestowed by an audience (Warren & Campbell, 2014). By many accounts, kitsch and cool coalesced around the same time period in the United States, but whereas cool materialised from authenticity in Black American social and

cultural practices, kitsch represents a form of artifice in relation to highbrow forms and values. Both qualities can be nebulous and difficult to define, in part because of the broad and ever-evolving nature of contemporary mass culture and media. Kitsch is an embarrassing overabundance of effort and sincerity in aesthetic expression, while cool is about performative detachment, self-assurance, and self-preservation. The massive growth of popular music and culture in mid-century America contributed to the environment in which kitsch thrived in the mainstream, and the saxophone has, intermittently, been a symbol of kitsch. Indeed, the saxophone's participation in parodic, comic, and kitschy viral videos released in the early 2010s contributed to the instrument's return to the spotlight in American popular culture. This can be seen in the guise of characters such as Sexy Sax Man, Sergio from *Saturday Night Live,* Ron Swanson's saxophone playing alter-ego Duke Silver from popular sitcom *Parks and Recreation*, and others that are discussed in Chapter 2. Interestingly, in more recent years it has become possible for something to be so kitschy that it becomes cool, and the saxophone has demonstrated that the two qualities can even be assigned concurrently despite their disparity. The concepts of cool and kitsch are further explored as they relate to music and the saxophone in subsequent chapters.

GENDER/SEXUALITY

Leonard Cohen, the Canadian singer and songwriter, wrote the following lyrics for one of the songs featured in a commercially released musical film, *Night Magic,* in 1985:

> *O listen to him and his saxophone*
> *Our musical genital unicorn*
> *He's very well hung with his golden horn*
> Leonard Cohen, 'Song of Destruction' (1985)

The film was about a struggling musician who falls in love with an angel, and it was not considered a success at the box office. However, these lyrics, crafted by a renowned songwriter, are representative of the gendered associations and sexuality that are so strongly linked to the saxophone in the popular imagination.

Three principal factors reinforce the saxophone's link to gendered identities, expression, and sexuality: its serpentine, phallic physical shape, as illustrated in the lyrics above; the fact that it is played primarily by men; and the similarity between the words sex and sax[3]. Gender is generally defined as socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women (World Health Organization, 2016). In this study, the performative aspects of gender and sexuality, including ways that they can be expressed in musical performance, are discussed in relation to the saxophone in one conspicuous example of contemporary popular music in the United States. The binary of masculine and feminine gender is discussed, not in a purposeful attempt to deny or exclude non-binary identities, but to concentrate on the two forms of gendered expression historically related to musical performance. Performative aspects of saxophone playing have traditionally been masculine in nature, and these aspects are examined in the second case study.

RACE

For this project, it is beneficial to define race within the parameters of its relationship to the saxophone and to popular music in America. It is important to mention the saxophone's beginnings as an instrument played by primarily white male musicians in military bands and vaudeville acts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but its adoption by Black musicians in the early twentieth century further popularised the instrument and imbued it with

wholly different connotations, in some cases positioning it as a symbol of race, politics, and progress. Louis Jordan ushered in the rock and roll era and, with his saxophone, was the living embodiment of the shift from jazz to rock and roll as the dominant popular genre in the post-war United States. With the saxophone's presence in a variety of Black musical genres and the history of racial inequalities in America, it was inevitable that the instrument would be subject to the scrutiny and discrimination that Black musicians experienced, and the fact that it was regarded by some white critics as 'low and dirty' appears to solidify this connection (Segell, 2006). In the third case study (See Chapter 6), this narrative is reframed in what seems to be a reclamation for the improvised saxophone solo from low, dirty, or kitsch to an elevated acknowledgement of the Black saxophonists and musical cultures of the past.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An ethnomusicological study of how an instrument insinuates connotation in music necessitates taking into consideration how it operates in a particular musical context, the role of the performers, and aspects of the morphology of the instrument itself. Both Nicholas Cook in his *Music: A Very Short Introduction* (2000) and Eliot Bates in his article 'Popular Music Studies and the Problems of Sound, Society and Method' (2013) lament the lack of recognition that instrumentalists have received in academic studies. They seem to agree, along with others (Tagg, 2011 and Fabbri in Tagg, 2011, p. 4), that this is a symptom of a larger issue of the lack of 'interdisciplinarity in popular music studies' (Bates, 2013).

> [Music] and musicians seem to have become some kind of troublesome appendage to popular music studies…where is music and where are the musicians? Can researchers learn something from them, or are musicians some kind of unnecessary appendix of popular music studies? (Bates, 2013, p. 17)

Cook, in reference to the subjects covered in the *New Oxford Companion to Music* and the *Rough Guide* to classical music, notes that, '…performers are conspicuous by their absence. It is like the role of servants in Victorian society: they have to be there, but you don't have to talk about them' (Cook, 2000). There is a wealth of knowledge and understanding that can be learned from musicians and, as Sara Cohen discusses in her research regarding the importance of ethnography in popular music studies, the information gathered from fieldwork illuminates the intricate social structures at work in the production of music and places the focus upon people and their musical practices and processes (1993, p. 123). Cohen continues, 'only with such knowledge can we be justified in making more generalised statements about popular music' (1993, p. 136). Prefacing the idea of musical instruments as mediators discussed below, Bates remarked that 'sometimes one specific instrument is embroiled in unique stories, trajectories, and sets of social relations', succinctly implying the numerous paths that could be taken in research of this nature (2012, p. 367).

In a review by John Baily of Paul Berliner's influential text *The Soul of Mbira: Music and traditions of the Shona people of Zimbabwe* (1978), Baily outlines the goal that Berliner achieved of demonstrating the power of musical instruments to act as musical mediators that connect certain avenues of inquiry into musical research as well as the benefits of these types of research:

> This book is a model of ethnomusicological thinking and investigation and it suggests a specific way of approaching a complex socio-musical system like our own popular music. The method is to start with a particular musical instrument…from the instrument itself one works outwards, studying the techniques of performance, how musicians represent the musical instrument to themselves, learning processes, use of the instrument in ensembles, song texts, dynamics of performance events, and so on. (Baily, 1984, p. 306)

Although many studies have been undertaken in this discipline since this review and the original text was published, Berliner's approach described by Baily remains relevant, and of particular

significance to this study. In terms of the saxophone, examples of research similar to this project have largely focused on playing styles derived from jazz that were heard in predominantly American popular music of the 1940's through to the 1960's, specifically rhythm and blues and related proto-rock'n'roll genres (Costigan, 2007; Miller, 1995), or has been concerned with studies of the instrument's burgeoning presence in exclusively Western art music spheres. The research presented in the following pages aims to present an approach to the discussion of the saxophone and its performance that is geared toward sociological, anthropological, and ethnomusicological analyses of its inclusion in examples of recent mainstream music, rather than from a perspective that emerges primarily from performance studies.

For the purposes of this study, Maria Sonevytsky's definition of a 'new' critical organology is particularly germane due to its interdisciplinary, holistic strategy for investigating musical instruments and the ways that they operate in culture, and this approach informs the methodology used here (2008, p. 102). Sonevytsky proposes a critical organology that combines an anthropological view of the social life of objects with culture theory that stresses the symbolic value of objects, and mixes in ethnomusicological studies that consider musical instruments in specific cultural contexts (ibid.). This integrative approach supplies a foundation from which to draw a comprehensive picture of the contributions of the musicians and the musical instruments in the making of meaning in recently released mainstream music. Bates updates this idea further in his 'Social Life of Musical Instruments' (2012) explaining why the traditional organological method of classification for musical instruments is an inadequate system for exploring the 'heterogeneity of networks' in which musical instruments operate on multiple levels of affect and meaning in society (pp. 366-368).

There are additional examples of dynamic ethnomusicological literature that utilise ethnography relating to musical instruments to articulate the way they operate in broader cultural contexts that inform the methods for this study. In terms of designing a project that effectively demonstrates how music and musicians interact with and represent particular themes, the work of Martin Stokes (2010) and Jonathan Holt Shannon (2006) were also influential.

Stokes discussed three popular singers in Turkey who represent different time periods and political eras in Turkish history and presents each as a case study, investigating the ways that each singer and their music signifies specific elements of Turkish life at particular moments in the country's history. One singer evoked nostalgia for audiences, another singer embodied the concept of the 'star-citizen', and the final singer was a symbol of the neoliberalism of the 1990s. A similar structural design exists in this study, with three songs presented as individual case studies in which particular themes are considered in relation to how the saxophone symbolises them in the context of the song and its accompanying visual media.

Shannon's work typifies an effective combination of ethnography with politics and its effects on aesthetic valuation, and how the concept of authenticity lies at the heart of the assignment of aesthetic value to popular music in Syria. While a discussion of aesthetics or aesthetic value is not the direct focus of this study, the aim of investigating '…how [Syrian] musicians conceptualise and articulate their music' as a way to interpret aspects of the culture through its music is definitely a goal here (Shannon, 2006, p. 26).

Other scholarly works that present a holistic view of musical instruments within specific cultural contexts as well as a diverse range of spatial, temporal, political, and ideological considerations include works by Bates (2012, 2013), Berliner (1993), Dawe (2010), Djedje (2008), Linn (1994), Rice (1994), and Waksman (2001, 2003). These writings are beneficial to

the advancement of ethnographic and musical instrument research and serve as worthy precedents for this study, in structural, ideological, and epistemological terms, and traits from each of these studies are interlaced throughout subsequent chapters of this project.

METHODOLOGY

In order to explore the saxophone in popular music and the implicit meanings represented in the music, a mixed method approach, one that engages with elements of critical organology, ethnography, autoethnography, media studies, and reception theory is employed in this project. In this case, the term 'mixed method' does not refer to a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, but rather a blend of qualitative approaches commonly used within the social sciences. This investigation into the making of meaning in music revolves around the instrument, the performers, sound objects, and musical environments in which the saxophone is utilised, and these four distinct elements necessitate varied and intersecting angles of analysis. I imagine the hierarchy of these four components in the order listed here, with the saxophone as the cornerstone or protagonist in the study, followed closely by consideration of the saxophonists, then the sound objects and musical environment in which the saxophone operates. For the purpose of this study, the sound objects refer to the three songs that have been chosen as case studies and the musical environment is that of contemporary popular music in the United States. This approach, influenced by H.M. Johnson's article relating to the ethnomusicology of musical instruments, allows for a comprehensive view of the capabilities and functions of instruments in particular contexts (1995).

To answer the primary research question, and to gain further insight into the ways in which the saxophone symbolises the key themes in contemporary American popular music, I did two

things: I interviewed saxophonists who perform with mainstream artists about their experiences and their relationship with the instrument, and I investigated the three key themes of cool/kitsch, race, and gender/sexuality as identified above. I used ethnography and autoethnography to explore the saxophonists' understanding of the instrument, and media studies and reception theory to examine how the saxophone is presented through multiple modes of mainstream media in the United States and subsequently perceived by audiences. Each case study occupies a chapter in the thesis and the key themes are explored throughout. Ethnographic and autoethnographic information is woven through each case study and provides anecdotal evidence to support the investigation into the capability of musical instruments to connote topics of socio-cultural significance.

The three main themes that are being used to investigate the saxophone materialised from several places: firstly, by researching histories and studies relating the significance of musical instruments in music and society (Bates, 2012; Berliner, 1978; Djedje, 2008; Doubleday, 2008; Linn, 1991; Rice, 1994; Sonevytsky, 2008; Waksman, 2001); and secondly, through data collected from the interviews carried out for this project, mostly in the form of anecdotal evidence; and thirdly, from personal experience as a saxophonist. Some of the study participants discussed these themes in their interviews unprompted, and sometimes I introduced the concepts, anticipating that the saxophonists may have considered some of these themes in relation to their own careers and experiences. For example, many times throughout my career people have told me that my instrument is cool, and they have also expressed surprise that I am a woman pursuing a career as a professional saxophonist. I have experienced this bewilderment relating to gender and the saxophone less in recent years, but it remains a notable issue. Mindi Abair, an internationally renowned session saxophonist, related an especially pertinent narrative about a

performance experience she had several years ago that reflects commonly held preconceptions about what a saxophonist 'looks like, feels like, and sounds like' (Abair, 2018). In his interview, Mike Burton, who regularly performs with Patti LaBelle and Jill Scott, wondered where all of the Black saxophonists had gone in recent times, as it seemed that all or most of the attendees at the Jazz Education Network Conference in recent years were white (2018). These are just a few examples of the ways in which the key themes were actively experienced and discussed by the participants and me.

Cool/Kitsch and gender/sexuality are being considered together because of their connection to one another or as contrasting but related cultural concepts. The contradiction of cool and kitsch is an important dichotomy to be explored through the symbiotic relationship that these two concepts have with one another. The saxophone signifies both of these themes, sometimes simultaneously and paradoxically, as demonstrated in the case study presented in Chapter 4. The complexity of the relationship between gender and sexuality is considered here as it relates to the saxophone and its performance. In the jazz and rock and roll performed in the mid-twentieth century the saxophone symbolised masculine sexuality in a few ways, such as the stunning virtuosity and intensity of the playing styles of Charlie Parker and John Coltrane, or the aggressiveness and power of the honkers and shouters like King Curtis, Big Jay McNeely, and Earl Bostic; men whose playing styles characterised early rock and roll. These associations cling to the saxophone, and still today the majority of saxophonists are men. The saxophone has been primarily defined by masculine notions of performance practice and expression and this is further investigated in Chapter 5. Cool/kitsch and gender/sexuality also intersect with race in American popular music, and that theme and those intersections are examined in Chapters 5 and 6.

The saxophonists interviewed for the study discussed their experiences over the course of their careers that have spanned the last several decades, but the scope of this project encompasses American popular music and culture from approximately 2010 to 2015. The reappearance of the saxophone in widely-circulated hit songs by American pop stars seems to have begun in 2010 with the release of Katy Perry's album *Teenage Dream* and reached critical mass in the summer of 2011 when there were several pop songs on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart that featured the instrument, such as Lady Gaga's 'Edge of Glory' and 'Hair', Perry's 'Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)', and M83's 'Midnight City'. This much saxophone had not been heard on the popular music charts since the 1980s. The trend continued until 2015 with hits like Macklemore and Ryan Lewis' 'Thrift Shop' (2012), 'Talk Dirty' (2014) by Jason Derulo, 'Problem' (2014) by Ariana Grande, Worth It' (2015) by Fifth Harmony, and Alright' (2015) by Kendrick Lamar, to name a few. These were artists and songs that were a considerable part of the collective consciousness of Americans in the first half of the 2010s, and these songs and their performances were broadly transmitted to wide and diverse audiences – meaning that large numbers of people were hearing the saxophone again. The instrument occupies a small space in the vast landscape of mass culture, but it is important to situate it within concepts related to popular/commercial culture as a material object that reflects societal norms and preferences (see Chapter 2) (Waksman, 2001, p. 251).

In this study, popular music is defined as music written and marketed with the intention of achieving mass distribution and sales, principally in the form of recordings (Boothe and Kuhn, 1990, p. 419). I am interested in interviewing saxophonists who have performed and/or recorded with artists whose music is considered popular, or produced for wide dissemination by the music industry and for mass consumption. Some of the artists have not performed on hit songs of the

past decade, but their experiences performing in popular music genres, as opposed to less commercially successful styles of jazz or avant-garde classical, for instance, qualifies them for this project. The particular genre may be of less consequence than the commercial viability or visibility of the principal artist; in other words, some of these saxophonists have performed with acts as varied as Jason Mraz (pop singer-songwriter), Jill Scott (neo-soul, R&B), and Tower of Power (funk). One common thread that connects these artists is that they are mainstream, popular artists producing music for a broad audience and for profitability, and as such, incorporating musical characteristics and conventions congruent with established discursive practices within that musical ethos. This statement is not meant to detract from the artists' individual agency and creativity, but to distinguish them from, for example, the more niche musical productions featuring the saxophone such as jazz fusion group Kneebody or the Prism Saxophone Quartet. Although the saxophone solo or riff may not be the star of each song being investigated in this study, its appearance demonstrates that the instrument possesses a certain appeal and/or symbolises significant socially assigned traits that serve to enhance the expressive properties of the music.

The songs at the centre of this research project's case studies are specifically hit songs that have appeared on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart since 2010, or are culturally significant for their extensive circulation in various forms of popular news and entertainment media. The stochastic process by which the *Billboard* charts are determined is not of utmost concern here, but it is worthwhile to note that there are popular musicologists and music information scientists who are parsing out the mathematical details of how the *Billboard* charts are determined and what this reveals about consumers' musical preferences (Burgoyne, 2011). According to Carroll, the *Billboard* Hot 100 was originally meant to, 'facilitate the marketplace—to let those in the

business know what others were playing and selling', but over time it became both a 'market maker as well as a market reporter' (2014). It also became a powerful tool as a historical performance record and guide for the music industry to gauge consumer tastes and activity (ibid.). For this project, information from *Billboard* is used as a way to assess a song's level of prominence and distribution in the United States. I am chiefly concerned with the noticeable increase in the early 2010s in the number of songs entering the Hot 100 that shared one noteworthy characteristic: a prominently featured saxophone solo or foundational riff.

Hybrid ethnography was used in this study, which is an interdisciplinary approach to doing ethnographic research in expressive culture that exists both online and offline (Przybylski, 2020, p. xiii). This form of ethnography was especially suitable because the nature of the study and the physical distance between the researcher and participants necessitated a combination of online research with virtual and face-to-face interviews, along with two in-person fieldwork excursions. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with saxophonists who perform or have performed in widely circulated, contemporary popular music genres. Each of them is a member of a network within which I am a member, and the questions posed in the interviews were framed by our collective personal experiences. The principal 'field site' was a virtual one; all but one of the interviews took place on a video chat platform (Skype or FaceTime), due to the complex lives that the participants lead as touring performers and the geographic separation between the interviewer and participants. The interviews centred around discussion of the participants' experiences relating to saxophone performing writ large and their connection to the three key themes outlined above, and thus the fieldwork for this study was not tethered to a specific location. Therefore, the primary focus in the analysis of the interview data was on experiences and knowledge of the saxophone and music-making rather than the context of a

physical locale. Initially it was deemed possible that some of the interviews could take place in an informal location such as backstage at a live concert, where a rigidly structured interview may not have been productive, but ultimately all of the interviews except one, with Jeff Watkins[4], took place as a Skype or FaceTime video or phone call.

A semi-structured interview design was maintained because this study aimed to answer a list of research questions, but not at the cost of missing any unanticipated information or stifling informative conversations that may veer from the script. In this regard, the interviewees potentially had a different idea of relevant issues related to the project than the interviewer. A less formal, semi-structured interview conceivably produced the most interesting and relevant results for the study. While an insider or emic approach is incumbent in this project, every attempt was made to allow the participants' responses to aid in the formulation of over-arching themes and theories. Qualitative analysis was used to summarise the data, establish links between the research objectives and the data summary, and to develop an explanatory framework for the information uncovered in the raw data. I can hypothesise freely about what I think the saxophone means and spend countless hours unearthing information about its cultural significance in a historical sense, but until the interviews were conducted and the data was collected, coded, and analysed, these were just hypotheses. The value in this study was found in integrating the information gathered from the participants with the research that emerged from the close examination of the social characteristics of the key themes. The data in this study looks a bit different than other ethnographic studies because there were only nine participants, therefore, the qualitative analysis did not necessarily serve to compare and contrast data collected from the interviewees but rather to collect descriptions of experiences primarily in the form of

anecdotal evidence. Part of the goal was to provide an avenue for the voices of these actors to be heard.

The participants in this study are professional saxophonists currently employed in the music industry that have performed on *Billboard* charting songs and/or albums. For inclusion in the study, the subjects must have professional performing and recording experience with prominent popular music artists and bands. The majority of these saxophonists are adult males that have formal musical training and/or post-secondary education and are from the United States. One female saxophonist agreed to participate in the project, also with formal musical training and/or post-secondary education. There was not a set number of participants in this study; the number was determined by the availability and willingness of the musicians to participate.

The participants were identified and recruited through research of internet sources, popular music recordings, as well as through my personal and professional networks. A considerable amount of time was initially devoted to identifying the names of some of the saxophonists who perform on these recent popular songs, because the supporting musicians of well-known artists are not always publicised in album liner notes; some detective work was required. The potential participants were approached through social media and email initially, and additionally through networks of professional musicians known to me personally. I have access to these performer networks as well as an understanding of the social norms and practices of these groups of people. A variation of the snowball sampling method also proved valuable in the recruitment of additional professionals who may have been unknown to me at the time but are active in these networks (Lewis-Beck et al, 2017). Also, participants were approached in the live performance environment (i.e., concerts) and asked to participate in the study. This may have posed safety

risks in addition to difficulty procuring and securing data, but attempts were made to avoid unforeseen complications. The questions asked in the study are not sensitive in nature, so there were no known risks to the individuals involved from the study itself.

The following interview questions enable the study's participants to define the relationships between the saxophonists, the saxophone, and the music through their own experiences. This provides import to the cultural significance of the instrument and its performers. Many of these questions were formulated before the thesis project began and now act as the foundation upon which the project is built. The questions arose from my some of my own contemplations regarding the instrument, and the awareness of not only the existence of the particular significations of the instrument, but the aspiration to study these meanings and put into words the saxophonists' understanding and explanation of these significations.

Why/When/How did you start playing the saxophone?

Did you study jazz and/or classical?

Did you ever study/learn about the rock and roll saxophonists such as Junior Walker, King Curtis, Earl Bostic, Boots Randolph, etc?

How and when did you get involved with popular music and artists?

Did the producers/artists ask you to play in a particular style?

How much interaction did you have with the artist?

Do you think it means something when you hear a saxophone in popular music (socially, culturally)?

Is the saxophone cool? Why or why not? Do others think it's cool?

Why does it seem to fall in and out of favour in popular music?

The answers to these questions allow the participants to define their relationship to the saxophone and to the music that they create, and in turn help us to understand its polysemic nature and cultural relevance. Part of the goal was to understand why, in the musicians' words, the saxophone is popular, why and how it has developed connotations, and how its popularity has manifested itself in their careers as musicians. In terms of the concept of performativity, how do they consciously or subconsciously 'perform' or otherwise engage with the aforementioned key themes of race, gender, and/or cool/kitsch? Thematically speaking, the questions were arranged into three broad categories: education and background, professional experiences, and cultural considerations. Brief discussion prompts were developed from these questions in order to streamline the interview process and in most cases the questions listed above acted as introductory topics that initiated other discussions and storytelling. In addition to the ethnographic elements of the study described above, autoethnography was also used here as an organic extension of the nature of the study.

Objectivity would be untenable in an analysis of any aspect related to the saxophone because of my immersion in this particular environment, therefore, reflexivity and autoethnography are important elements of the study. Reflexivity acknowledges the point of view that I bring to the research and its effects on the study at large. Here, it is demonstrated by explaining my background, perspective, and position as a researcher, and the autoethnographic elements illustrate this positionality throughout the personal narratives about my experiences as a saxophonist. Both elements show how the intersection between aspects of my personal identity and membership in the group of saxophonists impacts and transforms the research (Finlay and Gough, 2003, p. 4). This serves to contextualise my perspective on the topics at hand, and as Przybylski notes, helps the reader to understand those characteristics over which an individual

(the researcher) has control over and those they do not (2020, p. 36). For example, I am a cisgender woman who is white and middle class, and I am a saxophonist and first-generation college student. These characteristics represent the convergence of both privilege (the opportunities I was afforded to pursue an education), and marginalisation (being a woman and a classical saxophonist) (Boylorn and Orbe, 2020, p. 15). As described further below, reflexivity recognises my perspective and potential subjectivities, but the focus of the study remains on the participants and not the researcher (Hahn, 2006, p. 89).

Reed-Danahay broadly defines the autoethnographic method as, 'a critical study of yourself in relation to one or more cultural context(s)' (1997, p. 9). This definition is at the core of Heewon Chang's text *Autoethnography as Method*, where a thorough conceptual framework for the consideration of culture in relation to self and others is put forth (2008, p. 12). Contrary to the approach used in other autoethnographies, however, I do not plan to place the focus on myself as a main character, but rather to use my experiences as a bridge to study others, or as a guide to studying the group of saxophonists. As Chang notes, in this particular method of autoethnography, 'self opens a door to an investigation but remains outside while others are in the spotlight as main characters or participants' (2008, p. 66).

As a method for qualitative research, autoethnography is still relatively new and a few different approaches have been considered including evocative autoethnography which places focus on emotional resonance (Ellis, 2004; Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, 2011; Ellis and Bochner, 2006) and analytic autoethnography which aims for analytical reflexivity (Anderson, 2006; Le Roux, 2015). As Le Roux notes, the shared concepts of personal experience and of culture, and the relationship between the two, are crucial to each of the different approaches to autoethnography, and that is the case in this study as well (2015, p. 198).

According to Leon Anderson in an article published in the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, '…analytic autoethnography refers to ethnographic work in which the researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in the researcher's published texts, and (3) committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena' (2006). This study is informed by a profound knowledge of saxophone technique, education, musical practices, and something I refer to as 'gig sense', which is a term that attempts to encapsulate the implicit and explicit knowledge acquired throughout the life of a professional performer. Gig sense is having the technical facility, experience, and instinct to effectuate a skilful and entertaining performance. It is essentially common sense for the stage and can be as simple as showing up on time and prepared for a performance, or as complex as overcoming a technical issue in the midst of a solo or helping one of the other musicians get back on track after getting lost in the form, all while performing at a world-class level. There are aspects of gig sense that can be taught, but for the most part this is something at which the most successful musicians excel, and some people are able to instinctively deploy.[5] Gig sense has enabled me to formulate the useful ethnographic concepts utilised for this project which combine insider experience, reflexivity, and autoethnographic methods.

There is a sense of trust and mutual respect that is achieved by relating to other musicians about performance experiences or gig sense. This shared, implicit performance knowledge and experience is the basis upon which this ethnographic study has hinged, and it consequently provides a subjective take on the analysis of data collected in the interviews. The 'collaborative creation of sense-making' that Bochner and Ellis refer to in their description of evocative autoethnography is possible, I think, through applying a combination of analytic and evocative

approaches, and the aim of including autoethnographic detail in this study is to contribute to this idea of sense-making (2005, p. 433).

In terms of limitations, it is possible that interviewing a cross section of general popular music consumers who are non-musicians could prove valuable in gauging general public knowledge, awareness, or interest in the saxophone in popular music and understanding its meanings to the general public. The principal ethnographic focus of this study, however, is interviewing the cadre of professional recording saxophonists in order to explore their contributions to popular music at large. In interviewing these musicians, I hope to provide knowledge and insight into an under-served area of study; specifically, professional saxophonists working not in the more frequently studied Western art music or jazz genres of music, but in popular music. In this vein, 'emphasising music as social practice and process' and highlighting 'the dynamic complexities of situations within which abstract concepts and models are embedded', as Sara Cohen describes, is the goal (Cohen, 1993, p. 123). The general public's understanding of the instrument and its meanings are, however, briefly considered in regard to reception and consumption of the songs in the case studies.

The singularity of the study could lead to unintentional biases. While the hope is that saxophonists being interviewed by a fellow saxophonist will provide greater insight into the significance of the data and the study in general, it is possible that this insight could in some ways be detrimental, or too partial. However, this is the main reason for exploring the concept of reflexivity: acknowledging and embracing a saxophonist's perspective as the researcher. The intent is to allow the musicians to speak freely and openly about their professional experiences, and to use this project as a vehicle for the dissemination of information regarding musicians working in mainstream genres. And although I too have maintained a career as a performer, my

experiences have been exclusively in the classical and jazz genres. I have never recorded or toured with a popular music artist, so some of the data collected that relates to these experiences is new to me. The principal benefit of my professional experience as a saxophonist is a familiarity with the networks as well as connections with the musicians that enable me to undertake this particular project, as well as intimate knowledge of performance practices.

The possibility of limited data due to lack of participation from some important performers could affect the outcomes, but quality is valued over quantity in this project. It is not possible to interview every saxophonist who has ever performed on a *Billboard* chart hit song; this project is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all of those performers.[6] That being said, every attempt was made to establish contact and to interview those musicians who were willing to participate in the study. Musicians are busy people that lead complicated lives, and an interview for a doctoral thesis was simply not a priority for some of the musicians that were contacted. The saxophonists that did participate in the study contributed a wealth of interesting and valuable information.

CHAPTER LAYOUT

This thesis begins with a brief description of the inspiration for this project, continues with an explanation of the background for the research, a brief literature review and definitions of the key themes, and an overview of the methodology and design of the study. The chapter ends with an outline for the layout of the project.

Chapter 2 investigates the instrument's connection to cool/kitsch, race, and gender/sexuality through an exploration of its embeddedness in contemporary popular music cultures in the United States. To locate it in these contexts, discussions of critical organology, or

the social and symbolic structures that surround the saxophone, are carried out. In terms of the instrument's role in mass or commercial popular music, mainstream media, and advertising, Stuart Hall's reception theory related to media studies serves to investigate its portrayal in these settings. Since 2011 there have been a large number of articles in various types of popular media discussing the saxophone in popular music and a collection of those are surveyed here to illustrate some of the extramusical ways in which it functions in society.

Chapter 3 defines the world of saxophonists and describes the 'field site'. Technically speaking, and for reasons that will be explained within this chapter, this study can be considered as a form of hybrid ethnography. The 'community' explored is inhabited by professional saxophonists, and the narratives and insight that they share occurred in various locations around the world over the past several decades. Although they typically perform solo, they are connected to one another by their shared knowledge and experience of making a living and making music by performing on the instrument in contemporary contexts. Their connections with the saxophone, the music they create, and the ways that they engage with the key themes of cool/kitsch, race, and gender are all examined here.

The first case study, which is an analysis of the way the saxophone operates in Katy Perry's song and the accompanying video for 'Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)', occupies Chapter 4. The key themes of cool and kitsch are defined in broad terms as well as in specific terms related to how they intersect with this particular sound object and musical environment. The last section of the chapter examines the sound of the saxophone and its implications as they emerge from Lenny Pickett's performance style and how it affects the soundscape of Perry's track.

Chapter 5 features the case study of Jason Derulo's hit song and video 'Talk Dirty'. The saxophone represents masculine gendered expression and performativity and is a strong signifier

of sexuality in this song, and this is an organic segue into a discussion of gendered identities in saxophone performance which rounds out the chapter. The sound and musical material that Ori Kaplan performs in the song is discussed in further detail in the final section.

Kendrick Lamar's song 'Alright' is the subject of the case study in Chapter 6, and the key themes that are explored here relate primarily to the saxophone's role as a signifier of the connection between race and coolness, and the distinct relevance of that signification for a song that became a symbol of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2015. In the last section of the chapter, Terrace Martin's saxophone playing is discussed in further detail.

Chapter 7 is the conclusion of the project and outlines the outcomes and impact of the study.

CONCLUSION

The saxophone is a unique and meaningful object and is considered as a protagonist in this study. It is heard in varied musical genres around the world representing different things to different people, but three key theoretical foci have emerged that result from analysis of the saxophone's practical function in particular musical environments: cool/kitsch, gender/sexuality, and race. In many ways, the history of the instrument and its performers mirror the history of American musical culture. From the light classical variety shows of the mid to late nineteenth century, to vaudeville, jazz, and eventually rhythm & blues and rock and roll, the saxophone has been an integral element in American popular music and engages with uniquely American interpretations of the key themes. This mirroring continues today, with prominently featured saxophone solos in chart-topping songs. It is vital to investigate the ways in which the instrument functions as a musical object in these contexts, and to consult the artists who continue to

entertain us and propel the popularity of the instrument further forward into the twenty-first century. In the next chapter, a discussion of the instrument's cultural embeddedness is examined in order to build the foundation for further understanding of the instrument's societal significations.

CHAPTER 2

CULTURAL EMBEDDEDNESS

INTRODUCTION

The saxophone developed and has maintained a prominent place in music and broader cultural contexts in the United States in several ways, from its early days as a key component in several types of vernacular music in the early twentieth century to recent examples of its role as a leading protagonist in a handful of viral internet videos, such as those featuring Epic Sax Guy and Sexy Sax Man. Popular music writ large is a component of mass society and culture and both are defined further in this chapter as a foundation for exploring the small yet indelible mark that the instrument has made through its signification of the aforementioned socially assigned qualities of cool, kitsch, race, gender, and sexuality. These qualities partly emerge from the players, but they are also assigned to and communicated via the saxophone's involvement in various modes of media that circulate broadly and reflect the instrument's enduring legacy as a part of popular music and its corresponding culture in the United States.

How did the saxophone capture the attention of audiences and musicians alike in the United States? It could be as simple as falling in love with 'that shiny instrument', as Louis Jordan described it, or hearing ourselves in its sound, which saxophonists and scholars assert is sonically similar to the human voice (Ingham, 1998; Cottrell, 2012; Segell, 2005; Shaw, 1978). Saxophonists are able to produce all manner of sounds from the instrument: dirty, gritty, clean, neutral; they can make it hum, chant, and sigh. Jazz historians, musicologists, and journalists discuss its enigmatical sexual connotations in relation not only to its physical appearance, but also its lithe tone as well as the socio-cultural inferences that have developed over the course of the past 173 years since its invention (Monson, 1995; Segell, 2005; Lindner, 2014; Cottrell,

2012; Eggert and Vockeroth, 2003). It wails, moans, honks, and shouts; it is a 'sonic chameleon' (Cottrell, 2012, p. 341). When asked why he thinks the saxophone is popular, Jeff Coffin touched on some of these points and referred to the versatility of the saxophone as well as a general sense of eroticism that it is capable of producing that attracts people:

> I think that the sonority of it also, the timbre, where it sits in relation to the human voice is part of it also. The ambiguity of the instrument, the enigma nature of the instrument is part of it. It's exciting. To me, it's maybe the most exciting instrument. You can go to a whisper; it's like kissing someone behind the ear, and then (A: 'slapping them in the face?!') Yeah, it has all of that! It can be tender, and it can be brutal, and everything in between. (Coffin, 2018)

Perhaps it is the seductive serpentine shape, which brings to mind comparable concepts of gender identity associated with musical instruments such as the feminised hourglass shape of the violin or the frequent notion of the electric guitar 'as a vehicle for phallic display' (Waksman, 2003). The acclaimed classical saxophonist and pedagogue Jean-Marie Londeix remarked, 'The form, with its beautiful curves, is female. But when viewed from the side, it could also be an erection. Part of its appeal is that it's never clear what it is…its ambiguous sexuality is very modern' (Segell, 2005). Maybe it is a performer we idolised, such as John Coltrane, Gerry Mulligan, Branford Marsalis, or Kenny G. All of these factors contributed to the saxophone becoming a widely recognised and beloved musical instrument. In terms of American popular music and culture, it has achieved a level of almost universal recognition, but is this recognition due to its versatility, its shiny, curvy, sinewy shape, ambiguous sexuality, or something else entirely? Either in spite of, or because of, its lack of full acceptance in the domain of Western art music, the instrument has gone on to obtain a degree of success in almost every musical genre recognised by the global recording industries. Branford Marsalis remarked that 'It's the sound of the instrument…it has a versatility. The saxophone can actually produce a certain level of intensity without matching volume', and went on to say, '…(the) saxophone served a specific role

in popular music. Somehow the song had to get from A to C. The saxophone is the B' (Marsalis, 2018). Marsalis believes it possesses a singular sonic signature that played a central role as both a literal and figurative bridge in popular music of the 1950s and 1960s, and similar to Coffin, he believes it has the ability to express a quiet intensity which sets it apart from other instruments.

This chapter explores the cultural embeddedness of the saxophone by locating the instrument and the musicians within the context of its broad circulation in American popular music and culture and its representation of cool/kitsch, race, and gender/sexuality. This exploration endeavours to answer the question of how the saxophone impacts contemporary American popular music by discussing some of the ways that its image and aural signature are transmitted through other forms of mass media and advertising. As Johnson noted, 'Through a study of the interrelationship between musical instrument, performer, and sound object, one is able to understand the functional context of performance as a meaningful event that can be related to other areas of cultural analysis' (1995, p. 266). The theoretical concerns mentioned above are signified by the saxophone; they are a part of the essence of its sound, and to hear the sound of the saxophone in certain popular songs in the twenty-first century is to hear an implicit distillation of these themes. Both the sound and the visual or physical representation of the instrument as well as its performance are coded to signify certain qualities depending on the context. Part of the answer to the question of how the saxophone contributes certain connotations to music is through its representation of these themes in recent examples of music, culture, news, entertainment, and social media that are primarily distributed through the internet.

The chapter begins with an exploration of critical organology and mass culture as they relate to the saxophone in order to provide an ideological foundation for the examination of the instrument through its embeddedness in popular music and culture. That discussion is followed

by a brief history of the instrument in mainstream genres and some of its iconic players in the twentieth century, and continues with an analysis of viral videos from the early 2010s that demonstrate how its connection to kitsch has recently reinvigorated the instrument's visibility. The chapter ends with a discursive analysis of the saxophone's portrayal in advertising and its reception in the mainstream news and entertainment media which serves to demonstrate its pervasiveness in popular music and culture.

CRITICAL ORGANOLOGY

Musical instruments are significant for the way that they engage with different dimensions of people's lives, and critical organology offers valuable insights into the noteworthy facets of the 'social life of instruments' and the ways that they intertwine with the social life of humans (Bates, 2012, p. 364). As Dawe noted, 'they [musical instruments] exist in webs of culture, entangled in a range of discourses and political intrigues, and they occupy engendered and status-defining positions. Musical instruments are seen as material and social constructions' (quoted in Bates, 2012, p. 368). This is a notable introductory explanation of the extent to which instruments are involved in society and culture, and, as the title of this chapter suggests, I supplement the multitextual definition presented by Dawe with the idea that they are embedded in culture in various ways. This has the effect of underlining their importance but also of acknowledging that the embeddedness has, in the past, perhaps rendered musical instruments a less visible subject of research, from a sociocultural perspective.

The saxophone, as an integral part of the history of American jazz, rhythm & blues, rock and roll, and mainstream pop of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, is uniquely situated to be investigated for its symbolic associations in the particular sound objects and events in which it

participates and because of the people and players that engage with it. The historical dearth of social and cultural approaches to investigating musical instruments has been remedied by several key academic studies in recent years, and it is beneficial to examine some of the works in the field of critical organology in order to establish a basis for the ways that scholars articulate function and context in relation to musical instruments. Bates referred to this work as 'thinking through instruments' and put forth an essential argument for the importance in engaging in such work (2012, p. 368). In essence, the complex and multifarious social structures that surround musical instruments merit thorough examination (Bates, 2012). Discursive analysis is carried out below to investigate the ways that the relationships between instruments, people, and performance contexts aid in characterising the life of the saxophone.

For the purpose of this project, organology in the classificatory sense is not the primary aim. Rather, it is a more critical or analytical form of organology stemming from H.M. Johnson's idea of an ethnomusicology of musical instruments (1995), and explored comprehensively in more recent examples of scholarly projects discussed below. This is similar to Racy's approach which presents a holistic view incorporating elements borrowed from anthropology, history, organology, and musicology into one investigation of a musical instrument, its performance contexts, and its performers (1994). Other influential research surrounding instruments in culture include those by Sonevytsky (2008), Jacobson (2008a, 2008b), Waksman (2001, 2003), Linn (1991), Bates (2012), and Dawe (2005, 2010, 2013), to name a few, and those works are also invoked here. While the saxophone is not characterised in quite the same way as the aforementioned scholars classify the accordion, the banjo, the guitar, or the ukulele, there are notable similarities in their historical trajectories in the United States, in how they are perceived

in society, and in their individual capacities to convey sociocultural messages and connotations in the music in which they participate.

The intensive work surrounding the guitar such as Kevin Dawe's 'Guitar Ethnographies' (2013), *Guitar Cultures* (with Bennett, 2020), *The New Guitarscape (2010),* and Steve Waksman's *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (2001) demonstrate the depth and breadth possible for studies of this nature and serve as suitable models for a similar investigation of the saxophone and its players. Bates asserts, 'Much of the power, mystique, and allure of musical instruments, I argue, is inextricable from the myriad situations where instruments are entangled in webs of complex relationships—between humans and objects, between humans and humans, and between objects and other objects' (2012, p. 364). This viewpoint is similar to Johnson's and is foundational to this particular project, which has been conceived to demonstrate the links between the people, the instrument, and the symbolic associations that have been assigned to them, within the context of mainstream American popular music. This is reminiscent of Louis Jordan's quote in Shaw's *Honkers and Shouters*, in which he describes his excitement and longing for that 'shiny instrument' sitting in a shop window, that he had to have it, or Jeff Coffin's observation of the intimate relationship that is represented by the connection that our bodies have with the instrument (1978, p. 65; Coffin, 2018).

Jordan hinted at a feeling that many musicians have: an emotional connection and relationship to the musical object that is embodied in the sound produced and other unique and specific aspects of performance practice. Musicians are often closely aligned with, and identified by, the instrument that they play, and this is indicative of the emotional and also the fundamental physical connection that is required to play it (teeth, lips, lungs, left hand, right hand). In Dawe's

article examining the culture surrounding the Cretan lute, he aptly states that musical instruments have the ability…'to transform not only our surroundings, but our minds and bodies, and our sense of identity and belonging' (2005, p. 59). In practical terms, there are several ways that playing the saxophone manifest in the physical body: an uncommon dexterity in the fingers, or neck and back pain from bearing the weight of the instrument. Our bodies become accustomed to both the large and small ways that the instrument reshapes them. It also transforms our minds through the emotional connection that is formed through performance and practice, and it provides us with an identity. Conversely, it is imbued with characteristics developed from the people who play it. The culture surrounding the saxophone is so multitudinous that it is not possible to unpack it in its entirety in this project, but Dawe provides a foundation from which to frame the way the mind and the body relate to the cultural study of the instrument as it exists as a physical and emotional extension of the player (2005).

In terms of identity and belonging, I contend that there is a reciprocal exchange: instruments impact musicians in physical and emotional ways, and musicians affect the trajectories and evolution of instruments and how they move through culture. Social identities of players and instruments become linked. In my own experience, when I have related to people (primarily non-musicians) when meeting them that I am a saxophonist, the most common response is for them to mention Kenny G. This is representative of a way that instruments and players become closely connected to one another and is an example of a prominent musician whose imprint on an instrument creates lasting associations for broad audiences. Several instances of this could be cited, but a recent notable example within contemporary American popular music of an artist that embodies the linkage between the social identity of an instrument and its player to the public is Lizzo and her flute (which has its own Instagram page). The broad popularity and dissemination

of Lizzo's music in the past few years has brought an uncommon level of prominence to the flute in American popular music, and she often introduces herself to audiences as a 'flautist', indicating the importance of this aspect of her identity as an artist. Interestingly, many of us are compelled to introduce ourselves as the instrument we play (flautist or saxophonist), and this form of identification reflects the bond that exists between player and instrument.

Waksman and Dawe both engaged in research of 'planet guitar' (Dawe, 2013, p. 5), a similarly omnipresent instrument in American popular music (Waksman, 2001; Dawe, 2010). Regardless of the number of people who play an instrument or its popularity around the world, the main point is that it is crucial to investigate the relationships between instruments and performers to help us to understand the power demonstrated by musical instruments, as well as the social and cultural associations that are both conveyed by them and flow through them (Dawe, 2013, p. 5).

The work that Dawe has produced, with the help of collaborators[7], examines the ubiquity of the guitar in diverse contexts and provides useful frameworks for carrying out studies of other instruments. This approach entails '…accessing and providing a rigorous study of the guitar in various musical genres and music cultures across the world through participant observation, to find out the extent of its significance and entanglement in a particular cultural milieu' (2013, p. 6). In contrast, this project targets the saxophone in popular music of the United States in recent years and engages with a select number of participants. However, Dawe's aspirational and wide-ranging approach inspires ideas for potential studies of the saxophone of a more global nature. Ethnography performed through participant observation and from the perspective of performance could also be easily translated to studies surrounding the saxophone as it is a participant in diverse music and cultures around the world. It is not easy to construct like the guitar and does

require specialised equipment to operate (mouthpiece, reed, neckstrap), and it is not an instrument that is found in many indigenous cultures, however, it has 'travelled globally' and is a visible musical object in various musical environments (Dawe, 2013, p. 8).

Waksman recognises five ways for musical instruments to play into physical and cultural contexts. An instrument is:

1. A commodity bought and sold on the market
2. A material object reflective of technological developments and societal preferences
3. A visual icon
4. A source of 'knowledge' about the mechanics of music
5. A 'voice' (activated by the musician) that is the sonic manifestation of the physical apparatus (Waksman, 2001, p. 251)

These five points are helpful to establish a basis for the discussion of the impact that musical instruments have on culture. The saxophone, not unlike the electric guitar in terms of its embeddedness in American society, became a fashionable commodity early in the twentieth century and its manufacture and production continue to be reflective of current technological developments, even though the basic tenets of its construction have remained the same since its invention.

In regard to the third item on Waksman's list, in visual terms the saxophone conjures various thoughts from a viewer. I once gave a brief presentation at a university in the United Kingdom based on facets of this project where I showed a simple photo of a tenor saxophone, against a blank white background, and asked the educated but mostly non-musically trained audience to speak out loud the words that came to mind when they saw the object. Some of the words were 'jazz', 'loud', 'sexy', and 'cool'. Though unofficial, the answers offered up by the audience did not deviate from the inferences made throughout this study relating to symbolic perceptions of the saxophone, and in fact seemed to reinforce them. This small-scale, informal focus group

comprised of primarily postgraduate students from the United States and the United Kingdom supported the idea that the public's perceptions are potentially moulded by the saxophone's presentation in mainstream social, news, and entertainment media as well as advertising. As for the fourth item on Waksman's list, part of the genius of Sax's invention was the comfort and relative ease with which many people were able to pick up and play it, a factor that contributes to its popularity. Lastly, the saxophonist's voice is alluded to in other sections of this thesis. It has been many things, but one of the most culturally impactful is when it became an aural representation of the agency of Black musicians in the post-war years; they were able to act independently and to demonstrate free will in their public lives through musical performance, despite living and creating music in a prejudicial environment in the United States.

A comparison of this study to explorations by Waksman and Dawe of the guitar and its socio-cultural impacts is apropos due to the almost perpetual inclusion of the two instruments in mainstream music of the twentieth century, and the fact that the saxophone additionally reflects several facets of American social and cultural history. In terms of the electric guitar, the post-war years also brought about a shift away from the blues to the broader scene of mainstream popular music production (Waksman, 1999). Artists such as Les Paul, Chet Atkins, and other progenitors of the instrument and the technological advances that they championed changed the course of popular music in many ways. As Waksman argues, it is possible that the electric guitar is responsible for guiding popular music towards an electronic sound, manifested in the synthesisers that became prevalent in the 1970s and led to a general trend towards an electronic approach to music, however, he goes on to state that the electric guitar projected and maintained an aura of authenticity while the synthesiser did not. He refers to the inauthenticity of the synthesiser as 'self-conscious fabrication' (Waksman 1999, p. 9). The notion of authenticity also

plays heavily in the social life of the saxophone and this topic was broached by a few of the participants in this study and is discussed in subsequent chapters. Another way that popular music was altered by the electric guitar is in a socio-cultural sense; it has undoubtedly effected and been affected by race and gender dynamics within the context of mainstream music, and in this way, it is similar to the saxophone.

The saxophone can be discussed in relation to its participation in paradigm shifts in the post-war years and its impact on race and gender dynamics throughout the second half of the twentieth century. In terms of rock and roll, the saxophone did not reach the level of universality that the electric guitar achieved in the genre; it was not a defining characteristic of rock and roll of the late 1960s and early 1970s like the electric guitar. Instead, the instrument followed a different path, and the saxophonists of the bebop, hard bop, and free jazz movements concomitantly infused the instrument with a comparable degree of authenticity. A perceptible difference between the trajectories of the two instruments is that while the electric guitar situated itself as an instrument played primarily by white men, in many ways the saxophone represented the voice of the Black male in mid-century America. The authenticity of the saxophone has periodically been affected by its oversaturation in popular music and media, and this was partly responsible for the perceptions of the saxophone as kitschy and inauthentic in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The saxophone is not the only instrument susceptible to trends, however. While the electric guitar seems to maintain its authenticity, it has also seen a rise and fall in popularity over the years, and it is notable that in the past two decades electric guitar-driven music has been almost non-existent on the Hot 100 charts. The salient point is that both the electric guitar and the saxophone, while subordinate to consumer tastes in the popular music industry, maintain a

level of power and significance through considerations of authenticity, cool, kitsch, and other social factors.

The banjo is another instrument that seems to have suffered from the highs and lows of popularity at the hands of racialised stereotypes and social trends. Karen Linn begins the first chapter of her book by informing the reader that 'Early nineteenth-century banjo music and minstrel shows presented the first commercial use of African-American musical culture by white entertainers' (1991, p. 5). It is a critical observation that musical instruments, and by association the musicians who play them, are capable of embodying race and class designations. A clear difference between the saxophone and the banjo is that the banjo originated in Africa while the saxophone is European in origin, however, a noteworthy similarity is that both instruments were present in the popular music that helped to shape American culture in the decades after the Emancipation Proclamation. Both instruments were present in the early jazz of New Orleans and represented the sound of the mélange of African, European, and American cultures that coalesced there. The title of the first chapter of Linn's book is 'The "Elevation" of the Banjo in the Late Nineteenth Century', and she explains that when the banjo was being played in barrooms by Black musicians it was considered low class or even morally corrupt, but when white Americans began playing it in clubs and salons in the northeast perceptions of the instrument shifted and it began an upwards climb out of the depths of lowbrow class designations. These public perceptions rooted in notions of white supremacy repositioned the banjo from an African and/or Black American-aligned instrument to a rural instrument associated with white people. This is partially evidenced by Linn's description of a bluegrass and Old Time music festival that she attended in the 1980s in which there was only one Black person, a banjoist, in attendance, despite the instrument's history as an African instrument.

Further evidence of this shift can be seen when considering the banjo in its more conspicuous iterations in popular culture like the hit song 'Dueling Banjos' or harrowing scenes from the film *Deliverance* (1972). In this song and film, the association is that of the instrument's representation of poor, rural, white southerners, reinforcing the banjo's measurable cultural shift from African and Black American to rural white American.

Sonevytsky's article proposes an updated approach to critical organology, one in which the musical instrument is considered as a significant actor in the making of musical meaning (2008). This is a line of thinking that is especially useful for understanding the significations put forth by the saxophone which are fundamental to the ethnographic research presented here. Sonevytsky explores the 'ethnic whiteness' that the accordion represents, explaining the significance of this association in terms of the instrument's connection to white immigrants that were in a lower-class level, and these meanings are explored through the discussion of the accordionist and impresario Lawrence Welk (ibid.). The accordion doesn't have the same history of the Black and white binary of race issues as the saxophone or banjo, but it nevertheless represents a similar reflection of 'otherness' as these two instruments. In this case, the author is referring to 'whiteness' in the sense of 'immigrant backwardness, lower-class status, and/or marginalisation from mainstream American culture' (Sonevytsky, 2008). This reiterates not only the idea of musical instruments as significant contributors to musical meaning, but also of the ability of individual musicians to imprint their own values and traits onto an object. There are many Americans of a certain age that would directly associate the accordion with Lawrence Welk and PBS (Public Broadcasting Service), a testament to the strength of the connection between instrument, performer, and cultural context.

The accordion, the banjo, and the saxophone all seem beholden to the stratification of class and its relation to race in the United States, and this is a testament to how these instruments actively engage in social and cultural circumstances. These instruments were each considered rather marginal at different times throughout history, which is most likely what compelled musicians to strive for acceptance and respect. A musician's relationship to their instrument is of paramount importance, and professional musicians develop these close connections through thousands of hours of solitary practice and are able to transcend the technical difficulties presented by their instruments, thus performing as if the instrument is a natural extension of their body. In this way, the instrument acts as the intermediary, a delivery system for messages emanating from the performer.

The popularity of the saxophone in the United States, despite the vacillating designations of coolness, kitschiness, or authenticity, situates it as a component of mass and/or popular culture. The following section briefly examines mass culture, the mass culture critique, and the origins of culture studies in order to understand some of the politics behind popularity. In the early 2010s, the saxophone became a noticeable part of 'commercial popular culture' in the United States, and that was due to a handful of broadly disseminated viral videos and pop songs in which it was portrayed as kitschy and nostalgic (Born, 1987, p. 54). Kitsch was a springboard for the saxophone to return, but other social characteristics such as coolness and sexuality that have been historically associated with the instrument were subsequently prioritised in several different styles of music at the time.

THE SAXOPHONE'S ROLE IN MASS CULTURE

The saxophone is recognised as an element of mass and popular culture, or commercial

popular culture, in the United States because of its ubiquity not only as an audible component in examples of popular music over the decades of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries but also as an iconic visual element in assorted modes of media (Born, 1987, p. 54). The instrument's history in American popular music happens to coincide with the evolution of cultural studies from the elitist, modernist views of mass culture to more of a postmodern, pluralist approach to popular culture. It was not a specific part of discourses related to the mass culture critique, but it can be considered somewhat of a casualty of high culture's standard of aesthetic supremacy (Stauth and Turner, 1988, p. 509).

Mass culture is generally defined as 'cultural products that are both mass-produced and for mass audiences' (Chandler and Munday, 2011) and historically has been construed in positive or negative terms. In a positive sense, mass culture is synonymous with popular culture and embraces the intrinsic commercialism that helps to define it. The philosophers and social theorists of the Frankfurt School notably considered mass culture in a pejorative sense and criticised it as overtly populist and capitalist, the opposite of high class. This was a reflection of the repudiation of 'the popular' in music, and the denigration of musical products that were considered in opposition to modernism in music, if they were considered at all (Born, 1987, p. 52). Despite its European heritage, the saxophone's role as an important component of popular musics of mid-century America and the racial politics inherent in those styles contributed to its designation as low-class novelty according to the philosophies of the modernists of the first half of the twentieth century. However, as Born noted, postmodernism in music represented a reaction against modernism, and embraced the investigation of popular music and its culture, and in this context the saxophone can be viewed as a musical artefact that has potentially benefited from existing in the space between high and low cultures due to a more contemporary and/or

decolonised perspective on mainstream music and its culture (Born, 1987, p. 51; Stauth and Turner, 1988, p. 509).

The cultural theorists of the Birmingham School engaged in substantive investigations of mass media, youth subculture, education, gender, and race from the 1960s to the 1980s, influenced in part by Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony (Barker, 2007). The idea of a ruling class, the bourgeoisie, that dominates subordinate classes through the manipulation of culture has been an important foundational element for popular culture studies that focuses on the ways that politics and power are realised through mass media, and the scholars of the Birmingham School, led by figures such as Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall, were able to thoroughly investigate these concepts. They initiated investigations of creative output located in the gap between elitist, high culture traditions and the everyday, lived experiences of people. As Born notes, the study of popular music grew from the 'neo-Gramscian' view of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University into something separate and more substantial in later years (1987, p. 59).

The mention of the idea of the '…active and self-produced resistance to bourgeois hegemony' evokes some of the investigations that arose from the Birmingham school, and is notably reminiscent of some of the postmodernist concepts presented in Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) (ibid.). Hebdige eloquently describes the importance of scrutinising the 'expressive forms and rituals of those subordinate groups…who are alternately dismissed, denounced and canonised; treated at different times as threats to public order and as harmless buffoons' (2012, p. 2). He is speaking about the youthful British subgroups such as teddy boys, mods, rockers, skinheads, and punks, but this is indicative of several different groups of people and identities that represent cultures of popular music and the significant ways that

these groups operate both within and outside of society. Although the main concern of this particular study is American popular music that is widely circulated thereby representing the dominant culture, Hebdige's quote is suggestive of styles of subcultures surrounding jazz and its derivatives performed by Black Americans in the first half of the twentieth century that were simultaneously embraced and denounced by the ruling classes (Monson, 1995, p. 397). The saxophone's association with Black American culture along with its periodic association with kitsch and comedy place it in the space between high culture and the everyday, lived cultural experiences mentioned above, and this likely contributed to its aesthetic devaluation in the past. Perhaps the most notable example of this devaluation can be seen in the Six Brown Brothers, a Canadian vaudeville group that played a prominent part in popularising the saxophone in the first two decades of the twentieth century. They were a comedy troupe and each saxophonist performed in a clown costume, with the lead player in blackface. Although the group's biographer Bruce Vermazen (2004) credits them with bringing the saxophone out of obscurity and transforming perceptions of the saxophone from the 'siren of Satan' to a more popular and fun instrument, their association with it undoubtedly gave it a reputation as a trivial musical object not to be taken seriously. These characteristics are a few of the essential factors in the saxophone's rich and varied history that justify its study and contributions to commercial music and culture in the United States.

Returning to the body of work produced by the cultural theorists at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, Stuart Hall wrote a paper in 1973 entitled 'Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse' that laid out the tenets of reception theory, sometimes known as audience theory, as it relates to mass media. Hall posited that the broadcasters, or producers, encode media with messages and the audience interprets, or decodes,

the messages, thus forming a closed circuit of communicative exchange (hall, 1973, p. 2). The exchange requires a certain amount of education for audiences so that they have the proper understanding of decoding mechanisms, and the education is partially achieved through the conventionalisation of elements of genre or genre-codes (Hall, 1973, p. 6). To demonstrate briefly how this works, Hall described some of the distinct features of a Western-themed television program such as the 'good guy' cowboy in the white hat who wins out over the bad guys in the end (Hall, 1973, p. 5). To audiences that have seen Westerns on television, these become familiar aspects of a story line and a character's development in the program; they comprise characteristics of a genre. However, one of the main features of Hall's theory is that there may be preferred meanings encoded by the producers of media, but it is impossible to ensure that this is what will be decoded by the audience. The reception, or decoding, is also reliant on social, societal, cultural, and context-based knowledge, subject to considerations of time, space, place, history, and politics.

The saxophone and its notable presence in mainstream music and culture in the United States in recent years warrants examination from the perspective of reception theory, and some of the ways that symbolic associations connected to the instrument have become conventionalised are explored in more detail later in this chapter and in the case studies. As Hall noted, 'every visual sign in advertising [and media] "connotes" a quality, situation, value, or inference which is present as an implication or implied meaning, depending on the connotational reference' (Hall, 1973, p. 12). The saxophone's reception in mainstream music and media, and the ways that it embodies cool, kitsch, gendered identities, and race, are dependent upon a network of factors, and some of these are further explored in the following pages.

HISTORY

To aid in answering the question of how the saxophone affects perceptions of American popular music and to explain the contexts in which it is situated, it is useful to begin with a brief historical survey of the instrument in vernacular and popular genres in the United States and some of its notable players to illustrate some of the ways that it attained broad appeal in the United States. The history of the saxophone and its inventor have been well-documented across a wide range of books, articles, theses, and mainstream publications; these include notable works such as Stephen Cottrell's monograph, *The Saxophone* (2012), Frederick Hemke's seminal thesis on the early history of the saxophone (1975), and the popular *The Devil's Horn* (2006) by Michael Segell. Rather than duplicate the research presented in these influential works, I use this information to expand upon existing knowledge and to chart the symbolic associations evoked by the instrument and its performers. This short but impactful list of works provide a strong foundation with which to frame the story of the instrument. Several other scholarly publications are reviewed to broaden the scope of the narrative. 'Saxophonism,' as Gabriel Solis terms it, is alive and well and deserves to be studied within the purview of popular music of recent decades (Solis, 2015).

Due to its broad adoption in popular music genres in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century—first in military bands, then in minstrel shows, vaudeville, circus bands, and professional saxophone ensembles—the instrument experienced a remarkable upswing in popularity that began primarily in the United States but spread to other places around the world. In relation to other musical instruments, it is relatively inexpensive, and it is not that difficult to play—at first. Thanks in part to popular performers such as the Six Brown Brothers, the Musical Spillers, and the virtuoso Rudy Wiedoeft, by the mid-1910s America was in the throes of a

'saxophone craze'. In 1914, approximately six thousand saxophones were sold in the United States, and a decade later this number had risen to one hundred thousand (Cottrell, 2012, p. 152). Indeed, just one American manufacturer, the Conn instrument company based in Elkhart, Indiana, reported manufacturing 150 saxophones per day in 1922 which was roughly seventy-five percent of the company's production capacity (ibid.). The only other instrument that has experienced this type of growth in both popularity and sales was the electric guitar in the 1960s (Cottrell, 2012, p. 151). This is all the more significant because the saxophone experienced such growth even before systematic music education in the United States could have contributed to the sales figures. Nowadays, most towns and cities in the United States have middle school and high school concert bands, jazz bands, and orchestras that utilise the saxophone, sometimes in great numbers.

Due generally to the Great Depression and subsequent decline in audience numbers and performance opportunities, the saxophone craze came to an end and demand for the instrument diminished in the early 1930s. In the context of this research project, the history of the saxophone's first cycle of popularity and decline serves as a useful reminder that broader economic forces have an important impact on a musical instrument's fortunes. It also demonstrates that the saxophone stood as an observable symbol of progress as well as technological and artistic advancement in pre-war America.

Although there were many saxophonists that contributed to the rise in popularity of the saxophone in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, the history of the instrument in mainstream pop music in America can be traced largely to one individual: Louis Jordan. Musicologist David Ake contends that Louis Jordan was indeed a founding father of both rhythm and blues and rock and roll (Ake, 2002), a claim echoed by several other scholars (Garofalo,

2016; Lipsitz, 1981; Shaw, 1978). As Arnold Shaw notes, he effectively set the stage for the 'meter (boogie/shuffle) and sound (horns cum rhythm)', referring to rock and roll and rhythm and blues (Shaw, 1978, p. xvii). Arnold Shaw, in his book *Honkers and Shouters*, had this to say about R&B: 'Developing from Black sources, it embodied the fervour of gospel music, the throbbing vigour of boogie woogie, the jump beat of swing, and the gutsiness and sexuality of life in the Black ghetto' (ibid.). Louis Jordan, or the 'Father of R&B', embodied all of these things; he was a saxophonist, vocalist, and composer who sold over a million copies of his hit song 'Choo Choo Ch-Boogie' in 1946.

Louis Jordan embodied the shift towards R&B and rock and roll as the most popular genres in America in the 1940s and 1950s and away from jazz. Jordan himself said, jazzmen 'play mostly for themselves…I want to play for the people…for millions, not just a few hep cats' (Shaw, 1978, p. 66). Several of the participants in this study said essentially the same thing; they all studied jazz but consciously decided to play music that was more popular, for larger crowds of people, and for more money, and this will be further discussed in the next chapter. This set Jordan apart from other saxophonists at the time, because he was more than capable of performing 'straight-ahead jazz' (ibid.). Jordan was an accomplished instrumentalist, but perhaps as a result of his upbringing performing in minstrel shows, the mainstream entertainment world was what he knew and where he preferred to make his mark (Shaw, 1978, p. 66). This would serve him well as he went on to achieve great success in terms of chart-topping hits and record sales. One of the most notable aspects of Jordan's career is the way that he was able, to some extent, to cross the racial barriers that existed in 1940s in America and this is a testament to his skill as an entertainer. He told Shaw, 'I was trying to do what they told me: straddle the fence' (Shaw, 1978, p. 66). He went on to say, 'Many nights we had more white than coloured, because

my records were geared to the white as well as coloured, and they came to hear me do my records' (Shaw, 1978, p. 67).

Jordan was a guiding influence on early rock luminaries Chuck Berry and Bill Haley and the Comets, and he and his music were a vital bridge that connected genres separated by the racial divide that existed in the immediate post-war era. Jordan can be considered the world's first pop star who was also a saxophonist, and his influence on the instrument and on popular music in America is significant for several reasons, one of which is connecting the saxophone to race and proto-rock and roll styles in the pre-war United States. However, the possibility exists that rather than favourably aligning the saxophone with Black American creative output and contributions to popular music at the time, Jordan's association with the instrument was a reason for audiences and critics at the time to devalue the saxophone because of its representation of race and/or Black masculine sexuality.

From Louis Jordan's influence we can trace the often-overlooked saxophonists of popular music through the decades. Both he and Jackie Brenston heavily influenced Bill Haley and the Comets in the 1950s. In the 1960s Maceo Parker performed with James Brown, while Junior Walker recorded hits for Motown Records, and King Curtis recorded in Memphis and elsewhere with artists such as Aretha Franklin and John Lennon. In the 1970s, there was Phil Woods with Billy Joel, Raphael Ravenscroft with Gerry Rafferty on 'Baker Street' (Grammy Award for Record of the Year in 1978), and Dick Perry with Pink Floyd. These saxophonists contributed to a 'second saxophone craze' of sorts that continued throughout the 1980s (Cottrell, 2012, p. 295). That decade produced too many examples of hit songs featuring saxophones to mention individually, but a selection of the most significant examples includes Branford Marsalis recording with Sting, Steve Gregory with George Michael on 'Careless Whisper' (1984),

Clarence Clemons with Bruce Springsteen, and most notably, Kenny G, who recorded and achieved widespread fame as a solo artist in the late 1980s. Interestingly, Lenny Pickett mentioned in his interview that most of the music that featured the saxophone in the 1980s was trading on nostalgia, and his own playing was an example of this. Of the music from that time, he noted, '…it was about refurbishing the saxophone to its heyday, as a model of hipness from an earlier time', likely referring to the saxophone's prominent role in jump blues, R&B, and early rock and roll of the late 1940s and 1950s; the context surrounding this quote is further discussed in Chapter 4 (Pickett, 2018).

The absence of saxophone solos in mainstream hits in the 1990s is almost certainly due to the popularity of styles that did not 'fit' with the saxophone, such as grunge and the pop ballads that dominated the *Billboard* Hot 100 later in the decade, performed by artists such as LeAnn Rimes, Toni Braxton, Mariah Carey, and Boyz II Men (Leight, 2014). These pop and R&B-lite ballads were mostly about romantic love, and the saxophone's reputation as a strong signifier of primarily masculine sexuality may have had the effect in this context of imbuing the songs with an unduly suggestive subtext (Cottrell, 2012, p. 183).

It is not until the 2010s that we see a conspicuous reappearance of the prominently featured saxophone solos or riffs in chart-topping hit songs in America. This can be attributed to the wave of 1980s nostalgia that occurred in the 2000s, and the kitschy and comedic viral videos as well as a particular skit featured on *Saturday Night Live* that brought the saxophone back into the spotlight. As British music journalist Simon Reynolds explained in an article in *The Guardian* in 2010, almost every digitally produced, nostalgia-inducing sound from the 1980s had made its way back into the music of indie bands by 2010, a trend he described as an 'electropop renaissance' (Reynolds, 2010). While many of the popular artists of the early 2000s were

embracing the use of nostalgic electronic sounds in their music, other artists were revisiting one of the other common features of 1980s music—the saxophone solo. Recent use of the saxophone still indicates ironic referentiality in some ways, but there is an undoubtedly contemporary spin on the trope in music by artists such as Kendrick Lamar, M83, and Robyn, that is demonstrated in the way that they juxtapose it with modern hip-hop or European electronic music, sometimes digitally process the saxophone's sound, and deploy the saxophone as a symbol of racial (Lamar) and sexual (Robyn) politics. The instrument's inclusion in songs by these artists and others demonstrate the capability of the saxophone to represent the historically assigned identities of cool/kitsch, race, and gender/sexuality that are recontextualised for twenty-first century audiences through modern production techniques deployed in a diverse group of commercially popular genres.

KITSCH

Historically, the saxophone has been a victim of negative aesthetic valuations stemming from its popularity, its connection to Black American music and culture, and its associations with sexuality, but these connotations may have been subverted towards the end of the second saxophone craze in the late 1980s when the instrument mostly vanished from the mainstream due in part to oversaturation. However, it seemed to return to the American public consciousness in the early 2010s as a signifier of kitsch, and this became a gateway to the saxophone's incorporation into other popular music at the time that reinvigorated the instrument's connection to additional key themes. Concrete examples of mass culture that surround us and seem to be inescapable are numerous and increasingly global due to the internet and the preponderance of social media, and the saxophone has been a featured component in widely circulated viral videos

that reflect its pervasive position in commercial popular culture as well as its symbolic association with cool/kitsch, gender/sexuality, and race. Cool, gender, sexuality, and race are further investigated in subsequent chapters, but here kitsch is discursively analysed because it is one of the principal factors in the saxophone's re-emergence in popular music and culture since 2010.

As Binkley notes, kitsch is repetitive and it is derivative, but that does not mean that it is devoid of creativity (2000, p. 132). Binkley considers kitsch as a 'distinct style, one which celebrates repetition and conventionality as a value in itself' (2000, p. 133). In contemporary contexts, this is probably necessary, as things that would have been deemed kitschy by cultural theorists in the past are so ubiquitous now that one cannot consider them in the same old binaries of high versus low class or wealthy versus impoverished. Elements of pop culture that different types of people engage with on a daily basis such as Lady Gaga's music, the Kardashians, or certain viral memes and YouTube videos should not be considered by the same antiquated views of critiques of mass culture, but as separate entities. Kitsch makes people laugh and feel safe; it is sentimental and nostalgic and comforts people because it is a known quantity (Binkley, 2000, p. 135). I agree with Binkley that kitsch does constitute a level of creativity; it is imaginative to come up with an idea to copy something in a particular way, or to bring a funny or fresh perspective to an art object that no one else had considered previously. For instance, Sexy Sax Man is not the only person in the world that has the ability to imitate other famous saxophone players, but he is the one who thought of doing this in a new way, prioritising his body and gestures over the music in order to demonstrably perform kitsch.

Sexy Sax Man, the title and the starring character of a video with almost forty million views of one of his videos on YouTube as of June 2020, is one of the most visible examples of using

the saxophone as an element of kitsch that subsequently became widely circulated. Drawing upon decades of aural and visual representations of the saxophone in performance and the use of the instrument in advertisements, Sexy Sax Man's parodic pastiche exploits the public's cumulative knowledge of the instrument. However, unlike Kenny G's abundance of musical sincerity, which has the effect of classifying him and his music as kitsch (see Chapter 4), Sergio Flores' performance as Sexy Sax Man is intentionally kitschy. The saxophone is wittingly the punchline of the joke, harkening back to groups such as The Six Brown Brothers who dressed in clown costumes and produced funny laughing sounds with the instrument to the delight of audiences. He is a caricature of an amalgam of saxophonists such as muscle-bound and shirtless Tim Cappello, Clarence Clemons, and Steve Gregory, the original 'Careless Whisper' saxophonist. 'Careless Whisper' experienced a resurgence in popularity as a meme in the early 2010s, and Sexy Sax Man's first video was posted in 2011, around the same time of Katy Perry's 'Last Friday Night', another kitschy example of 1980s nostalgia and the saxophone. These two examples represent a resurgence of music and fashion from the 1980s in the early 2010s, an example of the implicit nostalgia that partially defines kitsch.

Sergio Flores' portrayal of Sexy Sax Man is influenced by a 2010 *Saturday Night Live (SNL)*[8] skit entitled 'The Curse', starring Andy Samberg as a slick businessman that meets a homeless man on the street who curses him to be interrupted in life's important moments by a saxophonist named Sergio. Visually, this character is almost the same as Flores' portrayal of Sexy Sax Man, who wears only pants with suspenders, sports a mullet, and dances provocatively while playing a loud, growling and passionate solo. Notably, both Sexy Sax man and Sergio from *SNL* are based on a real-life saxophonist and body builder named Tim Cappello, who gained fame for his

shirtless, oiled upper body, for performing with Tina Turner in the 1980s, and appearing in the popular movie *The Lost Boys* (1987).

The funny thing about the *Saturday Night Live* skit is that the people in the businessman's life, including his romantic interest and his co-workers, are entertained and, in some cases, sexually aroused by the sudden appearance of the shirtless, gyrating saxophonist, while the businessman is clearly tormented. The absurdity of this skit is bolstered by knowledge of the level of kitsch that the saxophone had achieved through the popular performances of the past as well as the outrageous display of sexuality. It clearly illustrates messages of hyper-masculine gendered expression, cool, and kitsch that are communicated through Jon Hamm's shirtless body and his use of the saxophone as a visceral phallic extension.

The basic premise of the viral YouTube video featuring Sexy Sax Man (Flores) is that he pranks people by entering a public space and spontaneously playing the saxophone solo from George Michael's 1984 hit song 'Careless Whisper' repetitively while suggestively thrusting his hips. At one point in the video, he is escorted away from the shopping mall food court by security guards, and warned that if he plays the solo again, he will be arrested for trespassing. The unwitting 'audience' in the food court begins applauding, but it is unclear whether they are applauding for him or the security guard. For the remainder of the video, he is asked by various bystanders, including a biology professor whose class he interrupted, to quit playing and leave. The way that he imposes a saxophone solo on an unsuspecting audience is representative of what the sax solo became in the 1980s: an unavoidable element of universally popular songs and media.

The three images below are still shots taken from Sexy Sax Man's most viewed video on YouTube, and show him playing the opening saxophone riff from 'Careless Whisper' (in 'flash

mob' style, meaning that he chose random public spaces and performed the song unannounced) first in a grocery store, then a shopping mall food court, and a university classroom:

Figure 1.1

Figure 1.2

Figure 1.3

Still photos of Sexy Sax Man retrieved from 'Sexy Sax Man Careless Whisper Prank feat. Sergio Flores (directors cut) posted March 12, 2011 (accessed: 26 March 2019) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GaoLU6zKaws

Flores has capitalised on an element of commercial popular culture, creating comedy from something many people understand; the saxophone exists here as an element of 'universal literacy' (Greenberg, 1989, p. 9). This type of parody would not be the same with, say, a trumpet or a violin; they do not possess the same associations and historical 'baggage' that the saxophone possesses, and of course they were not the instrument originally featured in the hit song by George Michael nor did they play a very important part in pop music of the 1980s. The wig and leather vest that he wears could be considered as his version of a clown costume. Sexy Sax Man comically embodies the ways that associations with cool, kitsch, and gender/sexuality have characterised the instrument in many ways and have contributed to its ubiquity. Sexy Sax Man's video is merely one example of the way that the saxophone is transmitted to audiences through online platforms and media. The cultural embeddedness of musical instruments is discussed further below, through the lens of popular news and entertainment journalism, advertising, and their mediation of public perceptions which have all contributed to the proliferation of the various associations related to the saxophone.

THE SAXOPHONE IN MAINSTREAM MEDIA AND ADVERTISING

The re-emergence of the saxophone in popular music over the decades of the twentieth and early twenty first centuries is generally connected to trends in genre style, production, and consumer tastes. When the second saxophone craze of the 1980s ended it was primarily due to the changing tastes of the popular music consumer. The phenomenon of grunge rock had come to the fore in the 1990s, featuring groups such as Nirvana and Pearl Jam with their angst-filled lyrics and de-tuned guitars. Some of these groups and the music of the time reflected what Waksman observed to be a general reorientation towards the electronic creation and production

of music. The 'ironic detachment' that was a notable attribute of these styles did not leave room for the saxophone, and in popular journalist Weiner's words the instrument is '…impossible to play while looking like you don't care'; not caring was a definite hallmark of the grunge-era bands (2011). This comment hints at the differences between white and Black notions of coolness, intimating that white coolness is about not caring, or having the option to not care, while Black coolness is typically interpreted as a requisite coping mechanism; a way to manifest calmness while moving through a racist America. This is an interesting observation that seems to conflict with the idea of acting or being cool, like Lester Young, Dexter Gordon, John Coltrane, and others. Cool was a way of being detached or unaffected; perhaps it was while they were not performing that they had to 'perform' cool detachment, but in musical performance they had to care.

Other artists of the 1990s who were regular visitors to the top of the *Billboard* charts included Madonna, Mariah Carey, Boyz II Men, Janet Jackson, Céline Dion, and Whitney Houston, and the majority of songs performed by these artists did not include the saxophone (Leight, 2014). However, Houston's version of 'I Will Always Love You', released in 1992, is one of the best-selling singles of all time and features a saxophone solo performed by Kirk Whalum, a participant in this project. Although the saxophone was largely missing from the popular music of the 1990s and early 2000s, it remained conspicuous in part due to the massive success of Houston's hit song. There was also a sense of saxophone fatigue due to the overuse of the saxophone solo in popular music of the 1980s. Two decades later, it would make its way back to the mainstream by way of 'ironic reclamation' (Weiner, 2011).

The reclamation of the saxophone solo can be heard in several places, but it likely began in electronic dance music in the 2000s, especially in Europe. There are several French DJ's and

musicians who have prominently utilised the instrument including Philippe Nadaud, Klingande, M83, Air, and Phoenix to name a few. While some of the songs by these artists may deploy the saxophone with a 'winking' or tongue-in-cheek quality alluding to the 1980s sax solo, as Weiner notes, they appear to have evolved past that in subsequent tracks and possibly influenced other artists to return to a sense of gravity with the inclusion of these solos superimposed over electronic beats, an interesting and modern combination of real and electronic instruments (2011).

As Born noted, the culture surrounding popular music is 'explicitly multitextual', and therefore its study requires examination of diverse modes of media and the conditions surrounding them (1987, p. 56). In this study, that includes a brief overview of the various characters that have contributed to its mythology; the saxophone has accrued cultural capital over the years through its relationship with the renowned fictional and non-fictional people who played it. Other factors that contributed to the accrual of this capital were the genres of music in which it participated, its use in advertising and popular media, and its connection to recognised popular culture figures such as Lisa Simpson, the Pink Panther, cartoon character Snoopy's counterpart Joe Cool, or Ron Swanson's alter-ego Duke Silver from the television show *Parks and Recreation*.

Some of the other characters mentioned above conjure a more straightforward image, that of the saxophone as the embodiment of cool. The Pink Panther and Snoopy's Joe Cool are fitting examples of the representation of the saxophone as cool, and interestingly these two characters debuted in the 1950s and 1960s when the saxophone maintained an authenticity afforded by its associations with revered subcultural jazz styles of the time. The fictional character of Lisa Simpson on the long-lived television program *The Simpsons* is somewhat of an outlier here,

chiefly because she is an eight-year-old girl who finds solace from her chaotic world when she expresses herself through playing the baritone saxophone. She is also not necessarily considered 'cool' on the program, because cool is often defined by performative acts of indifference. She is known to be a nerd; with her high level of intelligence and liberal political views, she cares too much to be cool. She uses the saxophone as a tool for self-actualisation, an interesting example of a musician who is identified by her instrument even though she is a fictional character and prefers to be associated with blues musicians as opposed to the other girls in her age group (Cooper, et al, 2005). In this sense, a subversive awareness of cool is present since it is intimated that she understands that blues musicians and saxophonists, specifically, such as the character of Bleeding Gums Murphy, are cool and she strives to be included in that group.

ADVERTISING

Bernstein, in the introduction to Adorno's *The Culture Industry*, refers to the idea mentioned above that culture can no longer be considered through the limited binaries of high and low or black and white:

> The expansion of the role of competing life-styles, the permeation of these styles into the home, the pervasiveness of music, the way in which products have become a direct extension of their advertising image, all of these phenomena token a closing of the gap between the culture industry and everyday life itself, and a consequent aestheticization of social reality. (Bernstein in Adorno, 2001, p. 23)

Contemporary culture, class, and taste fill an entire spectrum that is inadequately addressed through the judgments that were made in the past by people like Adorno and Greenberg. There is an audience, consumers, and fans for each of the types of culture produced, regardless of how niche the production may be. This 'closing of the gap' can be seen in a material object; a musical

instrument and its sound and image contribute to a broad range of elements in culture including its commodification and use in advertising.

The saxophone and its image have been used extensively in advertising, a fact that supports the notion of the instrument's universality and appeal, banking on its ability to boost sales. Its engagement with advertising has a very interesting past that can be traced back to the first saxophone craze in the 1920s, but for the purposes here it is primarily discussed in contemporary contexts that relate to its use in helping to sell other products. *The Saxophone in Advertising* by Axel Eggert and Melanie Vockeroth was published in Germany in 2003, and it details the meaning behind the saxophone's existence in different types of advertisements including those intended to sell the instrument and those intended to use the instrument as an aid to sell other products. This study is very interesting for two reasons: because it took place in Germany and therefore provides an alternative perspective from the Anglo-American one presented in this paper, and secondly because it discusses the connotations ascribed to the instrument in a manner intended for practical guidance in advertising. The saxophone barely existed in Germany in the early twentieth century but tumbled into the consciousness when it became known as 'anti-German' due to its association with American jazz. In early Nazi Germany, this music was considered 'decadent, inferior music and a bad influence' (Eggert and Vockeroth, p. 87, 2003). The authors of the study go on to say, 'The jazz image was transferred directly to the saxophone and its sound was described as perverted' (ibid). The instrument was not considered a 'proper' instrument and it was actually referenced in Karl Ventzke's 1981 book *Die Saxophone* as a 'funny gag machine' (Eggert and Vockeroth, pp. 88, 2003). Ventzke went on to say that 'only in jazz do they (saxophones) enjoy full recognition as a proper musical instrument ' (ibid.).

The saxophone was eventually accepted and popularised in Germany in the 1980s when it was frequently heard in popular music all over the world. Notably, in the 1994 edition of Ventzke's book the introduction was amended to acknowledge that the instrument is very popular, and it is considered youthful and vibrant (Eggert and Vockeroth, 2003, p. 89). It is important to remember that these associations of the instrument as a 'funny gag machine' or the more sinister, racist views of it existed in a very particular time and place, however, some of these associations have persisted and undoubtedly contributed to perceptions of the saxophone as a low-class novelty, in the United States as well as abroad. Further, Eggert and Vockeroth mention that in a journal article written by Friedrich that the idea that the saxophone is too easy to play and therefore not to be taken seriously still circulates in Germany, and that part of this problem is that the saxophone is defined by the media, whereas, for example, the violin defines itself (2003, p. 90).

There was an unquestionable change in perceptions of the instrument in Germany in the 1980s, however, and this is shown by the in-depth investigation of its appearance in advertisements in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland that are analysed in the remainder of the approximately one hundred pages of the book. The changes in perception likely stemmed from the saxophone's widespread popularity in commercial music coming from the United States at the time, and perhaps this was an example of the instrument's media presence having a positive effect on its reception in Europe. A very interesting inclusion is the authors' discussion of another research project carried out by Vogl in which a psychological approach to preference for musical instruments and related personality traits was carried out (1993). The researcher found that saxophone players are 'lively, extroverted people who are usually well balanced and rather masculine in their self-perception' (Vogl, 1993). Additionally, it was discovered that

saxophonists usually begin learning the instrument an average of seven years later in their lives compared to violinists or pianists. The authors contend that this is because the instrument lacks a consistent, well-known and trusted pedagogical tradition like that of the piano or violin, and consequently, parents do not recommend their children to learn the instrument at a young age (Eggert and Vockeroth, 2003, p. 91). Logically, this means that oftentimes individuals who play the saxophone have chosen it for themselves, and this is a noteworthy idea that has been proven to be true in the ethnographic interviews conducted for this project. It supports the idea that saxophonists identify with aspects of the instrument, and this in turn reinforces the importance of relationships between musical instruments and people and the myriad ways that they are transmitted to and reverberate in popular music, culture, and advertising.

NEWS AND ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA

As suggested in the informal focus group that I conducted of audience perceptions related to the saxophone mentioned earlier, the instrument's portrayal in examples of social, news, and entertainment media primarily circulated more recently on the internet potentially informs audience perceptions of the instrument and characterises its social life. Recent examples of the return of the saxophone solo in pop music did not go unnoticed by the mainstream media; articles began appearing across various online media outlets, from lifestyle blogs to music magazines to news websites and social media. Several commentators make notable mention of the saxophone's stereotypical association with sex or sexiness, playing on the simple similarity between the two words 'sex' and 'sax', while other articles lament the saxophone's return to prominence in pop music as an unwelcome development, likely due to a perception of the instrument as a gimmick or curiosity.

In contemporary society, it is useful to investigate the question of whether the popular media and their attention-grabbing, social media-minded 'clickbait' articles inform or reflect the tastes of the American public. A recent study performed by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania explored whether media coverage informs public perceptions regarding the economy. The reason for studying the relationship between the media and public perceptions related to the economy is that 'citizens' perception of the economy can shape their political and economic behaviour, making the origins of those perceptions an important question', however the researchers found that the opposite is actually true, that public perceptions inform the media coverage (Hopkins, et al, 2017). The music industry is not the economy, although they are connected, but a study such as this does support the idea that media coverage reflects public perceptions and behaviours; in other words, news and entertainment media give the people what they want. In regard to the cultural embeddedness of the saxophone, the number of popular media articles concerning its return to mainstream popular music in the early 2010s seems to indicate the public's awareness and approval of, and the media's reaction to, this resurgence.

In reference to Katy Perry's hit song of 2011, an article published in the Dallas *Observer* entitled 'The Problem With…Katy Perry's 'Last Friday Night' claims that '…the whole 80s retro thing is starting to run its course' and 'The saxophone solo is rather bizarre, too' (Rizvi, 2011). The author doesn't take the time to explain the ways that other media or popular music was referencing the '80s retro thing', nor do they explain what, exactly, is bizarre about the saxophone solo. The pertinent points from this particular article are that the saxophone seems to be back, and the author directly blames Katy Perry for this seemingly unwanted 'saxophone revival' (ibid.). It appears that the producer Max Martin was one of the driving forces behind this revival in the early 2010s, having produced the majority of Perry's *Teenage Dream* (2010) album as well

as Ariana Grande's album *My Everything* (2014) which featured some saxophone work by Leon Silva. The instrument held such a place of prominence in the context of 1980s popular music that the appearance of a solo in a song in the 2010s by a renowned pop star such as Katy Perry directly references the soundscape of the earlier decade.

However, this song was just the first notable example in the saxophone revival of the early 2010s. Lady Gaga released 'The Edge of Glory' and 'Hair' in 2011 both featuring Clarence Clemons. The choice of using 'The Big Man', of Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band fame, was certainly a nod to 1980s nostalgia. Many other songs with saxophone riffs or solos were released in subsequent months and years, and these songs were considered by the media to constitute a full-fledged trend. Some of the songs include 'Midnight City' (2011) by M83, 'Talk Dirty' (2014) by Jason DeRulo, 'Thrift Shop' (2013) by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis, 'Problem' (2014) by Ariana Grande, and 'Worth It' (2015) by Fifth Harmony.

The recognition by the popular entertainment media can be seen in the multitudinous articles which were published on the subject and while some of them referred to this trend in a generally positive manner, some of the articles expressed a distaste for this 'new' development. Jonah Weiner adeptly discusses why the instrument fell out of favour and how it came back in his article 'Bringing Saxy Back: the Sax Solo Returns to Pop Music' published in *Slate* in 2011. He notes that Lenny Pickett's wailing saxophone from the *Saturday Night Live* theme has been the (only) connecting thread from the instrument's previous heyday in the 1970s and 1980s. That thread was a sturdy and important one, stretching all the way from *Saturday Night Live*, which has been on the air since 1975, to Perry's 'Last Friday Night' which was released in 2010. Weiner makes a brief attempt at explaining some of the meanings behind the inclusion of the saxophone in hit songs of the 1970s and 1980s, as he notes that the saxophones deployed in 1980s Billy Joel

and Lou Reed tracks, 'evoke seedy urban streets', and that David Bowie, T-Rex, and Roxy Music made the instrument as essential to glam-rock as 'platform glitter-boots' (2011). Weiner's brief recognition of the implications for the instrumentation in these songs, while not academic in nature, shares a passing resemblance to the case studies presented later in this thesis as well as Eggert and Vockeroth's study of the saxophone in advertising (2003), in that he is situating the sounds of the instrument within larger cultural contexts with which many popular music fans are familiar.

Other mainstream articles published by the news, music, and entertainment media that have seen the saxophone as a positive addition to contemporary popular music include 'From Pink Floyd to Lady Gaga: 12 Awesome Saxophone Solos' for *The Hollywood Reporter* by Shirley Halperin and Charlie Amter (2011); 'From King Curtis to Clarence Clemons, the Saxophone Holds a Special Place in Rock 'n' Roll' by David Hinckley for the *New York Daily News* (2011); 'From Ariana Grande to Redfoo: These 9 Pop Songs Make Saxophone Sexy' by Emilee Lindner for MTV, (2014); 'Balkan Beat Box on their 'Talk Dirty' Sample and Why the Sax is Back' by Richard Gehr for *Rolling Stone* (2014); 'Hot and Dirty Sax is what Rock 'n' Roll is Built On' by Laura Barton for *The Guardian* (2014); 'Party Like It's 1989: Why So Many of 2015's Biggest Pop Stars Are Channelling the Sound of the 1980s' by Carl Wilson for *Slate* (2015); and 'The Best Sax Solos in Pop History (When Sax Solos Mattered)' by Kirk Pynchon for *Guff* (2015). These articles collectively represent an acknowledgement of the relevance of the saxophone's inclusion in mainstream music of the early and mid 2010s.

The first line in the Halperin and Amter article is, 'Is it ok to like the saxophone again?' This particular article goes on to say that 'thanks to the "saxual harassment" of the 1980s, when practically every Lite FM staple featured a schmaltzy brass crescendo, mainstream musicians

had largely soured on the saxophone…until this year' (2011). It is notable that the authors attribute both the waning popularity and the return of the saxophone to the musicians, rather than the general public or music consumer. The consensus in these pieces is that the return of the saxophone, regardless of its previous associations or journey to nostalgia and kitsch and back again, is not a bad thing. In fact, history informs us that it is a good thing. Several of the articles call attention to the role of the instrument in early rock and roll, clearly referencing its uncanny ability to induce feelings of nostalgia in a listener and also its symbolic associations with the pre-Civil Rights cultural and political contexts in which those genres were situated.

A superficial yet omnipresent correlation of the semantic similarity between the words sex and sax is apparently unavoidable, as witnessed by some of the titles of the articles mentioned above. Is the explanation for the instrument's sexual associations as simple as the difference of one letter in the spelling of its name? Exploiting this similarity between the two words is seemingly a cheap and easy way to garner attention, but it could also be a gesture towards the over-arching theme of the rebellious, provocative nature of early rock and roll which was seen in the gyrating hips of Elvis and the suggestive lyrics of some of the early rockabilly songs. It also speaks to the expression of gendered identities and sexuality that the instrument projects through both its physical shape and the sound it produces, as well as the way that the instrument protrudes from a player's groin area.

Although the majority of music journalism publications consulted for this study discussed the saxophone revival in positive terms, there are some notable exceptions. An article that laments the return of the saxophone to popular music is 'Sax Offenders: Death to Pop Songs with Annoying Horn Hooks' by Aaron Zorgel for *Complex* (2015). The attention-grabbing first line of this article is, 'When did pop radio get so horny?', producing yet another sex-related euphemism

at the expense of the saxophone, this time turning the synonym 'horn' into 'horny'. The author goes into quite a bit of detail and includes a list of songs in which the saxophone is an appropriate and praiseworthy addition, in his opinion, and then lists several songs in which the saxophone riff is 'evil' and rather than a relatively harmless ear worm, an 'ear snake.' The humour and sarcasm are apparent here, but it bears mention that this is clearly an article intended for mass distribution across the internet and social media due to its use of clever euphemisms and peevish remarks as well as its collection of demonstrative videos for readers to watch.

An article published online in 2015 by the young adult-centred Canadian media company *Vice* was entitled, 'Shitty Music Clichés, Trends, and Opinions That Need to Die in 2015' (Bassil, 2015). The first cliché that the author mentions is the saxophone in mainstream pop, and states that, 'just like farting, the saxophone is vulgar and offensive. Unless you're like, John Coltrane himself…reed instruments suck ass' (Bassil, 2015). Similar to the aforementioned article, the attempt at humour is clear; the article bears mention because of its widespread circulation as part of a popular media conglomerate but also because of the vitriol with which the author describes the instrument. The brazen denigration of the saxophone by both Zorgel and Bassil seem to be commonplace or simply accepted, and Bassil's flippant mention of Coltrane could also be read as an attempt to either cover up a racialised comment or to sound sophisticated enough to know about Coltrane, thereby demonstrating his latitude to take a stance of extreme distaste. Despite all of this, these varied interpretations signal that the saxophone is significant enough to elicit strong feelings and opinions from different types of people in multiple contexts.

CONCLUSION

The saxophone has made significant contributions to the popular music canon and is rooted

in American society as a musical object with a certain amount of cultural capital. It is perpetually represented in popular culture in several forms such as YouTube videos of Sexy Sax Man, Sergio from *SNL,* Lisa Simpson, the Pink Panther, Bill Clinton, advertisements for Camel cigarettes, Kool cigarettes, Benetton clothing, Emirates Airlines, and Cadbury chocolates, to name a few. In these instances, both its sound and its iconographic image signify socially assigned characteristics that emerge from the players and from society at large, and in some cases, it is used to inveigle consumers. Its use in advertising is indicative of its relevance in American society, signalling its position in mass and popular culture as an potent sound object and a product susceptible to trends.

Its history in the United States has been closely aligned with the history of jazz and of rhythm and blues and rock and roll, and the prominent saxophonists in those genres additionally infused it with their particular styles of expression. What is it like to embody these meanings while performing with artists such as David Bowie, Kelly Clarkson, Jill Scott, Jason Mraz, and Mary J. Blige, or on the stage of *Saturday Night Live* each week? As in Bates' quote mentioned above, the relationships formed around musical instruments are what defines them, and that is what will be examined subsequently (2012, p. 64). In Chapter 3, the community of saxophonists performing within recent popular music contexts, the fieldwork sites, and the culture surrounding that community will be explored.

CHAPTER 3

DEFINING THE COMMUNITY AND THE FIELD

> It was a saxophone in a store window. I could see myself in the polished brass—that started me off. I ran errands all over Brinkley (Arkansas) until my feet were sore, and I saved until I could make a down payment on that shiny instrument. (Louis Jordan in Shaw, 1978, p. 65)

The extract above resounds deeply in my own life. As a child I frequently watched old movies with my Mother and, when I was about nine years old, it was *The Glenn Miller Story* (1953) starring Jimmy Stewart, that inspired me to play the saxophone. However, I am ashamed to say that later on in life I found myself too embarrassed to admit that it was this movie about Glenn Miller that influenced my desire to pick up the instrument. In fact, it is a detail that I have only disclosed to a handful of people in my life including my partner, who is also a professional saxophonist. I later realised that the culture of professional musicians in which I found myself looked down on Miller's music. It was not considered 'serious' jazz, but rather a whitewashed reproduction of jazz of the 1930s and 1940s, performed by a group of middle-aged white men. Yet, as a child none of that mattered; I was completely unaware of any connotations linked to the saxophone or to Miller's brand of popular jazz music of the 1940s. I was attracted to the shiny instrument and found the shape and sound it produced intriguing. I did not fully comprehend it at the time, but I thought it was cool, an element that seemed to be missing from my impression of other wind instruments.

Each of the participants that I interviewed for this study expressed a similar sentiment in regard to their humble beginnings with the saxophone; a heartfelt emotion epitomised by Jeff Coffin's straightforward declaration, 'I think the saxophone chose me more than I chose it', intimating an attraction to the instrument that seems unavoidable (2018). When I first started thinking about how this project was going to take shape, the interest I had in researching the

saxophone in popular music emerged from my own relationship to the instrument, but also from hearing contemporary songs on mainstream radio that featured the saxophone and were receiving a considerable amount of airplay and attention in the early 2010s. I wanted to know more about the saxophonists performing on these songs, how they characterised their own relationship with the instrument, and understand their impressions of its cultural significance.

This chapter aims to define the community of saxophonists and the culture that surrounds them, and to describe the field sites in which particular musical events occurred. Exploring the community and the field in this study contributes to understanding how saxophonists characterise their association with the instrument, and how they relate to the key themes of cool/kitsch, race, and gender/sexuality. These topics are explored through a survey of ethnographic and autoethnographic data that provide insight into these interrelationships and the socio-cultural contexts collectively represented by the principal themes.

EXPLORING THE COMMUNITY

There are potentially millions of people who identify themselves as members of the community of saxophonists, but this project focuses on a select group. The term 'community' is being used metaphorically in this case and could be considered ill-fitting in this context, but it remains a suitable word to describe the group of people that are a part of this small yet elite and intimately connected network of musicians. The participants represent a compact cross-section of prominent professional saxophonists who come from different backgrounds and life experiences, but nonetheless they all hail from the United States, each of them supporting themselves financially through musical performance. Regardless of how many saxophonists there are worldwide, the number of saxophonists who make a living by performing is a much smaller

number, although both amateurs and professionals alike are still able to label themselves as saxophonists. Both groups are active members of the community in various ways including engagement in online forums, participation in amateur or semi-professional performing ensembles, or attendance at conferences. Interestingly, many of the saxophonists that participated in this project are friends and colleagues with one another and mentioned each other in the interviews.

Attending conferences, identifying one's allegiance to particular instrument and reed manufacturers, and participating in online forums and social media groups are just a few of the essential ways that saxophonists identify as members of the same community and connect with one another. Many saxophonists regularly attend the conferences of the North American Saxophone Alliance (NASA), World Saxophone Congress, Jazz Education Network (JEN), or the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM), and these meeting places are essential for social and professional networking as well as engagement with the community. The first time I heard Jeff Coffin perform at a live event was at a NASA Conference in 2013, and recently I was able to meet Sal Lozano, a renowned session musician in Los Angeles, face-to-face for the first time at a NASA Conference in March of 2020. Also, the sizable number of saxophone and equipment manufacturers that attend these conventions seems to be an indicator that there is, indeed, a very large number of people in the world that play the instrument and therefore financially support these commercial entities. Companies that produce saxophones and related equipment also take part in supporting the community by facilitating performances and educational outreach activities for saxophone students and amateurs featuring the artists who endorse their products.

Saxophonists are more than just people who play the saxophone; they embody it, they bring it to life, and they drive the instrument forward in time through trends and musical developments. They carry along its impedimenta, good and bad, and the cultural embeddedness, from kitsch, to cool, to race, to gendered identities and expression. They take its performance very seriously, not merely for financial gain, but because of their commitment and dedication to the instrument. One of the most perceptible and unequivocal commonalities amongst the participants interviewed for this project was their devotion to and defence of the instrument. It is not an inanimate object, but a musical artefact that comes to life. Saxophonists embody 'societal norms and values' when playing (Chang, 2008, p. 79). From my own perspective, hearing the saxophone, seeing it, and reading about it is akin to seeing or hearing or reading my own name; I identify very closely with the instrument. Perhaps this is because I have been playing the saxophone for thirty-five years, so it is simply a matter of intimacy by proximity, but I believe the connection is more than that. Playing the saxophone is an essential part of my life and career; it is both beloved hobby and vocation.

The willingness of the saxophonists to participate in this project illustrates the strong sense of open collaboration inherent to the saxophone community. Although none of the participants knew me personally, I was able to figuratively 'cold call', or send unsolicited emails or direct messages through Facebook, to each of the musicians that I had previously identified as potential participants due to their performance experiences. A full list of the participants included in the study, with a brief listing of artists that they have performed with and the date that each interview occurred, can be found in Appendix 1.

FIELD SITES

The ethnographic methods for this project fall within the category of hybrid ethnography, as defined by Przybylski (2020). I used a combination of virtual interviews and online research along with face-to-face interviews and fieldwork excursions to connect with the participants, a reflection of the way that internet technologies in the twenty-first century enable almost boundless possibilities for communication and research. There were three brief fieldwork excursions that took place in particular physical locations for this project, whereas the remainder of the field sites were explored through virtual means and exist in the minds and memories of the musicians and their past experiences of performing; the sites are spatially and temporally separated. In this case, the main 'place' in which the interviews were carried out refers not to a physical location, but rather a virtual one in which the interviewer and interviewees engaged over live video.

Unlike some of the seminal ethnographic texts influential to this study and their primarily fixed locales, (Rice, 1994; Djedje, 2008) the bulk of the data was collected in interviews where the interviewees and the interviewer were separated by both physical distance and time zone. Cooley, Meizel, Syed (in Barz and Cooley, 2008), and Przybylski (2020) define and explore multiple ways that current technologies mediate communication and inform research methods. As Meizel noted, '…the [virtual] field includes *all* of the expanding, shifting, sites where culture is produced, disseminated, and consumed' (2008, p. 93, author's emphasis). Similar to the approaches described by those scholars in Barz and Cooley (2008), this study utilised virtual elements at almost every juncture. The details of the various forms of virtual correspondence between researcher and participant are not examined as closely here as they are in Cooley, Meizel, and Syed (2008), primarily due to the speed at which technologies of communication are

adopted and become commonplace. Texting on mobile devices, emailing, and direct messaging on social media have become necessary, almost mundane modes of communication, especially in light of the global pandemic of 2020 and 2021.

For this study, most of the participants were contacted through social media (primarily Facebook), email, and/or text message, most of the interviews were carried out via live video due to physical distance between the researcher and participants, and each interview was recorded and then transcribed using a computer software program (NVivo). One practical difference between earlier studies by Rice and Djedje and this one is that here the saxophone, and its existence in popular American music of the past decade, does not serve a seasonal, ceremonial or utilitarian purpose. Instead, it is meaningful for its aesthetic and socio-cultural functionality, and for the ways that the saxophonists put forth their understanding of its cultural contributions in particular contexts. The collective impressions recalled from past experiences are the primary focus; the physical locale undoubtedly serves a contextual function but is of secondary importance. The main goal of this study is to understand how the musicians play a part in the making of meaning in music (Djedje, 2008) by exploring the community of saxophonists and bringing to light their shared knowledge and experiences, as well as illuminating aesthetic beliefs and attitudes relating to saxophone performance.

However, not all the research was conducted at a distance and over the internet and some crucial fieldwork was performed at physical sites: a music store in the United States and two concert venues in Belgium. The first interview was with Jeff Watkins in October of 2017, who notably performed with James Brown for over a decade. This was the only in-person interview carried out for the study and took place at a saxophone-centred music store called Saxquest in St. Louis, Missouri that is very well known to the saxophone community around the world. The

circumstances that led to this impromptu live interview are reflective of two things: the support for the saxophone community that the shop provides, and the ability of saxophonists to relate to one another. I have maintained a friendly and professional relationship with the owners of Saxquest for over two decades. When one of the owners, who knew about my project, realised that Jeff Watkins and I were going to be in the shop at the same time, they asked Mr. Watkins if he would grant me an interview, and he graciously obliged. This would prove to be the longest of all of the interviews in the study, over two hours. Even though it was my first interview, and the process was still evolving, Watkins was very accommodating and seemed happy to share details of his musical life through descriptions of various experiences he had while performing with James Brown and Joss Stone.

This particular field site was meaningful because shops like Saxquest provide saxophones, accessories, repair, and services—all of the critical tools of the trade—as well as general support for the community. The shop benefits musicians in other useful ways, as it is also a music venue, presenting a monthly concert series and master classes that feature renowned saxophonists.[9] In interviews with Jeff Watkins, Sal Lozano, and Jeff Coffin we enjoyed lengthy and lively discussions regarding saxophone equipment that are indicative of the culture surrounding the community. Many saxophonists have an almost obsessive interest in sax-related gear, and discussions about equipment were not only a way to demonstrate knowledge and experience in this area and connect with the participants, but it is also a topic with which I am thoroughly engaged (sometimes we call ourselves 'equipment freaks' or 'gear heads', affectionately).

Saxophone gear plays a significant part in sound production and performing style; there are different mouthpieces, horns, and reed brands and strengths for jazz, classical, rock and roll, or pop styles of music. Curiosity regarding saxophone equipment is so common that many

saxophonists list the maker of the instrument, brand and size of mouthpiece, brand and strength of reed, and ligature information for soprano, alto, tenor, and baritone saxophones on their personal websites, and sometimes even in their social media profiles. The equipment discussions in the interviews in this study related to the individual playing styles and proclivities of each participant and provided insight into their experiences as professional musicians. Renowned saxophonists are often queried about their gear by people who want to sound like them, and some believe that using the same equipment will assist them in achieving that goal. Aspiring to sound like our musical heroes is a longstanding tradition in the world of performance and it is a distinctive feature of the culture surrounding the saxophone community.

In addition to the saxophone shop, the other physical sites in which fieldwork was conducted were a concert at *Le Botanique* in Brussels, Belgium and a concert at the Ghent Jazz Fest in Ghent, Belgium. I lived in Belgium from June 2015 to April of 2019 and began work on my thesis during my time there. In those early days of research and discovery I had barely begun sketching out how to approach an investigation of the saxophone in popular music. In July of 2016, some musician friends and I attended the Ghent Jazz Fest. Although there were a few traditional jazz musicians featured at the festival, various musical genres were also represented including mainstream pop, R&B, and soul performed by artists from the United States, United Kingdom, and Europe. The featured performers on that particular night of the festival were Lianne La Havas, a British neo-soul singer-songwriter, and Jill Scott, an American R&B and soul artist. An unplanned fieldwork expedition began when my friends and I overheard a group of men speaking English in a sea of native Flemish and French speakers. I casually struck up a conversation with this group and, fortuitously, they were members of Jill Scott's band, including Mike Burton, the saxophonist in the group. I quickly took the chance to introduce myself and

briefly tell him about my project and its nascent existence. He seemed both excited and intrigued, and after further discussion concerning our professional backgrounds, we discovered a number of mutual acquaintances due to the fact that we both attended university in the Midwest in the 1990s. He has been performing with Jill Scott for several years and has also performed with well-known artists Mary J. Blige, Anita Baker and Patti LaBelle. Our interaction was rather brief, as he and his bandmates needed to prepare for their performance, but in that short time we were able to make a meaningful connection. At the end of our conversation, he indicated his interest in being interviewed for the study. We subsequently connected on Facebook and on January 25, 2018 I carried out a virtual interview that forms part of this project.

Le Botanique in Brussels was a unique location to attend a concert in May 2016, and as I walked into the garden its eighteenth-century grandeur was awe-inspiring. I was looking forward to hearing Balkan Beat Box, a band that prides itself on its inimitable, multicultural blend of gypsy punk, electronica, funk, and hip-hop styles, and in particular its saxophonist, Ori Kaplan. His saxophone playing can be heard on Jason Derulo's 'Talk Dirty' (2014) and Fifth Harmony's 'Worth It' (2015), both of which were widely circulated mainstream hits in the United States.

Kaplan was typically positioned front and centre on the stage along with the lead singer, and his performance style mirrored that of the band: highly energetic and powerful. Seeing and hearing Kaplan perform live in front of an audience solidified my perceptions regarding his playing style and the way that he embodies notions of masculine gendered expression. The idea of gendered expression and its connection to sexuality is explored in the case study in Chapter 5, which features Jason Derulo's 'Talk Dirty' with a discussion of Kaplan's saxophone riff. However, it deserves brief mention here because witnessing Kaplan's performance brought to life some of the key themes that formed the foundation of this project.

While each performer and performance is unique in many different ways, Mr. Kaplan's playing style and stage presence is evocative of many other saxophonists. Powerful and sometimes ostentatious saxophone playing is part of the tradition, and can be seen in the performances of honkers and shouters such as Big Jay McNeely and in the strong stance and pained expression of contemporary saxophonists such as Lenny Pickett and Mindi Abair:

Figure 2.1

Bob Willoughby (1951) '*Big Jay McNeely drives the crowd wild at the Olympic Auditorium, downtown Los Angeles'.* Available at: https://www.artsy.net/artwork/bob-willoughby-big-jay-mcneely-drives-the-crowd-wild-at-the-olympic-auditorium-downtown-los-angeles. Accessed 19 November 2020.

Figure 2.2

Photographer unknown (year unknown) *Lenny Pickett.* Available at: https://www.pinterest.com/pin/376895062561230544/. Accessed 19 November 2020.

Figure 2.3

Performing Arts Center, Buffalo State (2014) *Mindi Abair.* Available at: https://buffalostatepac.org/about/photo-gallery/gallery:mindi-abair/. Accessed 19 November 2020.

Playing the instrument is not physically painful, but often the players appear to be under duress while performing. This is part of playing for an audience: draw them in, put on a show, and demonstrate that you are working hard for their benefit. Understanding emerges from the players' embodiment of the music, as well as in the performance of coolness, kitsch, gender, and sexuality. The instrument as a stand-alone artefact evokes certain connotations, but it is the players that act out the connection between sound and gesture, performing socio-cultural codes. The relationships between the players and the key themes are further explored in the next section.

SAXOPHONISTS: HOW THEY CONNECT WITH COOL/KITSCH, RACE, AND GENDER

In the narrative analysis of the data collected from the interviews with this small but distinct group of musicians, several topics emerged that help to define the culture area surrounding the saxophone and saxophonists in contemporary popular music and how each

participant engages with the key themes. One of the recurring threads that many participants discussed was performance practices specific to popular music. Several interviewees mentioned the importance of playing a compact, simple, yet powerful solo, and having the knowledge and ability required to perform anything that is asked of them. In response to questions about the coolness, or kitschiness, of the saxophone, many participants acknowledged the importance of authenticity, integrity, and honesty in performance. In response to questions about the reasons for the saxophone's popularity and longevity, participants noted its versatility, its similarity to the human voice, and its coolness.

The conventional career path for professional saxophonists is to perform primarily in the classical and jazz genres and to supplement income with teaching, so it should be noted that, collectively, the backgrounds of the participants in this study represent a small number of musicians whose careers veer from this path in unique ways. Mining the data for specific details surrounding the knowledge or skill that it takes to be successful in this alternate, yet typically more visible and financially rewarding path of performance provides the type of insider information that is lacking in some of the existing saxophone scholarship. Carlos Sosa, who performs with Jason Mraz and Kelly Clarkson, spoke specifically about this topic:

> That's the thing...for me, making a living, you go the band director route, which has nothing to do with playing…no school tells you that you can make money as a musician in pop music. There was no direction that way. When I was growing up there were all these stuffy dudes playing in a classical quartet and nobody's making any fucking money. You've got to market to these kids that you can be in a pop band, that's a thing. (Sosa, 2018)

Jeff Watkins commented similarly on the lack of guidance related to pursuing a path as a saxophonist in popular music:

> Nobody had a real method to tell you how to do this, you had to kinda figure it out on your own. You had to borrow from the jazz language, and you had to go out and play with Black guys who played blues with electric instruments, and there was (sic) no charts. Old school R&B. The other half of my training wasn't done at the University (of Missouri in Columbia),

> it was out in the clubs, or playing these blues, jazz, sorta R&B and rock and roll gigs. At that point I was 19 and 20. I had enough training at school and learning to improvise to realise that there were horn charts that needed to be done for some things. I got myself a couple of partners, a trombone player a trumpet player and we became roommates and I figured out how to write ourselves some charts. (Watkins, 2017)

These quotes are significant because they recognise the perseverance required to pursue a career as a successful performing musician, as well as the lack of guidance or education surrounding this particular style of playing. This relates to another important theme discovered through analysis of the interview data: each one of the participants consciously decided to perform in popular genres, instead of in the jazz styles in which they were originally trained.

From personal experience, I concur with Sosa on the lack of education surrounding popular music performance (although it should be mentioned that people also pursue careers as musicians for reasons other than money). I was one of those so-called 'stuffy dudes' playing in a saxophone quartet, but it was for the love of the camaraderie and repertoire rather than as a money-making venture. That being said, the most unadulterated fun I have experienced while performing was with the funk-styled band named Mother Popcorn that I played with when I was a postgraduate student. We played covers of songs by James Brown, Parliament Funkadelic, Tower of Power, and Chicago, and it provided me with just a small sample of the feeling of performing music for a mainstream audience, rather than in the formal settings that I had predominantly performed in up to that point in my career. In a formal concert environment, it is difficult to not feel as though there is constant judgment regarding the performance, and for many musicians this generates anxiety. When I performed mainstream music, I did not feel anxious or nervous, I felt excited. Thousands of hours add up to years spent practicing, developing technique and tone; to be able to go on stage and transcend the technical minutiae of the saxophone and to present music that is enjoyed by large numbers of people is liberating, and

it enabled me to understand, in a small but impactful way, the challenges, but also the joy of performing music that had existed outside of my academic training up to that point.

In the interviews, I was interested in determining the styles of music that each participant studied and how that had informed their performance practices and subsequently their career paths and professional experiences. Every one of the interviewees had studied jazz at universities in the United States, with the exception of Lenny Pickett, who studied jazz, but did not attend university. The general ethos of this conscious decision to eschew jazz for pop and rock styles is embodied in Louis Jordan's statement, '(Jazzmen) play for themselves…I want to play for the people' (quoted in Shaw, 1978, p. 66), and this sentiment was reiterated by several of the participants. I asked each participant if they had studied the history and performance styles of artists like Louis Jordan, King Curtis, or Junior Walker from their professors, and if they learned about R&B, rock, or other popular styles in their formal training. The answer from each participant was no, they did not learn about these artists or their music in their studies, but several participants noted that they had educated themselves about some of these artists and styles. The lack of formal training in these areas supports the theory that saxophonists in popular music are disregarded for various reasons, such as the undesired acknowledgement of the saxophone's role in genres historically considered lowbrow. As mentioned above, Jeff Watkins noted when asked about learning to play rock and pop, 'you have to figure it out on your own' (2018), and this speaks to issues of race and class that relate to genre that are discussed below.

In relation to performance practices that are somewhat unique to popular music styles, Carlos Sosa, Mike Burton, and Jeff Watkins referenced the importance of the ability to arrange and play horn lines 'in the moment', either in rehearsals or sometimes on stage during a performance. Additionally, improvised solos are not included in all pop songs, but when they

are, they are often quite short in length; sometimes only two or four measures of music, or eight to sixteen beats, resulting in only a few seconds of musical material. This necessitates not only improvisational skills, but also a sense of urgency and musicality that is quite different from the skills used in traditional jazz improvisations. In a conventional jazz chart, an improviser may have anywhere from eight measures to sixty-four or more, and this could possibly be repeated several times. Jeff Watkins noted, 'The challenging thing about rock and pop solos is they don't go for very long... you need to have something to say and get it over with pretty quickly. Short and sweet. And you still have to build it to climax. Nobody talks about that' (2017). In addition to recognising the particular skills required to play a short and impactful improvised solo in a rock or pop song, Watkins also mentioned that the challenge was part of the fun; to invigorate an audience with this type of playing is indeed one of his very favourite things to do (ibid.).

Saxophone playing in popular genres requires a particular set of skills, and the saxophonists involved often become autodidacts due to the lack of formal education surrounding vernacular genres and players from the past. In the following sections, the key themes are discussed in terms of how the saxophonists perceive them through the lens of their individual relationships with the instrument.

COOL/KITSCH

As noted in Chapter 1, the saxophone's initial association with the concept of cool began in the 1940s with its connection to renowned Black jazz musicians of the time. The instrument's long-time relationship to cool was thus a crucial question that emerged early on in my research design and planning (including the formulation of interview questions), because it indexes its

acceptance in broader cultural contexts. Key findings from the analysis of the interview data notably associate the ideas of cool and kitsch to authenticity, honesty, integrity, and nostalgia.

Every participant in the study thinks the saxophone is cool, but with some caveats. For instance, Branford Marsalis said, 'the saxophone isn't unto itself cool, it depends on who is playing it…I've heard a lot of uncool saxophone playing' (2018). Kirk Whalum stated, 'I'm hoping that other people think it's cool' (2018), and Carlos Sosa reiterated that by saying, 'everybody else thinks it's cool' (2018). Sal Lozano exclaimed, '…it's been uncool in my hands a few times!', a self-deprecating observation that likely emerged from past performances that he had deemed unsatisfactory (2018). Marsalis related it closely to the coolness of the player while Whalum and Sosa prioritised other people's perceptions thereof, ostensibly tying that to economic or financial concerns. Mike Burton's thoughts on the subject were more abstract, but nevertheless seemed to represent what many of the participants alluded to when he said:

> Even if the person isn't cool, whatever 'cool' means, when you get your instrument and you start to play, if you can see the soul of a person and what they're playing then it's not so much about well I know this scale and I'll place this riff right here, it doesn't seem genuine. So when the honesty comes through in music, that makes it cool. (2018)

Lenny Pickett had the most to say about whether or not the saxophone is cool and what that means to him. As a youth growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1960s, he had started out playing the clarinet. However, he decided to switch to the saxophone because, 'my name was Leonard and I played the clarinet, so…the saxophone seemed like a much better avenue into social acceptability', an acknowledgement of the difference in reputation between the two instruments (2018). There are several technical similarities in playing the saxophone and clarinet, which is why many saxophonists play both, but the clarinet is a staple of the symphony orchestra and other traditional Western art music ensembles, generally lending it a more formal, refined, or staid reputation. Perceptions of the saxophone's character—jaunty, informal, cool—typically

stand in direct opposition to those of the clarinet. The popular music featured on radio stations that Lenny and his friends enjoyed at the time commonly featured the saxophone and he was interested in performing in those styles; the 'social acceptability' that he mentions is an affirmation of the saxophone's ability to be cool or sound cool in certain circumstances (2018).

Pickett was hesitant to lend too much credence to the question of whether the saxophone is cool or not because he believes that determination to be partially based on trends. Trends are mutable and this has the potential to trivialise one's instrument as well as one's life work. Pickett stated, 'my goal from a professional standpoint has always been to stick around long enough to hopefully enter the living legend status, because there's more permanence in that than there is in anything fashionable' (2018). The saxophone is somewhat susceptible to trends in popular music, but it has achieved longevity in American educational institutions, military bands, and jazz ensembles. Also, it is worth noting that, certainly in the saxophone community and likely in broader communities of musicians and American television audiences, Mr. Pickett has achieved his goal of attaining 'living legend status' (Pickett, 2018). Several of the participants in this study mentioned him as one of their primary influences and were excited to learn that he was a participant in the same study.

Interestingly, Pickett seemed to have an underlying concern that my intentions in discussing the saxophone in popular music were to malign some of the players and/or the genre, but the opposite is true. I believe I had inadvertently misrepresented myself, and I did my best to reassure him that the intention of my thesis was to explore the popular side of saxophone playing in order to investigate its merits and societal relevance. Perhaps his concern was in response to my own background as a classically trained saxophonist, but what has become apparent over the course of my research is that many saxophonists, regardless of fame, fortune, or the genre that

they play, have misgivings about how the instrument is perceived and have become self-appointed custodians of the instrument's reputation. We all try our best to ensure that it is respected. This appears to be a deep-seated attribute that saxophonists possess, which is likely in response to the relative newness of our instrument as well as a history that includes prominent examples of its use as an element of comedy and kitsch.

KITSCH

According to several of the participants, the performance and the player are what makes the saxophone cool, but conversely it can also make the instrument seem uncool, possibly kitschy, which several of the participants equated to inauthenticity. Marsalis reflected on the way in which the instrument was played and the image of the player, and spoke out in pejorative terms with regards to two highly visible examples that seem to make the saxophone uncool: Tim Capello, the saxophonist who performed with Tina Turner in the 1980s with his bare chest and oiled muscles, and 'Epic Sax Guy' who became an internet sensation with the YouTube video of his performance at the 2010 Eurovision song contest. Marsalis has played a central role as a traditional jazz and classical saxophonist who has contributed to the elevation of the saxophone's reputation in many ways. Although he has performed with notable mainstream artists over the course of his career, his perspective on the saxophonists mentioned above represents a form of cultural elitism that is sometimes dismissive of commercial, popular musical genres and performance practices. This viewpoint is not uncommon in the saxophone world, and part of the goal in this project is to discuss these class divides in an effort to reconsider long-held judgments about the aesthetic value of popular versus 'art' performance styles.

The video for the song 'Run Away' (2010) in which Epic Sax Guy, real name Sergey Stepanov, appears playing a simple and highly repetitive riff has been viewed more than seventy-three million times as of July 2020[10], clear evidence of its worldwide dissemination and visibility. The timing of the popularity of this video, and the subsequent memes that were generated from it, aligned with and potentially contributed to the notable return of the instrument in mass culture and popular music in the early 2010s, along with Sexy Sax Man who was discussed in Chapter 2. It is difficult to say with certainty whether Stepanov is a talented saxophonist or not, and of course this song may not fully represent his skill level. However, it seems that Marsalis is commenting on the idea that when a song reaches saturation, as this one did, then it cannot be taken seriously, or he is suggesting that Stepanov's playing should be judged by similar standards to those used to evaluate players in the classical and jazz genres. I would contend that what deems this act to be kitschy is its superficiality, or the exaggerated spectacle of the performance itself, rather than the skill level of the saxophone playing. This extravagant showmanship, partially aimed at enlivening Eurovision audiences, and partly the tradition of performative properties that emphasise the body and gesture in saxophone playing, is intentionally reminiscent of the 1980s when the instrument was cool. However, when the references re-emerged in the 2010s, these performances re-kindled strong nostalgic associations for the instrument tied to the significations of cool, kitsch, and sexuality. What was considered cool in the 1980s turned to kitsch for a time, and because of nostalgia, became cool again in the 2010s.

It could be said that it is the intention of the performer that determines whether saxophone playing in a particular musical event is deemed cool or kitsch. Generally, each of the saxophonists interviewed for this study demonstrated an earnestness and sincerity in their

discussions about the saxophone and have not intentionally performed kitsch. However, some highly visible saxophonists such as Sergio Flores (Sexy Sax Man), Sergei Stepanov (Epic Sax Guy), and, in certain modern contexts, Kenny G, are purposefully performing for comedic effect.[11] In their performances, they exploit the farcical identity assigned to some saxophone performances of the past with which audiences are familiar. This is not a condemnation, rather an observation that they are in on the joke; their intentions are made clear from the outset and are discernible due to their costumes, the musical event in which they are participating, or the music and the physical movements on display in the performance. If online audience size is an indicator, each of the aforementioned saxophonists has been remarkably successful in their performances of kitsch.[12] The inclination of some of the participants in this study was to judge these performances as inauthentic. However, a viable alternate viewpoint would be to consider these performances as authentically kitschy and, as such, careful deliberation needs to be given to the fact that these performers likely take their triviality very seriously. This is not to say that all saxophonists are constantly earnest in their performances, but rather that we should consider alternative types of evaluation for performances that are intended as parody. This aspect is discussed further below and the concepts of cool and kitsch are further explored in Chapter 4.

AUTHENTICITY

The idea of authenticity is a perennial topic of discussion in popular music (Armstrong, 2004; Dolan, 2010; Frith, Leppert, and McClary, 2004; McLeod, 1999; Moore, 2002; Peterson, 1997), and the concept was mentioned by several of the participants in response to questions relating coolness to the saxophone. It is discussed by scholars, critics, and consumers alike as a hallmark for the worthiness of their attention, or as proof that an artist is real, relatable, and true

to themselves and therefore, by implication, forthright with others. The perception of authenticity plays a significant role in the reception and subsequent fate of a popular artist or group, and hinges on a range of social factors to include race and gender. In terms of the saxophone, the post-war jazz musicians associated with it are typically considered as authentic, whereas an artist such as Louis Jordan may sometimes be seen as inauthentic, purportedly because he embraced straightforward song structures and playing styles, thereby broadening his appeal to a broad commercial audience. To some musicians this may have been a sign that Jordan compromised his integrity or authenticity; in other words, there was a perception that he was selling out, or engaging in some kind of falseness in his music making either because of his financial successes or the genre of his music. Sometimes there seems to be an underlying assumption that the mass appeal and financial success of a musician aesthetically devalues that person and/or their creative output.

The idea of the 'sell-out' was broached by Mindi Abair in her interview with me, when discussing her choice to play music that was popular rather than the traditional jazz being taught at the university she attended. In Abair's case, as well as that of Louis Jordan, the concept of selling out is not applicable because they felt they had maintained their integrity by making a conscious decision to perform popular styles to which they had an affinity. Furthermore, Jordan was known to be a talented instrumentalist, further supporting his sense of authenticity and integrity. By choosing to play R&B, Jordan did not compromise any principles, he made the choice to immerse himself in that style of music, and in so doing helped to create rock and roll. Artists such as Earl Bostic, King Curtis, and Junior Walker were also highly proficient saxophonists who chose to perform in proto-rock and roll styles. Nevertheless, Mindi Abair commented that she felt she had disappointed her instructors by performing popular styles and

noted, 'every type of music that I loved was "selling out" to them, whereas the music that they were playing, that they were teaching me, that was selling out to me; it wasn't my passion' (Abair, 2018). Today the idea that authenticity is tied to perceptions of class and genre is becomingly increasingly outmoded, and players such as Jordan and Abair exemplify the idea that authenticity is determined by an individual's intentions.

When asked about the idea of selling out versus authenticity, Lenny Pickett reiterated the sentiment:

> From an image standpoint, I think that my goal is to maintain as much integrity as a musician as I can. And to be as honest with the expressive aspect of the playing as I can. I'm not selling it to someone to be...I've walked out of recording sessions when people have asked me to sound ways that I wasn't comfortable sounding. There was recently a guy that asked me to play something, he wanted me to play louder, harder, more acrobatically than I felt comfortable doing. It wasn't because I couldn't do it, but it doesn't appeal to me at all. I said, here's three solos, use them if you like. I'd rather that what came across in the end is something that felt honest. It doesn't mean that someone else's honesty is less valuable, just that it's different. I'm an idiosyncratic performer, and that's the way I chose to do it. I invented it on my own, and I continue doing it because it has been sincere from the very beginning. (Pickett, 2018)

The words 'honesty' and 'integrity' emerge here not as insignificant platitudes, but as an additional way to express and assess authenticity in performance. This restates the themes that the participants mentioned: firstly, that they had made a choice to play 'for the people', and secondly, that technical facility and honest intentions come through when playing the horn and you can thus be considered authentic (Shaw, 1978, p. 66).

Performance prowess, honesty, integrity, and consequently authenticity can be heard in a saxophonist's performance. These factors play a critical role and can be distinguished, either consciously or subconsciously, as an artist's agency as well as their relationship to the instrument. Dedicated musicians practice for hours each day for years in an attempt to overcome technical issues that could potentially hinder creativity or diminish their ability to convey ideas

through the notes played on the saxophone. According to the saxophonists interviewed, these elements contribute to an artist's success and play a part in whether or not they are considered to be cool.

Genre classifications also seem to play a part in judgments that are levied against saxophonists. Jeff Coffin noted, '…sometimes I think with classical saxophone that people have a pole shoved up their ass', and 'I feel that on both sides of the aisle, both classical and jazz, there can be a bit of a superiority complex' (2018). He was not the only interviewee who expressed these feelings, and this appears to be further evidence that a barrier still exists between classical/jazz and pop and the question of prestige and class among the players.

Musicians are generally accustomed to being judged on their abilities, but this idea of a superiority complex appears to relate to class, and a more general idea that musicians who dedicate their lives and careers to studying and performing Western art music and jazz look down upon, or judge negatively, musicians who do not participate in those genres. There is a misguided assumption that popular musicians do not possess the same skills or commitment. However, as noted in Chapter 2, analysing popular music with the same tools that have historically been used in Western art music is anachronistic and ineffective, like comparing apples and oranges (Goehr, 1992, p. 245; Nettl, 1983, p. 60). Nevertheless, several of the participants in the study have, in some way or another, felt judged for their involvement in popular music and perhaps this is why the subjects of honesty, integrity, and authenticity were frequently brought up in the interviews. When asked about the idea of musicians' skills being questioned and the notion of the superiority of certain genres, Jeff Coffin noted, 'everybody has their thing that they do. There's a lot of room in the pool. Just don't shit in the pool' (2018). In

other words, it should not matter what style someone plays, but they should endeavour to play it well.

Coffin went on to say,

> I think that it's been so ingrained in us that there's a separation of music. I don't consider myself a jazz musician, I don't consider myself a pop musician, I consider myself a musician plain and simple. We've been indoctrinated to think that one style is superior to another, but for me, I'm looking for the spirit of the music. So to me, listening to Ornette (Coleman), or Bob Dylan, or Louis Armstrong, it's all the same shit. (Coffin, 2018)

Coffin's quote speaks to my own strongly held belief that talented performers exist independently of genre and technical facility, but there seem to be musicians that misconstrue personal musical tastes with objectivity in judgement of musical ability. During the interview with Marsalis, I asked about several different saxophonists who perform in popular genres and in each instance, he answered that they are not good saxophonists. This may have been a result of the general tenor of the discussion up to that point, and he may have felt compelled to call upon his experience as a jazz musician to evaluate the saxophonists that I mentioned from that perspective. Once again, this is indicative of the class divide that exists between classical/jazz and pop or rock and roll saxophonists, an issue over which several of the participants expressed trepidation. However, Marsalis did note that there are particular skills required to be successful in pop and rock performance environments:

> And the whole point is that there were a number of guys, Herb Hardesty, the guy in London, Dave Parry, the guy who played the solo on 'Money' (Pink Floyd). A lot of these guys are not good saxophone players by any stretch of the imagination, but good saxophone playing is not what is required for the job. The job is that you have to create a sound that matches the intensity of the song and raises it a level. And sixteenth notes ain't going to do it. While there are plenty of saxophone players who are better than Clarence Clemons, none of them can play with Bruce Springsteen. Because what he has that they all lack is the conviction and the power of musical intent. That's just what I learned from playing R&B. (2018)

In this context, a reading of this quote seems to indicate that Marsalis unwittingly proved the point I am making now. It is futile to evaluate or comparatively analyse sax players like Clarence Clemons, Dave Parry, or Herb Hardesty to classical and jazz saxophonists; they have a different skillset that necessitates a different set of rules for valuation that prioritises the intention and agency of the performer, the body, and the gestures used in service to the intrinsic simplicity and expression in popular music. Clemons performed with Bruce Springsteen, Parry with Pink Floyd, and Hardesty with Fats Domino, and they deserve recognition for being expressive and impactful in their performances with renowned artists whose music is integral to the popular or rock and roll canon. Indeed, this commitment is succinctly summarised in a statement of the guiding principle behind Hardesty's career, and was quoted in his obituary in the *New York Times* in 2016: 'when you play, play what's in your heart, what's in your mind, not what somebody else plays…you have to be yourself', a nod to the value of honest intentions in performance (Hardesty in Sandomir, 2016).

Overall, three main concerns were expressed by the participants when asked about coolness, kitsch, and genre. The concerns were related to judgments made regarding popular music's aesthetic value, saxophone skills, and lowbrow versus highbrow class designations. Interestingly, these issues also relate to race in a few ways which are discussed further below.

RACE

In the 1930s and 1940s the saxophone's coolness factor intersected with race because of some of the renowned Black jazz musicians who played it, and elements of that intersectionality continue to correlate to the saxophone today. A vast number of contemporary saxophonists still subscribe to the tenets of tone production, performance techniques, and style that were developed

by Black artists performing in vernacular styles in the pre-war and immediate post-war period, and it is in the playing styles of those artists that saxophonists implicitly engage with race. In preparing to interview participants in the study, I anticipated a thorough discussion of race as it relates to the saxophone in contemporary contexts, but the conversations primarily focused on the legendary Black musicians of the past whose playing styles continue to inform their performances. The influential artists mentioned most often in the interviews were Cannonball Adderley, Gene Ammons, Hank Crawford, King Curtis, Louis Jordan, Junior Walker, and Lester Young; artists who laid a foundation upon which today's musicians continue to build. Other influential names cited in the interviews, Maceo Parker, Michael Brecker, Lenny Pickett, David Sanborn, and Tom Scott, carried on those traditions and represent a newer generation of saxophonists, one which performed with prominent mainstream acts in the 1970s such as James Taylor, Joni Mitchell, Carly Simon, Elton John, and David Bowie.

The saxophone playing styles produced and popularised by Black musicians of the mid-twentieth century have, in some ways, contributed to the idea that genre classification is code for racial designation. This is a complicated issue in the discourse surrounding American popular music history, one that raises necessary questions about the correlation between low class designations and race.[13] The saxophone was an integral part of these musics, from jazz, blues, R&B to their related sub-genres, and therefore maintains a connection to these styles and their perceived lack of prestige.

Lenny Pickett noted that from a saxophonist's standpoint, it is difficult to distinguish between 'jazz and R&B or race music' when listening to recordings from the mid-1940s; it was either dance music or it was not dance music (2018). Pickett is referencing what he lamented as jazz's shift away from the mainstream and towards an erudite and exclusive audience, spurred by

the advent of bebop. He spoke at length about the music and musicians from the pre-war years, observing that, '…jazz had been popular, and people danced to it…to me the musics are not so different…they reflected one another' (Pickett, 2018). This is more of a favourable observation of the hybridisation between musical styles of the era. Pickett's mind-set seemed to be shared by many of the participants, namely, that the cultural connotations relating to genre are of less importance to the performers than the playing styles and intentions behind the music; the saxophonists listed above that represent various genres appear to corroborate this observation. The participants made no mention of controversies related to race, they simply referenced the fundamental importance of, and admiration for, the musicians of the past that were responsible for creating many of the performance traditions that today's players continue to employ.

Jeff Watkins spoke in specific terms about the performance styles and techniques of musicians that were influential to his own playing, noting, 'I'm kind of yearning for something a little Blacker' (2017). When I asked him what he meant by that, he explained:

> A little more on the back side of the beat instead of the front, more groove-based jams, where the pocket is the most important thing, rather than the (individual) parts or the rock energy….as a soloist or a singer, you want to pull and stretch the time. Listen to your favourite sax player…part of their expression comes from bending the notes, bending the time, lay back on a lick or a phrase, especially if it's a ballad. Time is a device just like choosing your note or your tone. (Watkins, 2017)

Watkins is attributing very specific musical characteristics to the Black saxophonists that informed his performance style. The concept of the 'pocket' refers to the precise, yet comfortable and unhurried, placement of notes into the rhythmic groove of a melodic line. The pocket is dependent on the genre and the performers, and Watkins is notably identifying specific components of performance style, particularly rhythm and feel, as he relates them to race. In many ways, this candid discussion of details regarding racialised performance practices in vernacular genres clearly illustrates the saxophone's connection to Black musical practices, a

brief but substantive acknowledgement of their significance in performance traditions of both the past and present. When I queried Watkins about the primary influence on his saxophone playing, he mentioned Gene Ammons, stating that, 'he could say more in two or three notes than most people could do with all their patterns, scales, and licks and memorised stuff. He really had something to say' (ibid.). Ammons' playing style was known for its big sound, expressive tendencies, and blend of jazz, blues, and soul style. This influence is recognisable in Watkins' performances, and it undoubtedly served the music well in the twelve years that he performed and toured with James Brown.

From the saxophonists' perspective, race does not seem to be the contentious subject that it is to some cultural critics, or gatekeepers of musical genre. They are more concerned with carrying on the conventions of good saxophone playing, regardless of genre.

GENDER

The intersectionality between race, gender/sexuality, and saxophone playing is succinctly demonstrated in this narrative by Mindi Abair, the sole female participant in the study:

> I had a woman sit next to my mother at a show in Seattle years ago. I was playing with Jonathan Butler who is a South African artist, he's a Black man from South Africa with a big urban audience. I walk out on stage in the middle of the song and finish out the song with him. As I walk out on stage, the woman sitting next to my mother stood up and said, 'what is that skinny little white bitch doing on stage?' And my mother shrunk down in her seat. By the time I finished the song with him, she stood up again and she goes, 'You go, you skinny little white bitch, you can play!' (2018)

As Mindi alludes to above, the predominantly Black audience for which she was performing had pre-conceived notions of what they believed a saxophonist should look like and sound like, resulting in a judgment of her abilities and her authenticity; not only was her gender a factor, but her whiteness also played a role in the assumption that she may not be a capable saxophonist.

She had to earn the audience's respect through her performance, which is a common theme in regard to female instrumentalists.

The traditions of performance practice for the saxophone are almost exclusively masculine in nature, and the themes of coolness and authenticity are tied to masculinity and the saxophone in a multitude of ways (see Chapter 5). Consequently, women frequently have to work harder to conform to these ideals in an to attempt to overcome prejudices regarding gender normative views related to saxophone performance. Below, gender and its relationship to the saxophone is primarily discussed from the perspective of the female participant and the researcher. The way that saxophonists engage with the theme of gender principally depends on one's own gender identification, and if you are a female saxophonist it colours many aspects of your career.

Abair was the only female participant in this project, but her experiences are representative of the reactions many female saxophonists have endured in performance contexts, including myself. Soon after moving to St. Louis for my first college teaching position, I was called to fill in on lead alto with a jazz band. I have walked into many rehearsals or performance spaces as the only female in the room, and this instance was no exception. It was a weekly swing band gig performing for dancers at an old ballroom, and the musicians were mostly mature, retired men, a mix of professionals and amateurs. The leader of the group was a trumpet player who, as soon as he saw me walk in and take my seat in the centre of the saxophone section, announced to the band that it would be unacceptable for me to play lead alto, and I would have to switch with one of the other saxophonists. The other saxophonists said no; I would play lead, and everything would be fine. He then proceeded to change the entire set list to include several lead alto features to see if I could 'handle it'. 'Don't fuck it up', he said. Whilst the dancers moved

around the floor, I played each of the charts he had chosen to a high standard, firmly quashing his prediction that the band would fall apart. The remarkable aspect of this story is that the leader of the band was willing to risk the band's performance success in order to prove that a woman should not play lead, or perhaps not play jazz, or the saxophone; he seemed to want me, and subsequently the band, to fail. I have experienced many micro-aggressions and implicit bias in my musical career over the years, but this was the most overt example of sexism I have ever experienced. Yet again a saxophonist's skills were called into question based on a discriminatory framework; another example of pre-conceived, narrow views related to the instrument.

The saxophone possesses ambiguous gender traits, which perhaps contributes to its popularity, and this ambiguity is reflected through its organological classification as an instrument that exhibits both masculine and feminine characteristics. It is considered a woodwind instrument because of its use of a reed, even though the body is made entirely of brass, and this dichotomy contributes to a somewhat androgynous gendered identity: woodwind instruments are typically played by women, whereas brass instruments such as trumpets, trombones and tuba, are played by men (Doubleday, 2008, p. 14). Nevertheless, the saxophone exhibits predominantly masculine expressive qualities, and these are discussed further in the case studies (see Chapter 4, 5, and 6).

The ambiguity mentioned above might also explain why the female saxophonists in jazz and popular music such as Candy Dulfer and Mindi Abair are portrayed as overtly sexual in their manner of dress, their album covers and videos; perhaps they feel the need to accentuate their femininity to counteract the masculine attributes of the instrument, to make it more alluring to audiences. If the saxophone is subconsciously viewed as an extension of the phallus when played by a man, and noted for its connection to masculine sexuality, then it is potentially difficult for

those who firmly believe in traditional gender roles to accept a woman playing the instrument. Alternatively, these accentuations of femininity are simply a woman's perspective on the prioritisation of the body, gesture, and meaning in performance, similar to the way that some male saxophonists approach their performances.

The Dutch saxophonist Candy Dulfer came to prominence in the late 1980s when she opened for two of Madonna's European tour dates and soon after performed with Prince. When asked about Candy Dulfer, Marsalis said, 'she sure looked good when she held the saxophone. She's not a player' (2018). Marsalis was passing judgment as a jazz saxophonist, and this can be construed as saying that looking good and being a 'player' are mutually exclusive. In one sense, he is calling out Dulfer for what he most likely sees as inauthenticity due to the fact that she performs primarily popular styles. However, he markedly judges her physical attributes first, then devotes just a few words to pejoratively assessing her technical skill on the saxophone because she identifies as a woman, thereby perpetuating a sexist view of female saxophonists. He is conflating genre, gender, and performing skills into one negative aesthetic judgement. Marsalis also made the point several times in our interview that audiences hear with their eyes, and he is not wrong in this assumption, but he also is demonstrably not immune to this form of appraisal which he views as negative or amateurish. Notably, he did not mention any of David Sanborn's physical attributes or those of any other male saxophonist that we discussed.

When asked if stereotypes persist pertaining to a saxophonist's appearance, Mike Burton said:

> The hope is to live in a place where if you're good you're good. You don't have to worry about what colour you are or what sex you are or anything. If you're blazing, you're blazing. I've seen Tia (Fuller) kill everybody in the club. Just blazing. She is amazing. (Burton, 2018)

Burton referred to Tia Fuller who is a Grammy-nominated jazz saxophonist that received notoriety early in her career, performing with popular artists such as Ray Charles and Beyoncé. Fuller recently published an editorial on the NBC News website regarding sexism in jazz, saying, 'Young girls can fly a rocket ship, throw a football and solo on the saxophone – but it is always harder to be what you cannot see' (Fuller, 2019). Seeing and hearing women play is one step towards dismantling deeply held gendered biases related to instrumental performance. Although this article exclusively discusses jazz, Fuller has extensive experience performing in popular music as well and it is highly likely that she has experienced similar prejudices in that genre. Discussing restrictive notions of gendered identities relating to instrumental performance is crucial because biases persist; inequalities in educational environments and the music industry linger, and in exploring these seemingly outdated ideas of gender norms in relation to instrumental performance, the goal is to encourage the erosion of these prejudices.

Mindi Abair discussed some of these issues in her interview, noting that, 'I think as women we have to prove ourselves more. We have to be better. We have to be more professional' (2018). She is describing the plight of all underrepresented or marginalised groups when she makes these statements. She went on to say:

> I think it's the tone that we take. We can have a good chip on our shoulder and become bitches, but at the end of the day if you go in and play your ass off we're all equal. It doesn't matter what colour you are, or if you're gay or straight…I have found that once you play, and you can hang, then the world is your oyster. Those walls come down. And I think that's great, and I know that will continue. But you have to get to that place where you can prove yourself. Then they ask if you can come next week too. (Abair, 2018)
>
> I think it's maybe how we deal with this perception or misconception of what we're supposed to be as women...it's got to be grass roots and we have to change people's minds about who we are and just play. Concert by concert. It's a great quest for us as women. (ibid.)

Saxophonists who are women are essentially fighting two different preconceptions about ourselves: that we cannot play the saxophone, and that the saxophone is awkward or ill-fitting for a female performer.

> You and I definitely don't fit the bill for what a saxophone player looks like. We will win any bar bet for what we do for a living! I think that it's great that we are a part of changing the perception of what a saxophone player looks like, sounds like, feels like. I think that there are a lot of women out there right now that have their own sound, that have their own vibe, and are just as successful as the men in their respective career paths whether it's jazz or it's rock. It's fun to watch it slowly but surely change. And it's going to be slow. It's interesting. (Abair, 2018)

Representation and visibility of female saxophonists seems to be improving with each new generation of saxophonists, but, as Abair observed, it will be interesting to see how quickly biases will be dispelled.

Earlier in my career I was unaware that I would regularly feel compelled to defend my instrument to classical musicians when performing with orchestras or chamber ensembles, would need to stand up and out-play men at jazz gigs who questioned my performance abilities based on gender, and generally spend time repudiating pre-conceived notions regarding the saxophone's reputation. I have engaged with several of the symbolic associations related to the saxophone rather regularly, and because saxophonists do not often live near, or perform with, large numbers of other saxophonists, most of the experiences I had were solitary. Over the course of my career, I have heard many of the same observations: 'you play the sax, wow, that's so cool! 'Oh, you play jazz!' 'You're a sax player? How do you handle being around all those men?' 'I've never seen a female sax player, that is sexy.' 'Oh, you're a sax player like Kenny G!' When I communicate with other saxophonists, I discover that I am not alone in these encounters, and part of what binds us together in the same community are our shared experiences, not only in performance, but in our daily lives as professionals. A more recent revelation as a result of this

study is that many saxophonists feel obliged to stand up to others for calling into question one's abilities or the instrument's reputation, and this defence of the saxophone and its capabilities may indeed be one of the defining characteristics of the community.

Exploring the community and the field has revealed some of the ways that saxophonists connect and identify with the instrument. The elite group interviewed for this project strive to perform with honesty and integrity, regardless of genre or performance context, and some of the participants harbour feelings of contempt for other performers that they deem inauthentic or dishonest in their intent. Saxophonists that perform in popular genres have sometimes been subjected to negative aesthetic value judgments that reflect the historical devaluing of popular musical genres because they are perceived to lack in class and prestige compared to conventional performance practices in Western art music or jazz. These value judgments have resulted in a feeling of inadequacy for some players despite the fact that the value system is anachronistic and disregards many integral elements that constitute a superlative performance in commercial popular music. The result, a feeling shared by a majority of the interviewees in this project, is an acute sense of responsibility to excel in performance and to elevate the saxophone's reputation.

The question of whether or not the saxophone is cool and why that matters has a complicated answer related to notions of authenticity, nostalgia, race, class, gender, sexuality, and genre, and all of these elements are performed by the operators of the instrument. It may seem a trivial question, but placing the instrument within the context of coolness in contemporary culture speaks to its social impact and a general feeling of acceptance for the instrument and its players. The consensus from the interviewees is that it is cool, and that coolness is visible and audible through the intentions of the performers. The saxophone's versatility is a hallmark of its existence and although this versatility is sometimes maligned by

outmoded ideas related to genre classification and discrimination, it is in fact an asset to the instrument.

In this and the previous chapter, the key themes were examined for how they are represented by the saxophone in the multitextual domain of contemporary popular culture, and for how the saxophone/participants engage with them. The next three chapters are comprised of three case studies in which the instrument is investigated for how it functions in particular musical environments and how it engages and intersects with each theme in those environments. Next, in Chapter 4, the ways in which the saxophone represents coolness and kitsch are explored in Katy Perry's hit song 'Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)'.

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY #1: KATY PERRY'S 'LAST FRIDAY NIGHT (T.G.I.F.)' COOL, KITSCH, AND THE SAXOPHONE

CASE STUDY ABSTRACT

This first case study examines how the saxophone characterises coolness and kitsch, as illustrated in Katy Perry's 'Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)' (2011). In this track, the saxophone acts as a strong signifier of those qualities in addition to its characterisation of nostalgia and sentimentality, both associated with kitsch, that emerge from the video's referential portrayal of popular cultural touchstones from previous decades. This song was chosen as a case study because it circulated widely as a number one song on the *Billboard* Hot 100, and its accompanying video additionally earned global attention. The song's success seemed to signal the saxophone's return as a feature of mainstream popular music in the early 2010s, indicating that the instrument potentially contributed to the commercial success of the track. This was significant because there had not been a song with a saxophone solo at the top of the Hot 100 charts in the United States in almost two decades, and this song was the most visible sign of the trend when considered in combination with some of the viral YouTube videos and album tracks by other notable pop stars that circulated around the same time.[14]

In Perry's track, the saxophone simultaneously embodies the disparate concepts of cool and kitsch in two ways: through Kenny G's comedic turn acting as the saxophonist 'Uncle Kenny' in the video, and through Lenny Pickett's nostalgic yet contemporary playing style heard at the apex of the recording of the song. The salient musical characteristic of 'Last Friday Night' is the saxophone solo, reminiscent in style to instrumental solos heard in pop songs of the 1980s but modernised for the 2010s with the addition of striking digital effects. The video for the song

features many supplemental references to past decades that reinforce its general nostalgic nature as well as the dualities of cool and kitsch. Support for the claim that the saxophone functions as one of the principal elements of each of these characteristics in the song and video is provided below, through an examination of the historical background and context for Katy Perry and 'Last Friday Night', followed by a discussion of how cool and kitsch (and its signalling of nostalgia and sentimentality), operate in this context. The second half of the chapter includes a survey of the song's critical reception and production, followed by a narrative and musical analysis of the song and video. The chapter ends with a close reading of Lenny Pickett's saxophone playing and its impactful role in the song.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Katy Perry is a globally recognised American pop star who had her first chart-topping hit in 2008 with 'I Kissed a Girl'. As of August 2020, she has sold approximately eighteen million albums in the United States and is recognised by the Recording Industry Association of America as the top-selling digital singles artist ever, with over seventy-two million downloads and on-demand streams of songs such as 'Firework', 'California Gurls', and 'Dark Horse' (RIAA, 2014). As a global pop star, she distinguishes herself from contemporaries such as Lady Gaga or Taylor Swift by employing humour in her songs and videos, whether through ostentatious fashion choices or the lyrical content in her music. In an interview in 2009 for *Esquire* magazine she described her persona as, 'Lucille Ball meets Bob Mackie', referencing the iconic mid-century American comedian as well as the flamboyant fashion designer that dresses celebrities such as Cher and RuPaul (Curcurito, 2015).

Perry is known for the controversial depictions of sexuality and cultural appropriation in her videos as well as for her quirky sense of humour, and this combination of controversy and idiosyncratic charm has combined to elevate Perry's celebrity over the years. 'Last Friday Night' is not an especially contentious song or video, but a couple of noteworthy examples of the reception for some of her musical output provides some context here. As Rosemary Pennington notes in her investigation of cultural appropriation in Perry's video for the song 'Dark Horse' (2013), Perry has been accused of 'peddling sex to young girls and perpetuating racist stereotypes' (2016). Her breakout hit song 'I Kissed a Girl' (2008) was celebrated by some as a mainstream anthem celebrating bisexuality, sexual freedom, and experimentation. Perry came from a religious background, so this song represented a form of rebellion against her upbringing, but it was offensive to many in the LGBTQ+ community for its flippant portrayal of same sex relationships. Michael Hann, in his music blog for *The Guardian*, noted that the lyrics of 'I Kissed a Girl' trivialise queer sexuality, and although it seems that her intention is not malicious, it is condescending (2018). Nevertheless, the slight sense of rebelliousness along with the theme of sexual experimentation resonated with large numbers of people at the time; the song remained a number one hit on the *Billboard* Hot 100 for seven weeks in 2008 and catapulted her to fame in the United States (*Billboard*, 2019).

After Perry released the *Teenage Dream* album in 2010, five songs from that album peaked at number one on the Hot 100, tying a record with Michael Jackson's album *Bad* (1987) for the most number one singles from one album. This is an indication of the level of success and commercial appeal she had achieved by June 6, 2011, when 'Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.), the fifth single from the album, was released. As referenced by the title, the album is an homage to Perry's youth, as she was born in 1984, which explains the overall thematic focus of the album.

The video accompanying the song was released about one week later, and enabled the song to gain momentum on the charts due to its wide circulation and the resulting media attention. The first time I heard this song was on the radio, and I later went online to watch the video which had become a sensation in the mainstream entertainment media due to the amusement that arose from Perry's campy turn as the teenaged Kathy Beth Terry, as well as the various cameo appearances it featured. The choice to include well known American television, movie, and music personalities from the 1980s, 1990s, and 2010s bears out the attempt of the video's producers to create a video that operates on several levels of competency. By evoking nostalgia and providing enjoyment for as many different groups of listeners as possible, these creative choices increased the chances for the song and video to generate audiences and revenues.

Sales and popularity are affected by audience perception, and whether consumers value objects as cool, kitsch, or otherwise. Cool '…has social and economic implications and has the ability to make things popular or to help sell things; it is a form of positive value orientation' (Hill, 2001, p. 458). It is a challenge to comprehensively outline the various facets related to the concept of cool or the attribution of coolness, and this is not always linked to overtly capitalistic concerns, but the case of this pop star and this album along with the place and time that 'Last Friday Night' was released does indicate a commodification of coolness. Perry was at a notable high point in her career at the time that the song was released, so potentially a very large number of people thought she was cool and subsequently became consumers of her music.

Katy Perry and other widely visible musical artists have accrued large amounts of what Bourdieu referred to as cultural capital, to the extent that they wield a certain kind of power and are at the forefront of cultural trends in various disciplines including music and fashion (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 4). Perry's position as a global pop star endows her with a great deal of

cultural capital, and because of that she potentially set a trend, however short-lived, and was able to capitalise on the saxophone's cool and kitsch qualities to enhance those thematic associations in 'Last Friday Night'.

As noted above, Perry employs a humorous, tongue-in-cheek element in her music, showcasing characteristics of kitsch that are evident in her performances. For example, these characteristics are notably on display in the video for 'California Gurls' (2010) where she dons a bra made of cupcakes, and in her appearance at the Super Bowl in 2015 when her vocal performance was overshadowed by eye-catching, meme-producing dancing sharks. She seems to use kitsch as an avenue into coolness; she is in on the joke and her irreverence is an endearing attribute in a pop star. However, it could also be true that she uses kitsch as a way to be cool because historically women have not been considered cool, and her persona lends itself to this approach. Coolness is often tied to masculine attributes such as detachment, self-possession, rebellion, and a capacity for violence, 'core qualities which are often unavailable to women' because of societal constraints (Dinerstein, 2014). However, in the contemporary popular culture milieu, female musicians like Perry have come to be considered cool by embracing a combination of qualities they can deploy on their own terms like humour, sexuality, and mild rebellious tendencies.

When the saxophone appears for the first time in one of Perry's songs, it makes an impact. She, or her producers, would not include it if it did not positively contribute to the overall spirit of the music and/or video, or represent particular concepts that enhance the reception of the music, thereby potentially contributing to dissemination and profitability. She is successful enough that there is likely a very elaborate machinery of industry and production personnel involved in the making of this highly polished music. A number of salaries are dependent on its

success, so every detail is significant. In the case of Perry's 'Last Friday Night', the line between coolness and kitsch is blurred, and similar to Perry herself, the saxophone deftly represents both of these qualities due to the accrual of the identities that have come to be associated with it over the years.

THE COOL/KITSCH PARADIGM

The principal reason that the saxophone represents both cool and kitsch in 'Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)' is due to the fluctuating assignment of those qualities throughout the history of the instrument as well as its associations with the well-known people that play it. As noted in previous chapters and explored further in Chapter 6, the saxophone's association with Black jazz musicians in the first half of the twentieth century established it as a cool instrument, but in this case, those particular associations may be assumed but are not prioritised. Here, an assignment of the quality of coolness primarily acts as both a symbol of and contributor to popularity and commercial success. The song and video are meant to evoke the early to mid 1980s when the saxophone seemed omnipresent in pop music and videos, movie soundtracks, advertisements, and television theme songs; it was cool. Indeed, a second saxophone craze occurred in the decade of the 1980s, and because of its pervasiveness in popular culture at the time, it aurally and visually symbolised that decade in this song and video for several reasons.[15]

One of the most visible ways that the saxophone signified coolness in the 1980s was its widespread involvement in popular movies and music, and 'Last Friday Night' exploits those tropes by referencing both the pop culture and fashion from the 1980s in the video. In terms of popular music, there were 243 songs on the United States *Billboard* Hot 100 chart from 1980 to 1989 that featured the saxophone, compared to 135 in the 1970s and 58 in the 1990s (Laughter,

2015). Immensely popular commercial hits such as 'Smooth Operator' (1984) by Sade, 'Dancing in the Dark' (1984) by Bruce Springsteen, 'Maneater' (1982) by Hall and Oates, 'Africa' (1982) by Toto, 'Rio' (1982) by Duran Duran, and 'Who Can It Be Now' (1981) by Men at Work dominated the airwaves and elevated the saxophone to a level of 'universal literacy' for a generation of listeners (Scruton, 1999).

In terms of cinema, popular movies of the era featured the saxophone in various ways. Further analysis of the specific 1980s references in Perry's video for 'Last Friday Night' are discussed below, but a general survey of the saxophone's frequent association with coolness in music and movies of the era is presented here. One of the main characters, portrayed by Rob Lowe, in the hit film *St. Elmo's Fire* (1985) was a saxophonist. The instrument played a prominent role throughout the film as he was shown playing in a rock band at a bar and flinging the instrument over his back, tied with a string, while riding his motorcycle. It would appear that Lowe's character was too cool to use a saxophone case to protect his instrument. Tim Capello, the saxophonist who was mentioned in Chapter 2, performed regularly with Tina Turner in the 1980s, and was featured in a performance toward the beginning of the popular film *The Lost Boys* (1987). He was performing at a well-attended outdoor concert on the beach where all of the cool kids, the main characters, were hanging out. Images from this noteworthy performance still circulate in the form of a meme, in 2021, on the internet. Also released in 1987, *Dirty Dancing* did not include a character who played the saxophone, but its soundtrack included several songs that prominently featured the instrument. The theme song for the film, 'I've Had the Time of My Life' (1987) was a number one hit on the *Billboard* charts, won several awards including the Academy Award for Best Music, Original Song, and features a saxophone solo. The movie takes place in 1963 and the soundtrack includes songs from the early 1960s as well as contemporary

songs from the 1980s, but only the contemporary songs included on the soundtrack prominently feature the saxophone, whereas the earlier songs do not.[16] Perhaps this reflects an effort by the producers and/or music advisors for the film to have the saxophone represent a more modern facet of the plot, which tackles generational issues of class, race, and abortion, or perhaps it is merely an attempt to make use of the popular sounds of the time.

Notably, *Dirty Dancing* is just one example of the many films released in the 1980s that attempted to capitalise on film-music partnerships to maximise financial returns. According to Denisoff and Plasketes, this 'synergism…came to signify an increase in each medium's effectiveness', and 'by mid-1984 the equation "movies + soundtrack + video = $$$" was firmly in place' (1990, p. 258). Other successful movies that utilised this model were *Purple Rain* (1984), *Flashdance* (1983), *Footloose* (1984), and *Top Gun* (1986). These examples demonstrate the perception of music's contribution to the success of movies and the saxophone was a common musical component of many songs associated with films around this time. It signified coolness through its frequent inclusion in different types of commercially successful mainstream entertainment of the 1980s.

In contemporary contexts, the act of featuring a saxophone solo at the high point of a song constitutes a distinct reference to the structure and form of pop songs from the 1980s, when it was commonplace to hear a guitar or saxophone solo. An instrumental solo break is not a frequent feature of present-day pop music. However, things that are deemed cool at a particular time or place in history likely do not maintain that value orientation for the audience that lived through it the first time, and if an object reaches a high level of competence among a population it is possible that it not only becomes uncool, but may devolve into farcical or parodic territory. The saxophone is rather firmly aligned with particular genres, so its popularity in mainstream

music does not necessarily dictate its longevity or devalue its existence, but additional connotations become part of its character. In reference to the observations of the interviews presented in Chapter 3, the negative attributes that the saxophone potentially accrued due to over-saturation by the late 1980s still clings to saxophonists today and contributes to a general sense of inferiority or the need to defend the integrity or authenticity of the instrument and its players.

The success of 'Last Friday Night' seems to have hinged on the audience's knowledge of things that were cool in the past. Interestingly, there were also noticeable elements of nostalgia that cropped up in other examples of pop music in the early 2010s, and according to Carl Wilson in an article published in *Slate*, it was time (2015). Wilson proposed the theory that for people born in the 1990s, the era of the 1980s is within their consciousness principally through the experiences of their parents, therefore that decade is 'at once familiar and mysterious' (ibid). In other words, the younger generation thinks that popular music and culture from the previous era is cool while their parents lived through it and possibly consider it kitschy.

Wilson further contends that it seemed like all of the genres were embraced equally in the popular music of the 1980s: 'the weird went mainstream and the mainstream went weird', and this manifested itself in various ways in the music and videos of the time, but it was primarily demonstrated in their lack of subtlety (2015). The artists had big hair, ostentatious costumes, and the music had big saxophone or guitar solos. Similar fashion, style, and musical markers can be seen and heard in the Katy Perry and Lady Gaga songs of the early 2010s, and it is noteworthy that neither artist had ever had the saxophone featured in one of their songs before this time. This supports the claim that the saxophone is serving a particular function in these songs and their accompanying videos, and is further reinforced by the choice of saxophonists that helped to

define the soundscape of the 1980s, such as Clarence Clemons, Lenny Pickett, and Kenny G. Interestingly, feelings of nostalgia have historically been maligned and even linked to depression, but more recent research has shown that nostalgia is a very strong emotion that prompts affection for the past, eliciting feelings of optimism and warmth (Tierney, 2013). Nostalgia relates to kitsch because kitsch trades in knowledge of the past, it is a known commodity, and it is safe and comfortable (Binkley, 2000, p. 133). Notably, it was around 2010 that parodies of the saxophone and saxophone players of the 1980s reappeared in mainstream American culture. It appears that enough time had passed for the saxophone's kitschy, 1980s connotations to become funny and cool again, and the evocations of nostalgia and sentimentality supplemented the saxophone's return to mainstream popular culture.

Concerning kitsch, it seems as if there are two dominant schools of thought: the idea that it is a 'parasite' to art and culture, or fake 'plastic culture' (Crick, 1983, p. 49; Greenberg, 2013, p. 16), or the notion of kitsch as an 'aesthetic choice and not a synonym for "bad"' (Dolan, 2010, p. 457; Binkley, 2000; Grossberg, 1992). As a concept, kitsch is comprised of various socially constructed qualities that allow for a diverse collection of interpretations. Stephanie Brown, in her article discussing the concept, notes that kitsch objects are mass-produced, and that they 'evoke appreciation through their ornamentation for something necessarily extrinsic to them…' She goes on to say that kitsch is 'context dependent', and 'designed to sell' (2000, p. 42). This idea can be applied to the saxophone and how it came to be a token indicative of popular music and culture of the 1980s. The extrinsic element could be the authentic Black male jazz saxophonists of previous decades, or it could be a nostalgic reference to the pre-war heyday of jazz as the dominant form of popular music. It is possible that a strong sense of nostalgia has been responsible for recent iterations of the saxophone in popular music, from the 1980s to the

2010s. In terms of the two dominant ideologies concerning kitsch, I subscribe to the latter and believe that kitsch can be considered aesthetically, as a form of authentic inauthenticity, and that creators of kitsch have an awareness of what they are doing, which should emancipate them from unsuitable forms of mostly negative value orientation.

In modern contexts, kitsch is a type of comedy that depends on cultural literacy through its positive evocations of nostalgia and sentimentality. However, the concept of kitsch also relates to authenticity, as kitsch has been described as fabricating emotion and is ridiculed for its inauthenticity (Scruton, 1999). In an article about kitsch as a repetitive system, Binkley notes that kitsch 'carries the baggage of an antiquated view of culture' and that it should instead be considered as its own distinct style, one that values its inherent imitation and conventionality (2000, p. 132). Historically, the repetitive and derivative nature of kitsch has been characterised as lowbrow, a designation that the saxophone has occasionally been assigned. As Stephanie Brown states in her article on kitsch, nostalgia, and femininity in the 1990s, 'kitsch has been inextricably linked to nostalgia in the past decade; in the (still current) market in "retro", nostalgia both evokes a desire for, and is evoked by the presence of, kitsch objects' (2000). The notion of class distinction partially results from the instrument's commercial popularity in the 1920s and again in the 1980s, and this popularity may have contributed, along with social trends, to negative aesthetic judgments; it was no longer cool after the trend faded. However, in recent years the saxophone has become an example of ironic reclamation in that it had been considered so kitschy that it is now, perhaps fleetingly, cool again.

One reason for the saxophone's representation of kitsch in the 'Last Friday Night' video is the cameo appearance of Kenny G. Kitsch and its affiliations with nostalgia, sentimentality, and authenticity are strongly associated with Kenny G (the 'G' stands for Gorelick, his last name).

Gorelick came up as a common topic of discussion in the interviews in which the participants raised concerns related to both authenticity and integrity regarding his creative output. It must be discussed in further detail here because he is one of the most financially successful saxophonists of all time that performs in popular genres, and because he appears in the video but did not perform or record the saxophone solo.[17] The participants typically deferred if they were prompted to make a judgment call regarding his authenticity as a musician. Many saxophonists admit that he is a skilful musician, but they tend to believe that he has compromised his morals or integrity to make millions of dollars over the past several decades. In the 1990s he was the top-selling instrumentalist in the world, and by the late 2010s he had sold over 125 million albums. Jeff Coffin noted that 'I don't think he's very respectful in some ways, but he's a good saxophonist. I respect it, I don't care for it' (2018).

In the context of my conversation with Coffin, he was likely referring to an album that Gorelick released in 1999, when he commercially produced and distributed a recording of himself playing over the top of Louis Armstrong's 'What a Wonderful World'. Pat Metheny, the acclaimed jazz guitarist, wrote a now infamous, scathing manifesto in response to the release and posted it to his website, now removed (Metheny, 2000).[18] In the manifesto, he called Gorelick's recording 'musical necrophilia' and that, 'Kenny G has created a new low point in modern culture' (ibid.). Additionally, Metheny accuses this recording of being a blatant cash-grab, the epitome of selling out. An article by Ben Ratliff that appeared in the *New York Times* shortly after Metheny's manifesto was released entitled, 'Music; Jazz Can Take Itself Too Seriously', makes the point that, while Metheny may be correct in his assessment of Kenny G's performing skills and general lack of respect for the traditions of jazz, his recording should not be considered within those parameters, but rather as a form of advertising; he is a medium through which the

'flow of commerce' is conducted (2000). As Ratliff notes, this is the practicality of the popular music industry at work, it is not meant to be considered as high art (ibid.).

Part of the issue that jazz musicians such as Metheny have with Gorelick is that he sometimes presents himself as performing in this 'high art' jazz tradition, when his music is produced, styled, and marketed for a mainstream, mass audience. Also, he displays a strong sense of earnestness in his music, and this over-abundance of 'musical sincerity' is likely what adds to his characterisation as kitschy, and perhaps compels other musicians to question his judgement (Hemingway, 2020). He seems to care too much to be cool. No matter which side of this particular debate one chooses, the point gleaned from discussions regarding Kenny G is that musicians strongly question his integrity and taste level, and this translates into the belief that he is inauthentic. In addition to selling millions of albums worldwide, an interesting side note is that he is from Seattle and invested in Starbucks when the company was first starting out, therefore his personal fortune was elevated by a substantial amount (Harding, 2008). This is yet another factor that is taken into consideration when saxophonists discuss his merits as a musician; it evokes a bit of envy but also contributes to the notion that he is a sell-out.

Mindi Abair had this to say about Gorelick in her interview:

> I said in an interview when one of my first records came out and someone asked me about the whole Kenny G thing and I was just like, look I don't slam him because he brought a lot of notoriety to the saxophone and a lot of us probably wouldn't have the chance to be successful it if weren't for him paving the way. And boy did I get slammed for that. But I stand by it! (Abair, 2018)

The hierarchies borne from perceptions of class and authenticity persist in music, and so do antiquated views on aesthetic judgment, made visible in this example of Abair being criticised simply for speaking kindly about Gorelick. Calinescu, a scholar that sides with the viewpoint of kitsch as a negative quality, referred to it as, '…a specifically aesthetic form of lying' (Brown,

2000). Perhaps the notion that Gorelick's music is kitschy is the issue at the heart of the vitriol surrounding him in the saxophone and greater jazz communities, but it seems to come from the perception that he and his music lack integrity and/or authenticity. These perceptions may or may not be warranted. His appearance in the 'Last Friday Night' video, without having recorded or performed on the song, could signal either a questionable level of integrity or a sense of humour; possibly both.

CRITICAL RECEPTION AND PRODUCTION

'Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)' was considered by several music media outlets as one of the top songs of 2011 (*Billboard*, 2011; Paskin, 2011; *Rolling Stone*, 2011), and it was considered the 'song of the summer' by a few (Etkin, 2011, *Rolling Stone*, 2011). Other notable contenders for the song of the summer that year were 'Party Rock Anthem' by LMFAO, Lady Gaga's 'Edge of Glory', and 'Rolling in the Deep' by Adele (ibid.). Although the consensus seems to be that 'Party Rock Anthem' earned the title of song of the summer that year, the fact that two of the most commercially successful and recognisable pop stars of the 2010s, Lady Gaga and Katy Perry, both released songs that featured referential, nostalgia-tinged saxophone solos constituted a legitimate trend which continued to reverberate in popular music and culture for a few years afterward. Other pop artists such as Ariana Grande, Taylor Swift, and Demi Lovato as well as indie artists Fleet Foxes, Bon Iver, Arcade Fire, TV on the Radio, and St. Vincent all included the saxophone in some of the songs they released in the mid-2010s, and this is at least partially attributable to the resurgence of the appearance of the instrument in music by Gaga and Perry.

'Song of the summer' is an unofficial designation but does speak to the news and entertainment media's distribution of Perry's song and its widespread popularity, as well as the

likelihood that the early-summertime release date was timed to encourage this framing. It appeals to a youthful audience who is excited for the end of the school year and the anticipation of a party celebrating that occasion, but it could also be geared towards anyone looking forward to Friday, the end of the work week. Indeed, the lyrics mention 'don't know what to tell my boss', in one of the examples that demonstrates how the song and video speak to different age groups of listeners. The designation, 'song of the summer', denotes a particular set of cultural significations and a level of conventionalisation. Although the idea of a particular song achieving this status is primarily a commercial construct, the achievement is not related to mere subject matter, but rather to *Billboard* chart data. Summer itself represents school break, vacations, pleasant weather, outdoor activities, and various other ways in which we are temporarily released from the daily grind of the remainder of the year. Popular music that attempts to encapsulate the spirit of summer is expectedly carefree, fun, and enthusiastic, oftentimes centred around dancing. Past songs of the summer have included 'Get Lucky' (2013) by Daft Punk, 'Vacation' (1982) by the Go-Go's, 'Hot Stuff' (1979) by Donna Summer, 'School's Out' (1972) by Alice Cooper, and 'Dancing in the Street' (1964) by Martha and the Vandellas (Dolan and Gross, 2013). The concept of the song of the summer is well-established in the United States, dating back to the early twentieth century according to an article in *Vox*, a general interest news website that often publishes popular culture news (Edwards, 2016). Edwards contends that the idea of the song of the summer coincided with the development of the music industry itself, as a way of constructing the culture around a hit song for maximum profitability (ibid.).

Jonah Weiner, in his article for *Slate* magazine, said that the first time he heard 'Last Friday Night' the saxophone solo took him by surprise, and its inclusion in the song was 'ingenious' (2011). He goes on to state, 'Perry's lyrics celebrate a goofy blast from the past, so what better

musical corollary to that theme than a sax solo, as goofy as blasts from the past get?' (Weiner, 2011). To Weiner, the addition of the saxophone solo here was an extremely effective characterisation of the 1980s pop style, and the song uses the saxophone as a 'nostalgia button' (ibid.). In other words, the act of adding the saxophone as a way to endow it with the sights and sounds of the 1980s was, perhaps, as easy as pushing a button, and the addition of Kenny G in the video augments the thematic material even further.

In an interview with *MTV* published just a few days after the video for 'Last Friday Night' was released in 2011, the director Marc Klasfeld noted, 'the storyline is definitely "Sixteen Candles" (1984) and John Hughes-influenced…and all those great 1980s high school movies' (Vena, 2011). Other movies directed by John Hughes in the 1980s include *Weird Science* (1985), *Breakfast Club* (1985), *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986), and *Pretty in Pink* (1986). These films are now often considered cult favourites, and the idyllic scenes of upper middle-class, white, suburban Chicago teens navigating life, and love (or sex), while throwing parties and trying not to get into trouble with their conservative parents, accompanied by an eclectic soundtrack of new wave and pop music of the era, has come to represent that decade for many people who lived through that time.

The 'Last Friday Night' video portrays many of the same tropes as the John Hughes films, such as the 'geek to chic' transformation of the main character, the depiction of a massive house party that devolves into relatively benign mayhem, and the unrequited love story.[19] In these examples, in just a matter of moments, there is a transformation of the main character from seemingly unattractive, uncool nerd to striking beauty with the newly acquired ability to attract the attention of the cool, popular kids, and even to be considered one of them.

In discussing the video, each of the articles surveyed mentioned the patent nod to nostalgia, and several of the articles make mention of the coexistence of references to multiple decades. Willa Paskin's account for 'Vulture', the culture section of *New York* Magazine, is entitled 'The Eighties Meet Rebecca Black in the Video for Katy Perry's "Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)"' (2011). *Rolling Stone*'s very brief commentary accompanying the video stated, 'the best and weirdest thing about Katy Perry's video for "Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)" is that it's simultaneously nostalgic for the late Eighties and, like, ten minutes ago' (*Rolling Stone*, 2011), an acknowledgement of the capability of the song and video to be relatable to multiple audiences. One of the celebrities featured in the video was Rebecca Black, an American teenager who released a video on YouTube in February 2011 for her song 'Friday', just a few short months before 'Last Friday Night', and it became a viral sensation. 'Friday' was called 'the worst song ever made' by comedian Michael J. Nelson on Twitter (now removed), and it was generally received very negatively on social media sites Facebook, YouTube, and Tumblr. The intensely unfavourable reactions to the song enhanced to its circulation, contributing to its trajectory from a ridiculed kitsch object to cool. The choice to include Black as a character in the video represented a topical, contemporary pop culture moment referenced in the two articles mentioned above.

Most of the articles in the mainstream entertainment press referenced the character that Perry portrays in the video, Kathy Beth Terry. The character names are divulged in the closing credits at the end of the video. Information about this character was released as the accompanying description for the video on YouTube, and considering that the articles surveyed used the same description almost verbatim, the statement on the webpage for the video likely acts as the official promotional material. Here is the description from the official video:

> You're invited to the party of the year! Find out what happened to Kathy Beth Terry in the official music video for Katy Perry's 'Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)' featuring Rebecca Black, Darren Criss, Kevin McHale, Hanson, Kenny G, Debbie Gibson and Corey Feldman! (Perry, 2011)

Interestingly, many of the media outlets surveyed seemed to be sharing the video because of its impact, popularity, and potential for a marked increase in page visits that the video may have generated for the media outlet. The broad distribution of the video by various news and popular media websites both contributed to its mass viewership and benefited from it, an example of the synergistic nature of contemporary cultural production and circulation. The most in-depth critical reading of the video appeared in *Vulture*, with the remaining articles which appeared in popular online outlets *Rolling Stone*, *Time*, and *Entertainment Weekly* only featuring one short descriptive paragraph of the video (Paskin, 2011; *Rolling Stone*, 2011; Gibson, 2011; Anderson, 2011). Several of the articles briefly mention Kenny G's appearance in relation to the list of featured celebrity cameos, and Paskin includes a statement about how 'Kenny G performs the song's triumphant sax solo from the roof of the garage' (2011). In the context of the *Vulture* article the term 'triumphant' seems to be a positive characterisation, and perhaps alludes to a reclamation from the past devaluation of the saxophone and Kenny G as kitsch. Paskin's description is more positive in nature than Gibson's disparaging review in the *Time* article, where it is made clear that the cameo appearances in the video should not be considered 'celebrity' cameos, because the people featured are not famous enough. Gibson ends with 'But, hey, it's always nice to see Kenny G back in action, right? (Paskin, 2011; Gibson, 2011). This rhetorical question is sardonic in nature, and infers that it is, in effect, not nice to see Kenny G 'back in action', an insinuation of the distaste that has developed surrounding his persona and music over the years (Gibson, 2011).

Most of the articles lacked a comprehensive reading of the video, and therefore did not mention that Lenny Pickett was the saxophone soloist on the track. The one exception to this was Jonah Weiner's article published on the *Slate* website in which the author remarked, 'the T.G.I.F. sax part, as it turns out, was performed by Lenny Pickett […] The caretaker had emerged from the sanctuary to release one of his beasts back into the wild' (Weiner, 2011). Weiner is referring to Pickett as the caretaker: the one saxophonist that has persisted in popular culture as the sound of *Saturday Night Live* (the 'sanctuary' he refers to), when the saxophone had fallen out of favour in other types of popular music. In this context, he seems to be naming Pickett as not only the connecting thread to decades past when the saxophone was everywhere in popular music, but also as the saxophonist responsible for bringing it back to notoriety in the 2010s. Regarding the video, the intended effect of audiences recognising Kenny G as a substantive element of both kitsch and nostalgia in the video was achieved, and so further investigation by popular journalists regarding the saxophone solo was probably considered unnecessary. The fact that the saxophonist was visually portrayed by someone other than who actually performed the solo is of little consequence to mainstream audiences and journalists, because the image of the saxophonist in the video served an important function. Kenny G is well-established as a self-aware subject of saxophone kitsch, so he was more suitable as a symbolic reference in the video; his image considerably enhanced the intertextual referentiality central to the storyline.

NARRATIVE AND MUSICAL ANALYSIS

Both the song and video for 'Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)' merit analysis here because of their widespread circulation and subsequent impact on popular culture in 2011. The striking musical characteristic of the song is the saxophone solo, and it is important for two primary

reasons: for the visage of Kenny G and his contribution to the kitschy nature of the music video, and for the role of the saxophone solo as the climactic moment in the music, effectuated by Lenny Pickett's singular performance style which is discussed further below. The saxophone acts as an aural representation of the extramusical significations that are visible in the video. The song was released in the United States on June 12, 2011, and the light-hearted nature of the song as well as its party-centric lyrics and elaborate video catapulted it to the top of the *Billboard* charts, and it became Perry's sixth song to reach number one on the *Billboard* Hot 100. In the following paragraphs, the video is closely reviewed because of its extensive contribution to the meaning of the song, and this section is followed by a discussion of Lenny Pickett's saxophone playing and narratives from his interview for this project.

The video begins by showing a young boy on his bike delivering newspapers to homes on an idyllic, suburban, tree-lined street. The music begins as soon as the video begins, and birds can be heard chirping. Credits appear on the screen setting the stage for the video: 'Capitol Records Presents', 'A Rockhard Production', 'Katy Perry in', 'Last Friday Night'. The next scene is a bedroom in one of the houses, and it is a complete mess. There is a pair of underwear on the door handle, posters on the door and walls have been ripped down, and there are young people sleeping on the bed, the floor, and a chair. One of them is wrapped in duct tape; another has glasses, facial hair, and a tuxedo drawn onto his body with a black marker. A muscle-bound, shirtless young man is shown lying in the bed next to Kathy Beth Terry (Katy Perry) when a rooster crows and she wakes up disoriented, seemingly with no recollection of the events of the previous night. She is wearing teeth-correcting headgear and there are feathers everywhere, including stuck in the headgear she is wearing. She surveys the room in wonder and confusion and exclaims, 'Friday!' At this point the door opens, and Darren Criss (first cameo), enters and

says, 'I wanted to thank you for the best party, and I don't care what anybody says about you, you're actually really cool. Best party ever! Woooooooooo!' She opens her laptop and checks social media, where photos of the party have already been posted. She looks around the room in disbelief, and begins singing the first verse of the song, 'There's a stranger in my bed, there's a pounding in my head…'

When the first chorus begins, the scene shifts to the night before when Kathy Beth Terry was in her room working on a sudoku puzzle and is bothered by the music and other loud noises coming from revellers outside in what appears to be the next-door neighbour's yard. She heads next door to investigate only to be greeted at the door by Rebecca Black, the second cameo appearance. She is also spotted by Kevin McHale, the third celebrity, who portrays another 'nerd' at the party with glasses and orthodontia, and he immediately becomes smitten with Terry. She then is bumped into by the handsome athlete in the letter jacket, the one that was in her bed at the beginning of the video, but he rebuffs her. Black leads her upstairs for a makeover, and Terry emerges a few moments later and makes her way down the stairs in slow motion wearing a form-fitting outfit in neon colours, mismatched high heels, big hair, and lots of makeup, all exaggerated examples of key fashion trends from the 1980s. She still has her braces, which sparkle as she makes her entrance, but the headgear has been removed. As she descends the stairs, the nerd and the jock both react to her appearance; the jock is so shocked and excited by her updated look that he spits out his drink onto the nerd. At this point Terry is welcomed by all of the partygoers and they continue enjoying the party, dancing and drinking. They are seen playing the popular video game *Dance Dance Revolution*, a rather blatant product placement, and then the scene transitions to a makeshift dance floor in the house. The music changes character to an electronically driven, instrumental version of 'Last Friday Night', and the

characters are seen performing iconic dance moves from past decades such as the robot and the running man.

The music drops to a low dynamic level as it shifts back to the original version of the song, and the partygoers begin chanting, 'T.G.I.F.', which stands for 'Thank God It's Friday'. The chanting gradually increases in volume, building towards something, then the scene changes again, and all of the partygoers are outside. As the chanting has reached its peak intensity, Terry points up to what looks to be the roof of the garage. The camera pans up to where Kenny G is standing, and he begins wailing on the tenor saxophone. He is accompanied by the band Hanson on guitar, piano, and drums, who are positioned in the yard below. The crowd at the party goes wild, screaming and throwing their hands up in the air while the saxophone solo plays. When the solo ends Kenny G is seen crowd-surfing, and then Terry motions back to the house and everyone heads back inside. At this stage the party becomes tumultuous as Terry vomits, the jock rudely grabs her buttocks, and the nerd attempts to defend her honour by punching the jock for his lewd behaviour (finally able to act upon his rescue fantasy). The jock and Terry fall on the bed, seemingly unconscious. Moments later, Terry's parents enter the room, portrayed by Corey Feldman and Debbie Gibson, the final celebrity cameo appearances. The three of them engage in dialogue relating to what had happened the night before, and Terry asks them why they are home early from the convention. Feldman says, 'I got some crazy text from Uncle Kenny that said he was going to start playing the sax again!' Gibson intervenes and says, 'Yeah we had to get home right away to see what that was all about', Feldman adds, 'we can't let that happen'. Terry then says, 'I love you guys, but Uncle Kenny told me that you used to be fun on Friday', and Feldman answers, 'Kitty Kat, we *invented* Fridays' (vocal emphasis on the word 'invented'). He and Gibson share a knowing glance and close the door so that Terry can go to sleep. She lays back

down on the bed next to the shirtless jock and smiles. The end credits roll, accompanied by additional scenes from the party, and a complete list of all of the actors and extras appears on screen.

The celebrity appearances in the video include several actors and musicians that have been considered cool in the past and the present. The appearances include Darren Criss and Kevin McHale, two of the lead actors on the acclaimed, music-themed television program 'Glee' that ran from 2009 to 2015; Rebecca Black, the singer and viral video sensation responsible for the song 'Friday' (2011); Isaac, Taylor, and Zac Hanson of the teen idol pop band Hanson that gained international fame in the 1990s with their hit song, 'MMMBop' (1997); Corey Feldman, teen actor who had leading roles in several hit television shows and popular movies in the 1980s (including *The Lost Boys,* mentioned above); Debbie Gibson, pop singer and songwriter of hit songs 'Foolish Beat' (1987) and 'Lost in Your Eyes' (1989); and Kenny G, who gained worldwide prominence for his instrumental smooth jazz albums released in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which positioned him as one of the most commercially successful instrumentalists of all time. The cameo appearances in the video enhance the intertextual dimensions and add a certain amount of kitsch and humour, and the saxophone itself makes a cameo appearance here, an artefactual embodiment of the themes of cool, kitsch, and nostalgia.

Despite its substantial length at over eight minutes long, the video experienced a level of viral fame and as of February 2021 it had been viewed over 1.3 billion times on YouTube. This is likely due to the visibility of Perry, but also the video's comedic bent, and is undoubtedly a credit to each of the actors that appeared as well as Perry's propensity for physical comedy. Each of the featured celebrity appearances serve to enhance the sense of nostalgia through their significations of prominent popular cultural touchstones from previous decades.

The elaborate video was released six days after the commercial release of the single, on June 12, 2011, and it was widely disseminated almost immediately. Indeed, a survey of online articles released by the mainstream media the day after the video's release on YouTube discussed chiefly the video and its celebrity cameo appearances rather than any particular aspects of the song itself. As media scholar Rosemary Pennington notes in reference to Perry's controversial displays of cultural appropriation in her music videos, the videos are 'designed to showcase the musical artist while also inducing the audience to consume the artist's merchandise' (2016, p. 114), and music videos 'have an avowedly commercial agenda' (Railton & Watson, 2005, p. 52). These statements support the idea that the video for 'Last Friday Night' played a significant role in popularising the song. The video is made in the style of a short film, featuring a plot with a clear beginning, middle, and end, and the inclusion of recognisable actors and musicians as well as the high production value contributed to the exceptional popularity of the video.

The age of Perry's character in the video is problematic for a few reasons. A Facebook page was created for the character, and it states that the page was opened on October 1, 1997. This is presumably the character's birth date, which explains several of the nostalgic touchstones in the video such as the fashion choices and the cameo appearances, but the problem is that it means that she is only thirteen years old. When the character receives her makeover from Rebecca Black, she is transformed from an awkward teen girl with braces and headgear, wearing a turtleneck, to an overtly sexualised adult-looking woman wearing a short, tight-fitting skirt, midriff-bearing top, and high heels. She is transformed, but the braces are still there, and they serve as the only reminder that the character is, indeed, a teenager. When she descends the stairs, she attracts the attention of one of the main characters, the 'jock', who was shirtless in her bed at the beginning of the video, and this seems to be the intended result of the makeover. This

showcases a troublesome gap between the underaged protagonist Perry portrays in the video and the much more adult, sexualised persona that she presents as the 'transformed' Kathy Beth Terry. This is another example of the 'peddling (of) sex to young girls' referenced by Pennington in her article that discussed elements of cultural appropriation in Perry's video for the song 'Dark Horse' (2016, p. 111). The following still shots from the video demonstrate the way in which the male gaze is portrayed:

Kathy Beth Terry before the makeover:

Figure 3.1

After the makeover, closeup shots of Kathy Beth Terry's body:

Figure 3.2

Figure 3.3

The 'jock' is so shocked as he observes the change in her physical appearance that he uncontrollably spits out his drink:

Figure 3.4

Figure 3.5

The primary extramusical information that is communicated in the video is not uncommon in popular music videos: the objectification and sexualisation of women. The heteronormative sexualisation of youthful femininity can be seen in other Katy Perry videos such as 'California Gurls', but upon closer inspection it seems that Perry, or the directors she works with, attempts to counteract dominant patriarchal narratives or sexual objectification in small but noticeable ways. For example, in the video for 'California Gurls' (2010), a subversive rebuttal of objectification occurs when Perry and the female dancers in the video eat parts of the live, disgruntled gingerbread man, leaving him in pieces on the sidewalk as they move on to the next scene. This seems to represent the idea that the candy-adorned women are not as sweet as they seem, and

although these intimations of dissent against the idea of a patriarchal society appear in several of her other videos, 'Last Friday Night' seems to be devoid of these inferences. Here, she portrays a character that embodies sexiness and tongue-in-cheek humour simultaneously and those two factors combined are translated by the audience as cool. This seems to be a part of Perry's recipe for success, as mentioned above.

The saxophone itself is a sexualised instrument, in part because of its curvy shape and seductive tone. That aspect of the instrument is not the focal point in this chapter, but in light of Perry's makeover, it remains an underlying reminder of sexiness in the song and video. In recent examples of viral videos like Sexy Sax Man and *Saturday Night Live's* 'Sergio' character, it not only symbolises the fun, frivolity, and nostalgia for the 1980s that the characters in the video are demonstrating, but also an implicit element of sexuality. Historically speaking, songs by female artists have not featured as many saxophone solos, but perhaps the inclusion of one here marks an interesting shift in the dynamics of sexuality that the saxophone represents.

The lyrical material of 'Last Friday Night' is simple and straightforward, exuding an effervescence in the way the words describe exuberance and imprudence ('Yeah we danced on tabletops, and we took too many shots, think we kissed but I forgot'). It is also in the lyrics that the age discrepancy is made manifest, as Perry sings about possessing credit cards and getting kicked out of a bar, both of which would require a person to be of a certain age ('Yeah we maxed our credit cards, and got kicked out of the bar, so we hit the boulevard'). In real life Perry was twenty-seven years old when the video was released, and the original recorded version of the song is sung from the perspective of an adult; it is merely in the visual storytelling in the video that there is an age discrepancy.

The tempo of 'Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)' is 126 beats per minute, appropriate for dancing, and features a prominent backbeat and very clean, potentially digitised, instrumental backgrounds which help to modernise the song for a contemporary pop audience. It is possible that the drum parts were recorded on a traditional drum set but later digitised; possibly filtered or manipulated due to the fact that there were no perceptible extraneous sounds such as drumsticks striking the drum or cymbal reverberations and metronomic beat. Conversely, it is also possible that a drum machine was used. The nature of the production of the song makes it difficult to perceive whether the song was crafted solely with electronic instruments or with a combination of musicians and digital tools, but the saxophone solo seems to prove that the latter is true. Pickett recorded the solo from his home studio and emailed a digital copy of it to Dr. Luke. Additionally, there is a rhythmic, syncopated guitar figure that is repeated throughout the song, adding an additional layer to the rhythmic nature immanent in the construction of a song meant for dancing.

Aside from the saxophone solo, the most important and audible element of this song is the lyrics, while the harmonic progression and structure are relatively simple and repetitive. This appears to represent an underlying dynamic movement that maintains the prioritisation of the lyrics and perhaps also makes it easier for audiences to sing along. Background vocals appear towards the middle of the song, the second time the chorus is repeated, and they do not follow the melody, but rather function to thicken the texture of the song. The only time that the straightforward four-chord/four-measure pattern is interrupted is in the context of the song's music video, when a short exchange of dialogue occurs at the beginning and end. The video is just over eight minutes in length (8:10), while the radio-released version of the song is just under four minutes (3:51). The video opens with an extended introduction, a vamp of the four-

chord/four-measure pattern, without vocals, and text of the opening credits appears on screen. In the radio edit for the song the introduction was just eight seconds long while in the video the introduction lasts fifty-seven seconds. Action and dialogue in the video are underscored by the introductory musical material, and this happens twice: once before the first verse of the song begins with dialogue spoken between Perry and Darren Criss, and again at the end of the song when Perry has a conversation with her parents who have returned home early from their 'convention' to find the house in shambles in the aftermath of the party. After their conversation, the musical material from the introduction is restated while the end credits roll on the screen. The longer running time for the video is due to the extended introduction, the addition of an instrumental interlude before the saxophone solo, and the closing sequence which contains dialogue and a restatement of the introductory vamp material. The extended introduction, instrumental interlude, and closing sequence feature music and dialogue that did not appear in the original recording of the song and serve as background music for the visual storytelling in the video.

LENNY PICKETT

To embark on a discussion of how each saxophonist and the sounds they produce function to enhance the key themes explored in each of the case studies, it is useful to briefly survey some of the vocabulary commonly used to describe the saxophone sound. Shepherd, et al, note that 'each genre in which the saxophone is used represents a different musical context, thus allowing, or even necessitating, individual saxophone sounds' (2003, p. 495), and this supports the notion of the versatility and adaptability of the instrument. Renowned jazz saxophonist David Liebman's book, *Developing a Personal Saxophone Sound*, provides an assemblage of adjectives

that are commonly used to describe saxophone sounds that further highlight the instrument's versatility and capacity for expression: 'light, airy, cutting, brassy, bright, full, fuzzy, deep, dark, nasal, piercing, clear, smooth, shimmering, silky, biting, watery, tinny, cool, harsh, dry, sour, screeching, lush, luxurious, velvety, and bell-like' (1994, p. 6). In the interest of brevity each individual descriptor is not fully defined here, but this group of terms provides an abridged vocabulary, or point of departure, for characterising the sounds produced by the saxophone. A few of these words directly correlate to pedagogy or performance technique on the saxophone (e.g., 'fuzzy' can be achieved by relaxing the embouchure and/or using a new reed) however, many of them are used in a figurative manner. For example, in a review of Kenny G's best-selling album *Duotones* (1986) his sound was described as a '…clear, somewhat pinched wail', and the reviewer went on to note that Gorelick demonstrated 'limitations as an improviser' (Holden, 1989). Kenny G has a very distinctive tone, and this reviewer's description of it is brief but befitting. In response to the word 'pinched', I would add that it also has a nasal quality that, along with brightness, sets him apart from most other saxophonists (ibid.). The adjectives mentioned above are valuable in shaping the nuanced ways that sound is described and how the sounds produced by saxophonists encourage readings of the instrument's role within particular cultural and musical contexts.

The last section in each of the case studies explores how the saxophone functions in relation to socio-cultural themes and includes a brief review of the musical and harmonic language used by each of the saxophonists[20]. In the following section, Lenny Pickett's playing style and sound is investigated for how it contributes to the soundscape of 'Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F).'

The climax of 'Last Friday Night' is the saxophone solo, and it comes just after an eight bar 'break' of sorts in which a group of voices, including Perry, repeatedly chant 'T.G.I.F.' There is a decrease in dynamic level followed by an energetic build-up leading to the solo. In the video, the voices chanting 'T.G.I.F.' are the partygoers. When the solo begins at the 2:53 mark on the radio version of the song, it is initially unclear whether it is a saxophone or not because the note is digitally manipulated, and this effect recurs at particular points over the course of the eight-bar solo. It sounds as though there are only a few seconds of a natural, acoustic saxophone sound, but the digital manipulation maintains elements of the instrument's reediness, ensuring its identification as a saxophone; the basic essence of the saxophone timbre remains intact. Indeed, the tone that Lenny Pickett summons from the tenor is robust, with a balanced brightness, reediness, and rasp that takes decades to develop. It is full and powerful, and in combination with his command of technique, it is also agile. The distinctive timbre exemplifies the saxophone sound of the 1970s and 1980s and was widely heard in performances with the soul/funk/R&B band Tower of Power and the *Saturday Night Live* Band, and this is discussed further below. He growls, shakes, and plays in the extreme high register, encapsulating the joyful party atmosphere and excitement of the song over the course of just sixteen seconds.

The improvised solo resides primarily in the upper range of the tenor saxophone, a hallmark of Lenny Pickett's inimitable playing style. He is known in the saxophone community for having exceptional technical facility as a saxophonist, particularly in the altissimo, or extreme high register of the instrument. This technique is difficult to master as the altissimo register reaches to over an octave above the natural register of the horn. It requires advanced knowledge of air control, voicing (throat position), and unconventional or 'false' fingerings to

achieve. Pickett regularly plays almost two octaves above the traditional range of the tenor saxophone in his solos, as shown here:

Figure 3.6

This is a transcription of Pickett's solo in the track, and it occurs at 2:53 in the radio-released version of the song and ends at 3:10. The notes above are intentionally written without the use of ottava (8va or 16va) to demonstrate the extremity of the register in which Pickett regularly performs. Also, the excerpt above is not in concert key, rather it is written out for B flat tenor saxophone (to visually represent what Pickett played, and so that saxophonists can play it from this example if they choose)[21]. For comparison, the figure below is the standard octave range for all saxophones (soprano, alto, tenor, baritone):

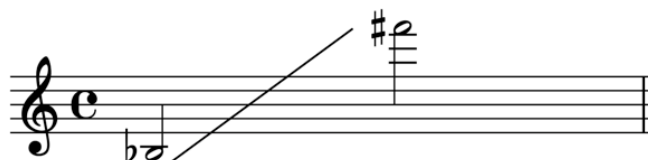

Figure 3.7

Many professional saxophonists are capable of performing to approximately one octave above the written high F sharp shown in figure 3.7, but Pickett's technical facility in performing in the octave above that is atypical.

In terms of the notes that Pickett plays in the solo, he utilises the major pentatonic scale, a conventional approach to soloing in both the rock and pop genres (see Woodward, 2018, chapter 5). As Jeff Watkins noted in his interview (see Chapter 3), it is important in these types of solos to say something quickly (2017). The pentatonic scale enables Pickett to highlight the important notes that are relatively idiomatic for the genre and also sound good in this specific musical environment, keeping the harmonic language rather straightforward but creating excitement by including growls, falls, and plenty of altissimo.

In the extreme high register, the saxophone sound is still discernible, but an elevated level of intensity is present in the tone. It is reminiscent of the whisper register technique employed by vocalists such as Minnie Riperton, Mariah Carey, or Ariana Grande, and the sense of emotional appeal that is inherent in those high sounds. Extensive playing in the altissimo register is undoubtedly Pickett's sonic signature and represents the virtuosity and expressivity that he brings to saxophone performance. It is also the sonic equivalent of a spectacle that a non-professional musician—general pop audiences—can latch onto, particularly as the saxophone is embedded in this thick production style that is not necessarily geared towards highlighting acoustic instruments. This is a significant consideration for saxophone playing styles in rock and pop genres; the tone must compete with louder electronic instruments in the performance environment. One way to do that is to rise above by playing in the altissimo register (a common technique used by saxophonists in rock and pop; see Woodward [2018]), and another is to develop the lung capacity, air control, and strength of embouchure, along with a general concept

of tone that exudes presence and power. The difference between saxophone tone and playing styles in Western art music or jazz (in acoustic environments) and rock or pop saxophone is, in some ways, comparable to the differences in tone between the acoustic guitar and the electric guitar.

Pickett can be heard on most Saturday nights as the leader and soloist of the *Saturday Night Live* band, a popular and long-running satirical sketch show in the United States. His signature tone not only starts and ends the show each week, but his blues-based improvisations, executed high in the tessitura, are also heard in all of the promotional materials for the program. He has performed as a member of the *Saturday Night Live* Band since 1985 and became the leader of the band in 1995, and his saxophone sound is inextricably linked to the show. This is partially due to the longevity of his tenure there, but also undoubtedly because of his artistry and professionalism. The forward placement of the saxophone in the music for the show is not an accident, as Pickett noted in his interview that Lorne Michaels, the producer, and Howard Shore, the original music director and a saxophonist, were both fans of Junior Walker and had attended one of his performances together when they were younger (2018). Pickett said it was always 'a thing' between them, and that they were interested in the idea of modernising the sound of a big band for the show when it first aired in 1975, taking their cues from horn bands that were popular at the time such as Tower of Power (ibid.). Pickett also noted that he believes part of the reason that *Saturday Night Live* is still on the air is because '…we keep the iconic aspect of the show intact, and the music plays a role in that…the saxophone has always been part of the imagery and sound of the show' (2018). Before Pickett was hired to play, the show featured saxophonists Lou Marini, David Sanborn, and Michael Brecker, a few of the most revered players of the 1970s and 1980s.

The striking stylistic markers of Pickett's playing are recognisable in the Perry song, even though the original solo that he recorded has been significantly manipulated and digitally processed. In the interview for this project Lenny stated:

> Dr. Luke is an old friend of mine. He played guitar in my band on *Saturday Night Live* for ten years. We're very good friends. We kept in touch and he thought it would be an interesting addition to the song because it was sort of retro, at least in the video. We played around with a few things and I sent him a bunch of solos. Nowadays you don't go to the studio you just do it at home. We emailed back and forth for a while, found one we both liked, and he played around with it electronically and that was that. It was just another recording session. The relationship was part of it. He's super familiar with my playing from having played with me for ten years. We both love electronic music, and he knew I wouldn't have any issue with him altering it. (Pickett, 2018)

Dr. Luke is Lukasz Gottwald's professional name, and Dr. Luke is a record producer, guitarist, and songwriter based in New York City. He spent many years performing as a guitarist with the *Saturday Night Live* Band, and then achieved recognition for co-producing and co-writing, with Max Martin, the song 'Since U Been Gone' (2004) performed by Kelly Clarkson, which propelled his career as a producer. He has produced several songs for Perry including her first *Billboard* Hot 100 hit, 'I Kissed a Girl' (2008).

Several interesting points can be made from Lenny's quote. First, he is the only saxophonist interviewed for this project who felt that electronic manipulation of the saxophone's natural sound, beyond the recording process itself, was acceptable. If this topic arose in the other interviews, the saxophonists stated that this was undesirable, and the saxophone should not be electronically altered; the instrument speaks for itself. Professional musicians spend thousands of hours honing their craft, working on technical facility and tone production, so the idea of electronically manipulating a saxophonist's sound is considered by some as an affront to the musician. Conversely, mechanisation and digitisation of music has been ongoing for decades, and Pickett considers this not only acceptable but part of the status quo; a natural evolution in the

production of popular music. He enjoys electronic music, so he does not have any reservations concerning the digital manipulation of his own playing.

The second point is that Lenny acknowledges the 'retro' signification of his playing, and this is one of the fundamental components of the song and the video, although he did not explicitly discuss this aspect of his performing style in the context of the Perry song. As noted in Chapter 3, I asked each of the participants if they think the saxophone is cool as a way to gauge their impressions of the instrument's cultural reverberations, and part of Pickett's response acknowledged his personal contribution to both the cool and kitsch connotations that the saxophone acquired in the 1980s:

> I think it's still acceptable. I don't think it has become a complete joke. It was in danger of that in the 1980s with the way the saxophone was being used. And I participated in that, unwittingly. It was in danger mostly because of over-saturation. It was a bit of a cliché. You expected the saxophone player to maybe have a fedora, and there was a lot of swooping, and growling, and this and that going on. It has a long enough history and a good enough pedigree that it has withstood that. The way it has come back recently is interesting, it has come back as samples. (Pickett, 2018)

When asked whether he knew about the nostalgic concept for the video when he recorded the solo, he acknowledged that he knew nothing about the video, and did not receive any specific instructions regarding performance style before he recorded the solo. As Lenny notes in the quote above, the producer Dr. Luke is very familiar with his playing, and this would seem to support the notion that he is cognisant of what Pickett's style evinces. He is solely responsible for coming up with the idea to feature Pickett's sound in the track, thereby acknowledging and reinforcing the intended 1980s aesthetic. When Pickett talked about performing on tour with David Bowie he stated:

> The saxophone had a heyday in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, and it kind of fell out of favour in the early 1970s as the guitar took over, and then came back in the 1980s as a retro instrument, usually. There was a big 'back to the 1950s' movement…I played on the 'Let's

> Dance'[22] tour with David Bowie, and it was about refurbishing the saxophone to its heyday, *as a model of hipness from an earlier time*.' (Pickett, 2018; emphasis my own)

Lenny acknowledges that his own playing is a distillation of several decades' worth of saxophone styles and sounds.

The sound of his saxophone playing in the commercially released recording of the song is potentially recognisable to a vast audience who are familiar with *Saturday Night Live*. Pickett has been performing on that program for over thirty years, and over that time his saxophone playing has become the aural signifier of the show. In the 2010-2011 season, around the time 'Last Friday Night' was released, the show averaged 8.4 million viewers per week, and these numbers bear out its relevance in American popular culture. His saxophone solo also embodies the nostalgic element of the song because he was a prominent saxophonist in the 1980s in the midst of the second saxophone craze, and the energetic and blues-heavy riffs intrinsic in his playing style exemplify the sounds from that time period. Pickett and another saxophonist that was highly visible in popular music of the 1980s, Michael Brecker, have bright yet brawny timbres and similar vibrato styles in their playing. Brecker also performed on *SNL* for a time and like Pickett, is renowned for his tone and technical facility on the instrument. In the interview, Lenny also acknowledged that the choice made by the music video producers and/or director to cast Kenny G as the saxophone soloist further reinforced the concept of nostalgia, as he is the more visually recognisable of the two saxophonists. When I asked why Kenny G was in the music video, Lenny stated:

> I think because Kenny G is a more immediately recognisable retro character than me. He's an 80s guy. What he's famous for is 'Songbird' (1986), and things like that from the 80s, and he has a very 80s kind of look. They also had Hanson on for the same reason. I kind of liked it. I thought it was really funny. (Pickett, 2018)

While the comedic effect of his inclusion in the video was potentially achieved for a broad audience, Kenny G's playing style is incongruous with the style of the song due to his sentimental melodicism and piercing tone. The relationship between Pickett and Dr. Luke is part of the reason for Pickett's saxophone solo in the song, but it is more probable that Pickett was chosen to record it because of his proficiency in enhancing the style, energy, and character of 'Last Friday Night'.

SUMMARY

The saxophone plays a significant role in 'Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)' by functioning as a symbol of coolness and kitsch, in contrasting registers, from past decades in American popular culture. There is an interesting bifurcation between the visual and aural representation of the instrument in the song, and this is demonstrated by Kenny G's charmingly kitschy portrayal of the saxophonist 'Uncle Kenny' in the video, and Lenny Pickett's incomparable, cool playing style that emerges from his effortless virtuosity in the commercially released recording. Both of these saxophonists had reached a level of prominence through their recordings and performances in the 1980s, and the video strongly references those and other popular cultural criteria from that decade, while presenting them in a modern and intentionally humorous way. Katy Perry's position as a global pop star whose music is commercially successful and widely circulated ensured a mass audience for this song and for the saxophone. Indeed, the song's popularity relies on audience competencies related to popular culture and music of the past that was cool for people in the 1980s but became kitsch partially through repetition and saturation. To a younger audience, those kitschy connotations become funny and cool again, similar to the saxophone itself.

The analysis of the song and video illustrates how the saxophone contributes aurally and visually to the intended character, and along with other noteworthy features of the video the instrument played a part in the commercial success and broad dissemination of 'Last Friday Night'. The saxophone's relevance is further supported by the conversation that occurs at the end of the video between Kathy Beth Terry and her parents. Feldman and Gibson, two quintessentially 1980s celebrities that portray Terry's parents, state that they had to come home early from the convention because they had to keep 'Uncle Kenny' from playing the sax again. 'We can't let that happen', Feldman states, as if it was a dangerous activity that required intervention. This is a facetious acknowledgement of the saxophone as a novelty from the past that should not be resurrected in the 2010s, and stands as an acknowledgement of the connotations that the instrument represents to a broad range of listeners.

In the next chapter, the saxophone is discussed in terms of its relationship with gender, gendered forms of expression, and sexuality through an investigation of its role in Jason Derulo's song 'Talk Dirty'.

CHAPTER 5

CASE STUDY #2: JASON DERULO'S 'TALK DIRTY' GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND THE SAXOPHONE

CASE STUDY ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to examine how the saxophone acts in support of traits typically attributed to male sexuality in 'Talk Dirty' and Jason Derulo's portrayal of an approachable version of sexiness exhibited in the music and video. The saxophone is a sonic manifestation of a masculine form of sexuality in the song due to the prominence of its positioning as the hook and because of Ori Kaplan's powerful playing style. His saxophone riffs also evoke exoticism, and along with some of the international visual characteristics of the video, are deployed in service to the multicultural eroticism and subsequent commodification of that quality that define the track.

This chapter begins by placing into context Derulo, his music, and race as it relates to genre identities, and continues with a discussion of gender and sexuality in this song and saxophone performance more broadly. The second half of the chapter includes a narrative analysis of the song and video that more closely examines the saxophone's role, and ends with an exploration of Ori Kaplan's saxophone playing.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

The song and video of Jason Derulo's 'Talk Dirty' (2014) are analysed here as they relate to racial and gendered identities, expression, sexuality, and the performative aspects of those concepts as heard in playing styles that are associated with the saxophone. Historically, the instrument has been considered to possess predominantly masculine traits and conventionalised performance practices that reflect norms of 'male instrumental musicianship', however its classification as a woodwind instrument imparts it with slightly effeminate undertones which

contribute to its ambiguously gendered characteristics (Doubleday, 2008, p. 17). As mentioned in Chapter 2, this may be what draws people to the instrument, and these qualities related to gender and sexuality factor into the music in which saxophone is heard. This brings to mind the topic of performativity, and this project utilises two definitions of the concept: the one defined by Judith Butler (1990) relating to the performative aspects of socially constructed notions of gender, and the one that relates those concepts to the performance of music. The latter is defined by what bodies do while performing music, as well as the style, timbre, and genre of the sounds produced while performing, and how these actions and sounds represent preconceived, normative ideas related to gender and sexuality.

Jason Desrouleaux, (stage name Derulo), is originally from Miami, Florida and got his start in the music industry in the mid 2000s as a producer and songwriter for other acts such as rapper Lil Wayne and dance-pop/hip-hop artist Pitbull. He signed his first recording contract in 2006, and released his first single 'Whatcha Say' three years later. That song held the number one spot on the *Billboard* Hot 100 in the United States for one week and was a top ten hit on charts in thirteen different countries, propelling Derulo to higher visibility and a global audience. According to his website, he has sold approximately fifty million digital singles and his YouTube videos have been viewed over two billion times (Warner Records, 2020). Derulo's music can be described as a mixture of pop and R&B intended for dancing, and he is known to be a talented dancer. He has admitted that the dominant influence on his career is Michael Jackson, an artist who was also known for his dance skills as well as the seemingly effortless blend of multiple genres in his music to include guitar-driven rock, pop, and R&B (ABC, 2016). Derulo's musical style and dancing place him in a group with other famous Jackson acolytes such as Usher, Chris Brown, Ne-Yo, and Justin Timberlake, although he is not as well-known or

commercially successful as most of these artists. 'Talk Dirty' was Jason Derulo's second-biggest hit song after 'Whatcha Say' (2009), reaching number three on the *Billboard* Hot 100 in the United States and charting in the top ten in twenty-two different countries.

Derulo has achieved a respectable level of notoriety in mainstream popular music, although several critics seem to agree that he and his music are rather anodyne. Derulo's music has been described as, 'stylishly innocent Top 40 confections' (Lipshutz, 2015) while Derulo himself has been characterised as a 'reliable pop star, though not an especially bold one' (Caramanica, 2015). Caramanica's article in the *New York Times* goes on to state that he's neither a luminous pop star nor a toughened R&B singer but rather a less robust version of both (2015). It seems as if some journalists in the mainstream media perceive his persona, music, and career to be weakened by a straddling of genres and the perception of a lack of commitment to one genre over another undermines his image, its perception of authenticity, and perhaps his overall success. However, this could be Derulo's concerted effort to project a more universal appeal to audiences or simply reflect his own predilections toward pop styles. Lipshutz frames the article around what he sees as Derulo's two personalities: The Sweet Talker and the Dirty Talker (2015). He notes that after Derulo releases a sweet-talking hit, for instance the slow burn 'Whatcha Say' (2009), that it will be followed by what he calls a 'bumping, faux-crass club thumper' (Lipshutz, 2015). 'Talk Dirty' falls into the latter category, or in Lipshutz's terms, this is a song in which Derulo plays the part of 'Dirty Talker' (2015). Derulo and his music fit into a male pop music archetype that is sexy yet relatively innocuous, and he does not distinguish himself in profound ways from other, similar male pop/R&B artists, which may be the reason for the entertainment media's tepid critiques of his music. Perhaps this is why he sings his own name at the beginning of most of his songs, a fact that has been a source of bemusement amongst fans and critics but that seems to signal a

need to remind people of his existence. Alternatively, as music circulates on the internet and social media often without proper identification, this could be seen as a shrewd marketing manoeuvre intended to provide listeners with a reminder of how to locate the track.

This chapter aims to primarily focus on gender and sexuality and how they relate to the song and to the saxophone, but the topic of race is inextricably connected to gender and sexuality in discussions of the social structures surrounding genre identity. Another interesting point uncovered in the research of Derulo and his music in the mainstream media were two articles that appeared in British Afro-Caribbean newspaper *The Voice* in 2011 and 2013, written by Davina Hamilton. In the first article, entitled 'Derulo: "My Music Isn't Black"' Derulo was quoted as saying, '…I find it disturbing that some people call my music "Black music" […] To me, music shouldn't have a colour'. This is a somewhat oversimplified approach to the deeply intertwined topics of race and genre identity, but I believe it was a way of saying that his style of pop music is intended for a broad and diverse audience and thus should not be categorised based on the colour of his skin (Hamilton, 2011).

In the ensuing two years, Derulo's videos were not played on the American television network BET (Black Entertainment Television), and he felt he was overlooked for a nomination for BET's Best New Artist award despite selling millions of records. He was 'aggrieved' that Justin Bieber was nominated and was quoted as saying, 'I took that pretty hard — because I'm Black!' (Hamilton, 2013). He went on to say that the reason his music was not featured on the network was because it was not '"urban" enough to fit the network's remit' (ibid.). This presents a conundrum, one which epitomises underlying problems with the music industry's self-serving dependence on categorising music and artists for the sake of commodification despite the perpetuation of systematised racial separation and 'othering' of people of colour. Derulo is not

'urban' enough—code for not Black enough—for BET, but is perhaps too Black for mainstream pop; he appears to be a victim of the entertainment media's influence over the mediation of Black masculine bodies and identity, legitimised through years and years of repetition in film, television, and visual media (Balaji, 2009, p. 21).

There is also considerable discussion in the entertainment media of what Derulo is not, and this speaks to the limitations of genre and the social identities with which genre is connected. According to several of the online media outlets mentioned above, he is not 'bold', 'toughened', or 'luminous'; his music is a 'less robust' version of either pop or R&B, and 'Talk Dirty' is 'faux crass' in its lyrical content (Lipshutz, 2015; Caramanica, 2015). After the album *Talk Dirty* was released, one urban radio programmer viewed Derulo as, '…a pop artist who's now trying to cross over into the urban world. And I'm not sure he's got enough swag to make the move', and Mitchell, the author of the article that quoted the radio programmer noted, 'he's got Chris Brown's moves but not the attitude' (2014). Both instances reference what they construe as Derulo's shortcomings as a R&B artist, and that seems to be code for a paucity of Blackness and masculinity. These traits have become implicit to male R&B artists over time, and levying a judgment on Derulo for a lack of these characteristics renders him ineffectual in that genre despite his identity as a Black man who showcases masculine sexuality in his music and videos.

According to Brackett in an article for the *Black Music Research Journal*, the determination of genre, '…indicates a tacit and contingent collective agreement about the "proper" place for different types of music and the social groups most associated with them' (2005, p. 89). In other words, genre owes as much or more to identity and social practices of the artist and the audience than to musical stylistic characteristics. The designation of musical genre is dependent upon the examination of a collection of factors: general stylistic traits of the music,

the intended audience, an artist's associations, and a collective 'cultural memory' (Brackett, 2005, p. 88). The determination of these factors, however, does not constitute immutability; on the contrary, genre is fluid and transitory and also hinges on spatial and temporal concerns.

The question of genre identity relates to Derulo and 'Talk Dirty' because the track represented an attempt to cross over from pop to pop/R&B by way of a stronger display of sexuality than he had exhibited previously in his music; the timely addition of rapper 2 Chainz and an exotic sounding saxophone riff to the track underlined this thematic shift. Derulo noted that the song has a 'very apparent' urban side, but it is unclear if he was simply referencing 2 Chainz or other musical characteristics of the song (Mitchell, 2014). For the purposes here, R&B of the early 2010s is generally defined by a lyrical focus on love and sex, and a strong rhythmic presence distinguished by syncopation and the hierarchical emphasis of rhythm over harmonic complexity.

These musical traits could potentially describe many different styles of music, so it is important to place them in particular social contexts as mentioned above. In the 2010s, R&B was performed primarily by Black artists but there were a few well-known male, non-Black musicians such as Justin Timberlake and Robin Thicke that blended pop and R&B in a similar manner to Derulo. The intended audience for this music is not restricted to a particular social group but meant for mass consumption which was a reflection of the mainstream popularity and commercial success of both R&B and hip-hop at the time. The addition of a rap verse by 2 Chainz to 'Talk Dirty', in combination with the saxophone hook and a provocative video, constituted Derulo's effort to create a more urban style as well as capitalise on the popularity of rap and of the saxophone at that time. The instrument was a key component of R&B music in the 1940s and 1950s, but its use here is not indicative of the past, or of nostalgia or kitsch; its sound

in the song represents a more modern and exotic aesthetic that is discussed below. The release of 'Talk Dirty' was a way for Derulo to be more successful by performing historically and socially assigned characteristics of R&B.

R&B was an umbrella term created in the late 1940s by Jerry Wexler of Atlantic Records to describe music by Black artists and intended for Black audiences (Palmer, 1995, p. 8). The term replaced the discriminatory and outdated 'race music' which had previously been used by the music industry and had nothing to do with musical characteristics. Little Richard notably referred to this terminology in the documentary *The History of Rock 'N' Roll* (1995) commenting, 'rock and roll music is Black music…it's nothing but rhythm and blues, and R&B stands for real Black'. In the context of the documentary his comment was intended to recognise the contributions and agency of the Black musicians that had contributed so much to rock and roll and American popular music of the 1950s, but whose legacies had been diminished because of racial prejudices in the United States. He was highlighting the fact that the terminology had changed but the social identity and cultural memory surrounding the genre remain, and he was probably also attempting to regain a sense of ownership for the term.

The coded word 'urban' is used to describe a genre and a type of mainstream radio format, which is similar to R&B in that it is defined as music by and for Black people. It is a catch-all title that encompasses styles representative of Black musical culture in the United States such as rap, hip-hop, R&B, soul, and gospel, and the radio stations that are located in the cities and serve communities of colour through broadcasting music and supporting civic engagement (Stroud, 2018). 'Urban' is code for 'Black' in these contexts because of the large number of Black people living in city centres in the United States. However, it also suggests qualities of masculinity and male sexuality when referencing aspects of the genres of rap, hip-hop, and R&B. Indeed, the

construction of these genre identities exists at the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality, and the performance of Black masculinity is a fundamental element of the image related to these styles when performed by male musicians (Balaji, 2009, p. 22). As Balaji notes, the construction of the hypermasculine, sexual, and sometimes violent images related to rap and hip-hop can primarily be attributed to capitalism and white supremacy and their perpetuation of (and appetite for) the 'Otherness' of Black men, and in turn Black musical artists have in some ways embraced the images of toughness, street credibility, and authenticity historically assigned to them. Many have accepted ownership and deployed these images in their favour as marketing tools that help them sell records and build audiences (ibid.).

A capacity for violence and street credibility is not as prevalent in the public images of R&B artists and are mentioned here to contextualise the mediation of Black genres of music in general terms. However, the performance of hypermasculinity and sexuality remain paramount in R&B. Derulo's music and image may have been adversely affected because of what critics and audiences interpreted as an insufficient amount of sexual suggestiveness or aggressiveness, which translated as a lack of urban and/or R&B qualities in the music that he released before 'Talk Dirty' (2014). His pop-styled music did not fit into the R&B box that audiences and critics believed that he needed to be placed within. Interestingly, the saxophone is often connected to similar concepts of gendered identities and sexuality, although it demonstrates a capacity to be assigned both feminine and masculine traits as famed saxophone pedagogue Londeix noted above (quoted in Segell, 2005). The saxophone in 'Talk Dirty' supplemented some of the normative qualities associated with R&B through the way it symbolised a masculine form of expression.

While genres such as hip-hop and R&B performed by Black men are associated with notions of masculine sexuality, pop music is generally associated with effeminate sensibilities, and the gendering of genre identities plays out in various ways in contemporary popular music (James, 2010, p. xi). For Derulo, 'Talk Dirty' was a way of going 'full-steam-ahead sexy' and performing a more visible form of masculine sexuality perhaps in a conscious effort to appeal to the media and audiences by performing the Black male sexuality that was expected of him (*Billboard,* 2014). In the next section, gender, its identity and expression, and sexuality are explored as they relate to the performance of 'Talk Dirty' and the saxophone.

GENDER & SEXUALITY

The terms gender, gendered identities, gendered expression, sexuality, femininity, and masculinity, along with the concepts that each represents, are comprised of a broad set of definitions and interpretations that are worthy of attention. However, they are primarily interpreted here as they correlate to a particular popular song and to the performance of the saxophone in that song. Also, it is necessary to acknowledge non-binary gender identities, and the terms listed above are not meant to exclude or negate the spectrum of gender but to discuss the two gendered identities historically associated with saxophone performance in particular contexts. In the section below, the way that these terms manifest in the bodies and performances of musicians are discussed in support of understanding how and why the saxophone has strong associations with both gender and sexuality.

Further evidence of the intersectionality between the key themes discussed in this project is reflected in a discussion of masculine performance traits and their connection to coolness. Some of the terms mentioned above such as toughness, boldness, street credibility, and capacity for

violence constitute elements traditionally associated with masculinity as well as coolness, and it is crucial to acknowledge the convergence of cool/kitsch, gender/sexuality, and race, the key theoretical foundations of the project. As discussed in previous chapters, the consideration of coolness involves a broad range of factors, but the concept generally maintains its dependence on authenticity, race, sexuality, and masculinity, and these elements have played a critical role in the discussions of popular music of the past several decades.

Paul Gilroy noted that, 'Sexuality and authenticity have been intertwined in the history of Western culture for several hundred years' and explores this idea through a discussion of Jimi Hendrix and the way that he displayed, or at least was interpreted by white audiences to be displaying their updated notion of minstrelsy and an overt masculine sexuality through instrumental performance on stage (1991, p. 121). This was construed as 'authentic Blackness', intimating that his sexuality was somehow emboldened or defined by his Blackness (Gilroy, 1991). Regardless of their problematic undercurrents these interpretations by white audiences around the globe potentially contributed to his massive success. The idea of authenticity, however, was further reinforced by his technical prowess on the electric guitar, and this aspect of his persona is reminiscent of how audiences characterise jazz musicians such as Lester Young, Charlie Parker, or John Coltrane; their virtuosity, intensity, and masculinity were underlined by, and inextricable from, Blackness and a perception of authenticity. In his interview Marsalis referred to these factors when he noted that, 'Lester Young was cool because he was comfortable in his own skin. He had nicknames for everybody, he cursed a lot, it was sexy', acknowledging Young's ability to project a calm, cool, detachment which went hand in hand with his sexuality (2018).

According to Gilroy, the consideration of the music has only recently been at the forefront of discussions of artists such as Hendrix or Michael Jackson, with discussions of the bodies of the performers taking precedent in earlier discourses (1991, p. 126). This article was published almost three decades ago, but it notably illustrates some of the prejudices that academics and critics have had to overcome in terms of analysing the music and performative practices of musicians of colour and women. It also demonstrates biases that remain regarding how a lot of popular music is considered only in terms of 'male-defined sexuality', almost completely disregarding any notion of feminine performativity, and aesthetically devaluing music that is perceived to possess any manner of feminine characteristics (Frith and McRobbie, 1978, p. 317). Frith and McRobbie note that the discourses surrounding popular music, at least in the 1970s, tended to focus on 'political economy or on its use in youth subcultures' but do not reflect on the explicit masculinity exhibited lyrically, sonically, and visually in popular music. McRobbie's critical views on the assumption of a link between subcultural authenticity and masculinity are important to mention here for their refutation of these assumptions and provide a point of departure to investigate some of the masculine performance traits as they pertain to saxophone playing.

The influential feminist and queer theorist Judith Butler expanded the definition of performativity, a term that originated in linguistic studies, by theorising that gender is 'performed'; generally, that people perform gender because of dominant societal constraints (1990, p. 25). It is possible to adapt this term to music, in this particular case referencing both the performance or playing of an instrument and the simultaneous performance of expressive traits related to gender. In terms of music performance, performativity describes a form of expression that demands exploration of what is embodied in a performance, through 'repertoires, events, and

practices', or through the prioritisation of the examination of socio-cultural environments in which performances exist (Davidson, 2015). For the purposes here, musical performativity includes considerations of the corporality or physicality of performance, and determination of the ways that these actions and the timbres produced represent specifically gendered forms of expression and/or gendered aesthetic valuations.

Considering saxophone performances in popular music throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, a very masculine performing style is the archetype for what we still see and hear in mainstream popular music, despite what some view as its ambiguous sexuality (Doubleday, 2008, p. 17; Segell, 2005; Coffin, 2018). There are many stereotypical examples of the performance of masculinity in popular music such as the aggressive and powerful sounds inherent in heavy metal or the often violent and rebellious lyrics of gangsta rap, but how are other forms of popular music evaluated in terms of gender or sexuality? In a reading of Adorno's essay 'On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening' (1991), scholar Robin James posits that Adorno's trivialisation of popular or commodity music is reliant upon a 'devaluation of qualities considered "feminine"' (2010, p. 106). Adorno infers that pop music is for girls, it is infantile and requires no training or knowledge to understand (ibid.). This is just one example of the debasement of popular music based on the supposition of a genre's gender identity, but it provides insight into one of the ways that pop music is considered to have poor aesthetic value. If it is intended for girls or girlish in character, then it must be passive, infantile, trivial, and superficial; that is, bad. The performance of hypermasculine traits mentioned above serve as a way to avoid being characterised as effeminate.

Intensity, aggressiveness, virtuosity, toughness, and detachment are terms used to describe both masculinity and coolness and represent some of the aesthetic characteristics of particular

musical genres. The early R&B and rock and roll saxophonists played loudly, they gyrated their hips and the horn, they were very physical and danced all over the stage, they honked, and they shouted through the instrument, captivating audiences and inspiring them to get up and dance. In the first two paragraphs of Arnold Shaw's discussion of Cecil J. 'Big Jay' McNeely in *Honkers and Shouters*, he uses the terms, 'screaming', 'honking', 'loud', and 'screeching', to describe the first time he heard McNeely perform (1978, p. 171). These are words that characterise a confident, audacious, and physical approach to playing the saxophone and they embody masculinity in part because these are not descriptors that have been historically attributed to women, nor are they qualities typically desired of female performers. They represent an aesthetic choice made by the performers to make a powerful impact on the audience and other musicians. Jazz historian and critic Leonard Feather called saxophonists like McNeely 'audience getters' and noted that they were all capable of 'first-class mainstream jazz work', but that they preferred this type of music and the success that they were able to garner from playing R&B (Feather quoted in Shaw, 1978, p. 170). Other saxophonists included in this category of honkers and shouters were Gene Ammons, Eddie 'Lockjaw' Davis, Sam 'The Man' Taylor, and Arnett Cobb, to name a few. Shaw quotes Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) here, and Baraka notes that the point of performing the simple and repetitive riffs until 'he (the saxophonist) and the crowd were thoroughly physically and emotionally' exhausted, was to 'spend oneself with as much attention as possible, and also to make the instrument sound as unmusical, or as non-Western, as possible […] it was as if the blues people were reacting against the softness and "legitimacy" that had crept into Black instrumental music with swing' (Baraka quoted in Shaw, 1978, p. 171). Baraka goes on to say that this was an expressive response to three things: the sound of Western music, of white popular song, and of 'the Negro middle class to whom R&B was anathema' (ibid.).

From this perspective, it is interesting to consider the social and political implications of that particular style of saxophone performance, and to note that many of the traditions of saxophone playing in popular genres stem from this time and these players. The passage of time and repetition have seen some of these important connotations fade away, but many of the audience-getting performance techniques remain. This microcosm of R&B saxophonists performing gender and race played a part in the construction of contemporary genre identities; they undoubtedly had an effect on the saxophone and its significations by solidifying its association with R&B of the 1940s and early rock and roll. Today, saxophonists—regardless of the colour of their skin or their gender—still jump around the stage, use extended techniques sometimes beyond their musical usefulness, and honk and shout to the delight of audience members. Likely because of the time period in which their writings were published, Shaw and Baraka did not discuss the work of these saxophonists in terms of gender or sexuality, but there is a tacit understanding that the saxophonists were performing both Blackness and masculinity in ways that were simultaneously subversive and widely accepted by a range of audiences at the time.

James Baldwin observed, '…that to be an American Negro male is also to be a kind of walking phallic symbol: which means that one pays, in one's own personality, for the sexual insecurity of others' (quoted in Monson, 1995, p. 402). The negative implications associated with the saxophone in the 1910's because of its use in jazz music earned it the title of 'the devil's horn'. A few decades later, the honkers and shouters contributed, at least partially, to rock and roll's denunciation as 'the devil's music', likely because of the fear surrounding Black masculine sexuality. Just as the saxophone was Lester Young's voice and a manifestation of his persona, it feasibly was also a physical extension of his body; something to fear.

The topic of sexuality as it relates to the saxophone is regularly broached; although seemingly puerile, it is one of the most discussed topics related to the instrument. Not only is the name of the instrument closely related to the word sex, but the physical appearance of the instrument represents sexuality in various ways.

> That we're connecting our body to that. In some ways it's sexual. I don't think overtly necessarily, but I think that's there. We see those curves. It's like the curve of the hip or the curve of the shoulder. I think that does come into play in some ways, subliminally, that exists. You're holding an instrument. (Coffin, 2018)

Some men, such as Jeff Coffin above or Jean-Marie Londeix, think of the instrument as a distinctly feminine object, with sexy curves, a feminine shape, and the ability to sound delicate. Other people think of the instrument as an extension of the phallus, unmistakably masculine in its form and ability to project power through sound. After all, it is held and played in a position that places it directly in front of a person's groin area. On the surface, the duality of its gender identity speaks to the instrument's versatility, but on a different note, in both of these scenarios the assumption is that the player is a man with his hands controlling either the phallus or the feminine and curvaceous instrument. Neither of these scenarios resists the established norms that are attributed to the saxophone, and even though there were female saxophonists from the very earliest days after its invention, even in the twenty-first century when the saxophone is played by a woman it appears to be confusing because it does not adhere to dominant patriarchal and cisgender norms.

The saxophone is considered to have predominantly masculine characteristics and is typically portrayed in music and media as being played by a man. As Mindi Abair noted in her interview, when a woman appears on stage holding a saxophone her skills are called in to question, and she must take it upon herself to change people's minds regarding what a saxophone player looks like. Below, some of the ways that scholars have observed issues related to gender

and instrumental performance are considered, in contrast to the gender and sexuality related to 'Talk Dirty' that follows in the remainder of the chapter.

According to Doubleday, 'musical instruments are important symbolic tools used within the construction of human gendered identities' (2008, p. 6). The honkers and shouters discussed above provide part of the answer, but it is important to examine other reasons why the saxophone is predominantly associated with masculine gendered identity and expression. As mentioned, the saxophone is sometimes considered an extension of the male musician's virility, and consequently it has been difficult for female saxophonists to be accepted or considered serious musicians. There have been excellent histories produced about female jazz musicians by Kristin McGee (2011) and women in popular music by Sheila Whiteley (2013a, 2013b) that illuminate the struggles that female musicians have faced throughout the twentieth century. Essentially, women have not been able to achieve the same heights and levels of respect as male instrumentalists. Doubleday notes, '…male instrumental musicianship may emerge as the cultural norm, with the female instrumentalist being seen as "unthinkable" or deviant. The very image of a woman playing an instrument may be seen as "weird", awkward or laughable' (Doubleday, 2008, p. 17). In essence, instruments interfere with men's enjoyment of a woman's face or body (Doubleday, 2008, p. 18). Cottrell contends that the saxophone can be seen '…both as a symbol of predatory phallic behaviour, and female sexual allure' (quoted in Doubleday, 2008, p. 14). And while Cottrell goes into some detail listing many of the ways in which female saxophonists were performing in the United States and around the world and receiving recognition in the late nineteenth century, he also dutifully reminds us that this was not necessarily a sign of 'female musical independence,' but rather a novelty still controlled by men (Cottrell, 2012, p. 329). They were products of their time, but the renowned saxophone soloists

in the United States, Louise Linden and Bessie Mecklem, were nevertheless influential for performing at very high standards. Mecklem made some of the very first solo saxophone recordings in the world, and the first references to the saxophone in the *New York Times* in the late 1880s and 1890s refer to her performances (Cottrell, 2012, p. 121). These early successes would prove novel, in some ways parallel to the historical trajectory of the instrument itself and its consideration as a curiosity, but this also reflected the undervalued and dismissed contributions of female saxophonists.

Ellen Koskoff points out that there are more women in orchestras now thanks to the advent of the blind audition in the 1960s (1995, p. 126). Although this was not a panacea, it has resulted in significant advancements for female instrumentalists in the orchestral world. In my own experiences, I have faced blatant sexism and distrust in my abilities as a saxophonist in several performing situations in the jazz and popular genres, but notably not in my orchestral performing experiences. I do not recall anyone commenting on my gender before or after an orchestral performance but have had that happen almost every time I performed with a jazz group or funk band. This may be related to genre identity because of the masculine associations with jazz, rock, and funk. The jazz and rock genres do not utilise the same audition approach as symphony orchestras, so that is not a viable avenue for pursuing more equality or representation in performance. Jazz musicians still have a long way to go in terms of accepting women as skilled and respected instrumentalists and overcoming the male-dominated traditions of the genre, and this is a worthy cause that many women performing in those genres continue to work towards.

In Koskoff's article, 'When Women Play: The Relationship Between Musical Instruments and Gender Style,' she explores some of the literature regarding female instrumentalists of centuries past (1995). The article focuses primarily on courtesans and other women (that would

be referred to as sex workers in contemporary parlance) that became instrumentalists for the purpose of pleasure, and indeed she makes the point that this was initially an important avenue in which women were able not only to learn to play instruments, but to excel at performing them. This is a key point to consider in women's musical histories. Contrastingly, Rita Steblin presents us with the other side of the story in terms of class or economic position in her article 'The Gender Stereotyping of Musical Instruments in the Western Tradition' (1995). In the Renaissance, women were only allowed to play those instruments which did not upset their feminine sensibilities. In fact, it is widely held that the virginal is so-called because it was played by young, innocent, aristocratic women and, in Steblin's opinion, any contrary notion regarding the origin of the instrument's name would be an 'attempt to assuage the twentieth-century male conscience' (1995, p. 135). It seems that the male mediation of female instrumental performance has been going on for centuries.

Carl Ludwig Junker, the pastor, composer, and writer on music noted in 1784 that, 'an uneasy feeling arises when the nature of the instrument does not fit together with the acknowledged characteristic of the female sex—weakness.' (Steblin, 1995, p. 139). Steblin goes on to explain, the 'nature' of an instrument is the traditional meanings and associations assigned to it by the listener (ibid.). This may be the best explanation yet as to why the saxophone was considered unwieldy or misunderstood when in the hands of a woman. If one considers the aggressive playing style inherent in 'honking and shouting' and how we have come to associate it with male virility, this is logical.

Elise Boyer Hall, the late nineteenth-century saxophonist and a woman of means, commissioned several well-respected composers of her time to write for the saxophone, including Claude Debussy, despite his equivocation. In fact, without her, the saxophone would

lack some of the seminal works in the repertoire and would have had an even less auspicious start in the Western art music world. Debussy, in a letter to his wife in 1903, wrote:

> I do not know why 'the Saxophone Lady' appears to me like the Statue of the commandatore appeared to poor Don Juan! – Never will she suspect how much she bored me. Does it not appear indecent to you, a woman in love with a saxophone, whose lips suck at the wooden mouthpiece of this ridiculous instrument? – This must surely be an old mole who dresses like an umbrella. (Cottrell, 2012, p. 244)

Debussy not only sounds 'faintly misogynistic', but also petulant (ibid.). Remarkably, famed American saxophone professor Frederick Hemke states, 'His (Debussy's) reaction to the project would have been the same for any other commission and it was purely the focus of time which brought Mrs. Hall, the saxophone, and Debussy together' (1975, p. 434). Hemke contends that Debussy's regard (or disregard) for Mrs. Hall had nothing to do with her gender, and everything to do with Debussy's lack of experience writing concertos, but this seems to be a very magnanimous and wilfully short-sighted view of the composer's opinion of the commission and of Mrs. Hall. Hemke, in his influential thesis on the history of the saxophone, also never made mention of the fact that some of the renowned saxophonists of the early twentieth century performed in blackface. This aspect of the instrument's history is too substantial to be overlooked, as it provides important context for some of the cultural meanings and symbolism attached to the instrument. Additionally, Hemke does not include any of the nineteenth century female saxophonists in his discussion of influential soloists. While it is true that there was not a wealth of research that had been uncovered about Bessie Mecklem, Louise Linden, or Etta Morgan at that time, this is still a noteworthy omission in a document titled 'The Early History of the Saxophone' (1975). Dr. Hemke's pioneering research is an invaluable resource in the discussion of the history of the saxophone but its age displays limitations regarding the neglect of research into underrepresented social groups that contributed to the instrument's history.

Compliments must be paid to Hall for remaining committed to commissioning Debussy's work and many others for the sake of promoting the instrument, despite the adversity that she experienced as both a woman and a saxophonist at the turn of the twentieth century.

There remains a lacuna in the research that examines feminine notions of performativity and expression in the male-dominated world of instrumental performance. From Elise Boyer Hall in the late nineteenth century to contemporary jazz and pop saxophonists such as Mindi Abair, Candy Dulfer, and Tia Fuller, female saxophonists must negotiate their careers through the pre-conceived notions of masculine performance practices, and because of this their skills as musicians are often called into question. Advancements in gender equality in the music professions are being made, but it remains vital to discuss the various ways in which gendered identities relating to instrumental music performance affect the meanings portrayed by the saxophone in popular music and culture and generally exclude women. As someone who has engaged in practicing and performing on the saxophone for many years, the idea of examining the performance practices into which saxophonists are inculcated as a gendered form of expression is a foreign concept that I have a difficult time figuring out how to approach, because as far as I know, tenets of female instrumental musicianship do not exist. As women we bring our own beliefs and bearing to performances, but the pedagogical histories and traditions that we must subscribe to in order to become successful professional musicians all emerge from male-defined measures of musicianship.

The saxophone has been described as having both feminine and masculine traits and yet women playing the saxophone are relatively marginalised. It is still more acceptable for men to benefit from the ambiguous sexual characteristics that the saxophone symbolises. To revisit the

topic, I now turn to further analysis of gender and sexuality in an analysis of the song and video for 'Talk Dirty' by Jason Derulo featuring Ori Kaplan on the saxophone.

CRITICAL RECEPTION AND PRODUCTION

'Talk Dirty' peaked at number three on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart in the United States in February of 2014, and it stayed on the Hot 100 chart for thirty-three weeks which constitutes evidence of its widespread popularity despite never reaching the number one spot on the chart (*Billboard*, 2019). While this song is characterised as pop, it also includes elements of R&B and hip-hop, audible in its emphasis on rhythm, relative lack of harmonic variation, and a rap verse by 2 Chainz. It is just under three minutes in length at 2:57, and the video is virtually the same other than a few extra seconds after the musical material ends that feature a still shot of an advertisement for Derulo's album, *Tattoos*. The track was included on the five-song EP *Tattoos* released in September of 2013 in Europe and Australia, but an updated version with six additional tracks was issued in the United States in April 2014 as a full-length album entitled *Talk Dirty*. The song 'Talk Dirty' was officially released in the United States in January 2014, even though the video was released a few months earlier, in 2013. There are two versions of the song, one with explicit lyrics and one without, and further discussion of the lyrical content of each of these versions is included below.

'Talk Dirty' was considered a global hit and charted in the top ten in twenty-two different countries, likely a result of the simple, sexy lyrics with a transnational theme and the visual representation of those themes in the accompanying video. This had the intended effect of relating to a global audience from different social and cultural backgrounds. The simplicity of the song undoubtedly aided in its commercial success, and this is not a negative attribute, rather,

absence of complication in popular music can be beneficial. According to the lyrics, the language of lust is the only thing that needs to be understood. Lyrics such as, 'I'm that flight that you get on, international, first class seat on my lap girl, riding comfortable', suggest that it does not matter where Derulo travels and whether he speaks the language or not, flirting and/or engaging in sexual activity transcends language barriers and international borders. The song and video principally signify three things that contributed to the success that the song achieved as a pop and dance hit: dancing, sexual suggestiveness, and exoticism.

The song was released a couple of years after the saxophone had made a publicised comeback in mainstream popular music, and in that way, it was able to capitalise on this trend while also exhibiting an unconventional sound in the form of Ori Kaplan's signature playing style. This proved successful, and Kaplan was hired to produce and perform on another project that became a commercial hit. 'Worth It' by Fifth Harmony charted at number twelve on the *Billboard* Hot 100 in 2015 and utilised a very similar structure to 'Talk Dirty', with a prominently featured saxophone hook in each iteration of the chorus. While 'Worth It' also featured Kaplan's bold saxophone style, this time the script was flipped, so to speak, and the sax riff appeared to underline the theme of female empowerment in opposition to its typical associations with masculine performance traits featured in 'Talk Dirty'.

The salient feature of this song is that Kaplan performs the hook, and this distinguishes it from countless other mainstream hit songs that feature the saxophone in more traditional ways such as in a solo break or as a background instrument in a horn section. This unique feature was acknowledged in one notable example written by Nick Messitte in an online article for American business magazine *Forbes*:

> What is it about the song? I would argue…that the energy which intoxicates us comes from that chorus—that out-of-control catharsis provided by a jaunty, Semitic sax and its

> corollary backbeat. It's the signature of that tune—the hook—the element with just enough rub and just enough spark to fuel a party's fire. (Messitte, 2014)

At an earlier point in the article, he states that neither Derulo nor 2 Chainz are the primary reasons for the song's success, making the claim that neither of these artists is distinctive enough to have driven the massive popularity that it experienced. Rather, he pinpoints what he believes to be the two distinguishing features which contributed to the song's success: the saxophone and the backbeat.

NARRATIVE AND MUSICAL ANALYSIS

'Talk Dirty' is about sex, and the lyrics in the song and the musical and visual material and dancing featured in the video reinforce this theme in a few ways. It is minimally explicit, and as such circulates more widely because of its relatively inoffensive intimations about talking dirty as a precursor to sex. An important part of the formula for the song's success was its articulation of 'erotic multiculturalism' which was achieved by featuring a saxophone hook characterised by Middle Eastern and/or Jewish musical traditions that centre on the harmonic minor scale. In the video, these sounds were accompanied by a diverse group of female dancers who reinforce the exotic theme by dancing provocatively in indigenous costumes (McGee, 2012, p. 212).

The majority of the musical material that provides the foundation for 'Talk Dirty' is borrowed from Balkan Beat Box's song 'Hermetico', released in 2007. The producers of 'Talk Dirty' utilised the distinctive saxophones and percussive elements from the song, in addition to the horse whinny, brass backgrounds, the bass line, hand clapping, and the tempo, and although much of the musical material is shared between the songs it seems that the character or thematic focus of the two is quite dissimilar. Derulo's song is a re-contextualisation of the original song's sounds, deploying the saxophone and other musical elements borrowed from the Balkan Beat

Box track to signify exoticism and, in a twist from the original, sexuality. This could constitute a trend in his music, as his first hit song 'Whatcha Say' (2010), used Imogen Heap's a cappella track 'Hide and Seek' (2005) as its basis, but Derulo reframed the original theme from sadness and isolation to an apology for cheating on a partner. It is noteworthy that Derulo's two biggest hits borrowed the majority of their musical material from other songs, and perhaps signals the potential for commercial success in hybridisation between genres.

Popular music scholar Kristin McGee's definition of 'erotic multiculturalism' is especially appropriate for this case study, as she coined the term to describe musical and visual Orientalist tropes combined with contemporary erotic signifiers borrowed from hip-hop and 'raunch culture' that are used in some recent examples of popular music (2012, p. 211). In brief, she discusses the West's fetishization of Orientalist emblems such as the harem and belly dancers and their frequent appearance in popular music and culture. In terms of musical characteristics, this particular brand of exoticism is symbolised by snake charmer music which is distilled and aurally represented by the harmonic minor scale. Orientalism is a way that people of the West have used an amalgamation of Arab and Muslim cultural elements for their benefit and also as a form of Othering. McGee's analysis of 'Buttons' (2006) by the Pussycat Dolls outlines the ways that this Othering and the visual and aural demonstration of cultural difference in the music video serves as a basis for the eroticism performed in the song (2012, p. 220). The gender identity of the artists may be different, but a very similar type of erotic multiculturalism is performed in Derulo's 'Talk Dirty', with Kaplan's saxophone hook performing the role of erotic snake charmer and the female dancers in the video evoking a harem of belly dancers.

This song differs from the others analysed in this project for two main reasons: first, because the song and the video are the same length and the song is not altered in the video in any

way; there is no additional narrative material of consequence in the video to enhance its intended message; and second, the saxophone melody is the hook of the song, as opposed to being featured in an isolated solo as in Perry's track or as a unique countermelody as in Kendrick Lamar's 'Alright'. Whereas Perry's video for 'Last Friday Night' was akin to a short film that expanded the original length of the song by over four minutes and included a full cinematic narrative arc, and Lamar added over three minutes of dialogue and imagery to reinforce the message of what it is like to be Black in the United States, Derulo's video was a prototypical pop music video recorded on a soundstage. It is reminiscent of the videos seen in the early days of *MTV* (Music Television) such as Madonna's 1983 video for 'Lucky Star' that featured her and two dancers performing elaborate moves on a soundstage in front of a simple white background. There is more variation and artful editing in Derulo's video, but the focus remains on the dancing and the video faithfully recreates the modern conventions of urban dance music videos by featuring the female dancers and a rapper making an appearance in the middle of the video.

The video is relatively simple but there are a lot of fast camera movements and scene changes that occur almost every second throughout the video, and this signals modern production techniques. The focus is on Derulo, his dancing skills, and his interactions with both the female and male dancers in the video. The video begins with a close-up of the face of a young Asian woman. She exclaims, 'Jason!' with a serious look on her face, then almost immediately breaks into audible laughter as the musical introduction to the song begins at the three second mark. The words 'Jason Derulo' are shown on the screen, and the woman says his name, while other shots of flags from different countries are interspersed with shots of Derulo's mid-section, highlighting his abdominal muscles as the camera pans up to his smiling face. 'Talk Dirty Directed by Collin Tilley' flashes on the screen and immediately disappears at the moment that the first verse

begins. As an interesting side note, Collin Tilley also directed Kendrick Lamar's video for 'Alright', but the two videos are very different in character and content (Lamar's video is summarised and some of these differences are discussed in the next chapter). The scenes change very rapidly throughout the video, and each frame highlights different individuals and groups of dancers as they dance or interact with Derulo while he lip-syncs the lyrics of the song. Several of the scenes feature women dressed in what appear to be indigenous costumes from various countries: one in an outfit that resembles a Brazilian Carnaval costume with brightly coloured feathers and a headdress, and another woman is shown in what appears to be a Middle Eastern belly dancing costume. The Brazilian costume correlates to the lyric in which Derulo sings, 'met your friend in Rio', and the belly dancing costume seems to be another reference to Orientalism, corresponding with the melody of the saxophone hook. Derulo is occasionally shirtless and the women are also scantily clad in the majority of the scenes, and he is either dancing with the women or they are touching his body and/or kissing his neck. When Derulo dances with the male dancers, they are all wearing long-sleeved shirts, pants, and baseball caps, and they primarily move in unison. One of the most interesting features of the video, albeit bewildering for knowledgeable viewers, is that every time a saxophone is heard in the song, whether it is the baritone saxophone in the verses or the principal saxophone riff, women appear on the screen dancing and pretending to play a trumpet. When the musical material ends the woman from the introduction reappears on screen and says, 'What? I don't understand' with a thick accent. The final shot is of a sweaty Derulo with his shirt open, and then a still screen of the advertisement for the album appears to close out the video.

The lyrical content in 'Talk Dirty' is straightforward:

Been around the world, don't speak the language
But your booty don't need explaining

All I really need to understand is
When you talk dirty to me

The meaning of the lyrics does not stray from this first verse; throughout the entirety of the song the singer and the rapper both extol the virtues of the ability to transcend or disregard language barriers in order to have sex with women all over the world. Actually, the lyrics of the song only mention 'booty', not the more explicit 'ass' or other slang terms that would be considered too illicit for mainstream radio airplay. The only time sex is mentioned is in 2 Chainz' verse, when he mentions oral sex twice. As Lipshutz mentioned in his article about Derulo's dual personas, this song is sexier than some of his other hits, but it still exhibits a 'faux-crass' or not-very-dirty version of talking dirty. It is notable that there are two versions of the song, one with explicit lyrics and one without. The only difference between the two is in the rap verse. In the explicit version, the lyrics are as follows:

Dos Cadenas, close to genius
Sold out arenas, you can suck my penis
Gilbert Arenas, guns on deck
Chest to chest, tongue on neck
International oral sex
Every picture I take, I pose a threat
Bought a jet, what do you expect?
Her pussy's so good I bought her a pet
Anyway, every day I'm trying to get to it
Got her saved in my phone under 'Big Booty'
Anyway, every day I'm trying to get to it
Got her saved in my phone under 'Big Booty'

In the radio-approved version of the song, the word 'penis' is replaced by the sound of an elephant trumpeting, and the word 'pussy' is replaced by the sound of a cat's meow. Interestingly, these sounds uniquely signify the words that they are replacing, with the elephant sound meant to represent a large penis. The word pussy is slang for two other words, vagina and cat, so the use of a cat's meow here is expected. Derulo had never had a rapper featured on any of his songs

before this, and as mentioned above this addition made the song fit more squarely into the R&B genre because of its performance of masculine sexuality and braggadocio that are historically associated with both rap and R&B.

One of the most distinctive features of this song is how the chorus is split between the singer and the saxophone. When Derulo sings the title of the song in the chorus, 'talk dirty to me', it is immediately answered by the saxophone, in a call and response relationship. In fact, it could be construed as the saxophone melody itself representing the dirty talk. One thing that would seem to dispute the importance of the saxophone in representing sex in this song is that in the video there are female dancers shown 'playing' (holding) the trumpet. Indeed, the image of a saxophone is never displayed. Could it be as simple as not having a saxophone available to use in the video, or was this a deliberate decision made by the director? In either case, the image of the saxophone was not deemed essential to the overall look of the video. To listeners with cursory knowledge of the two instruments this seems like a massive oversight and not an intentional decision. The women who are dancing and pretending to play the trumpet are not holding the instrument correctly, which is suspect, and the images of the trumpet-playing dancers appear at the exact moment that the saxophone sounds are heard in the video. Perhaps the director thought that the female dancers looked sexier holding a trumpet than they would have looked holding a saxophone, which may have restricted the audience's view of their bodies. In an article that appeared online in *Digital Spy* from 2013 the director of the video, Colin Tilley, was quoted as saying, 'one thing that we wanted to do as far as theme is bring an international vibe. We've got girls from different cultures that came and danced and brought a different energy and just created this beast that was really fun' (Copsey, 2013). This does not explain the decision to use trumpets as a visual representation for the saxophone sound in the song, but it seems to signal that the

director may not have been overly concerned with instrumental accuracy. Alternatively, the trumpet's appearance in the music video could simply represent the idea of a horn, any horn, which is a slang term used for the instruments that are commonly heard in pop and rock music: trumpet, trombone, and saxophone. Some of the lyrics are rather nonsensical too so this oversight is perhaps a reflection of the song's general portrayal of sexy frivolity.

The first, most prominent musical sounds in this song are a saxophone 'section' and a digital rhythmic figure akin to a hand clap produced by a Roland TR808 drum machine. When Derulo sings the verse, a repeated rhythm in the bass and a two-note motif in the baritone sax at the end of every other bar serve as the primary elements of musical interest. Throughout the song additional digital sound effects appear, adding specific points of interest and additional meanings, such as the sound of a horse whinnying at the end of the introduction, a digital version of a Hammond B3 organ at the end of the verse, bongo rolls in the pre-chorus, and a cowbell in the second chorus and the rap verse. These sounds are difficult to discern, as they are placed far back in the mix; I did not hear some of these sounds until I listened to the song with high-fidelity headphones. The Hammond organ's existence here is reminiscent of earlier Black popular musics such as jazz and R&B from the 1950s and 1960s in which the instrument was often featured. The assorted percussive sounds generally add to the exotic character of the song. The horse whinny could be an aural representation of humankind's animal urges, in the vein of Missy Elliott's use of the elephant trumpet sound in her song 'Work It' (2002). The various sound effects serve a few purposes: to cover up explicit lyrics and enable radio airplay, to reinforce the conspicuous sexual innuendo, and to enhance the exotic themes in the song.

Musical elements of the song including the baritone saxophone motif, the foundational alto saxophone melody, the horse whinny, the digital hand claps, the bongos, and the Hammond B3

organ are all present in Balkan Beat Box's original recording of 'Hermetico' (2007) which formed the basis of 'Talk Dirty'. The lyrics in 'Hermetico' seem to be secondary to the extensive instrumentals, but they generally centre around an internationally themed party atmosphere. It seems to be a 'hype' song of sorts, serving the purpose of creating excitement for the audience. It is not clear what the horse whinny represents here, as this song is not overtly sexual in nature, but it likely exists as an exotic signifier similar to Derulo's track. The other musical elements mentioned above are representative of the multicultural music for which Balkan Beat Box is known, and this particular meaning transfers to Derulo's song. The three main members of the band, Ori Kaplan, Tamir Muskat, and Tomer Yosef are all credited as songwriters for 'Talk Dirty', and Kaplan noted that the producer, Rick Reed, had found the 'Hermetico' recording and asked the members of Balkan Beat Box if he could use it (Gehr, 2014). Ori, Tamir, and Tomer were able to negotiate with the producer and receive fifty percent of the profits from the sales of the song. Listening to the two songs it is clear that 'Hermetico' provides the majority of musical material and the contributions of Derulo and the producer Rick Reed are rather minimal in comparison, but they did succeed in making the song a verifiable hit.

The song's R&B tendencies are combined with the concept of erotic multiculturalism to perform the sexual suggestiveness at the core of the track. The conventional techniques of objectifying and sexualising women are present in the video for this song, but either audiences have become immune to all but the most explicit examples of this or this video is simply not that illicit. The myth of the attractive male pop star who is also a good dancer is being reinforced, but one way in which Derulo strays a bit from the stereotypical portrayal of the male artist in a music video is that he appears shirtless for a significant portion of the video for the song. He is diverting attention from the predictability of the objectification of the female dancers by placing

himself in a position to be objectified, however, the masculine character of the song and video remains the dominant narrative and in no way veers away from some familiar tropes such as the sexualisation of women and demonstration of heteronormative and traditional gender roles in contemporary popular music videos.

ORI KAPLAN

In May of 2016 I attended a Balkan Beat Box concert in Brussels, Belgium, and I do not believe I have ever heard or witnessed a more energetic and vigorous performance from a band. As noted in Chapter 3's discussion of the fieldwork excursions carried out in support of the research, Balkan Beat Box's music is a multicultural mélange of musical genres driven by complex rhythms and a dynamic performance style that electrifies audiences. Ori Kaplan's saxophone sound in the live environment was almost exactly as I had heard it on the radio, with musical language inspired by his upbringing in Tel Aviv and formative experiences as a klezmer clarinettist. He displays a vigorous, powerful form of expression demonstrated by the sheer volume of his sound as well as the visible effects of playing on his body. He squeezed his eyes shut, danced, thrusted, and jumped up and down all while performing repetitive technical passages on the instrument in a rousing display of showmanship. I was not alive to attend a performance of the early rock and roll saxophonists, but their powerful and energetic playing heard in recordings resonates in Kaplan's performances, a testament to the lasting effect that the honkers and shouters have had on the conventions of saxophone playing in popular music.

According to his personal website, Kaplan was exposed to the klezmer clarinet and classical teachers in Jaffa when he was eleven years old, but eventually chose to perform with a local electronic group instead of continuing the study of klezmer music (Kaplan, 2003). In

addition to presenting harmonic material representative of his heritage, Kaplan's saxophone performance style is physically powerful, and the individual notes he plays almost break due to the force of the air; they come very close to splitting into a multiphonic or eliciting a squeak because he approaches the edge of overblowing the pitch. The fact that he is able to control this massive amount of air and keep the sound from breaking is a testament to his skill as a saxophonist, and this aggressive approach lends itself to live performances, creating a sense of intensity and excitement in a performative display of masculinity. In a word, the sound he produces on the alto saxophone is loud. More specifically, it is reedy, bright, and piercing, reminiscent of the Moroccan rhaita or ghaita[23] heard on the streets of Marrakech or the clarinet rising above the din of the crowd at a well-attended Jewish wedding. The transcription below is of Kaplan's repeated riff (in the key of E flat for alto saxophone), which functions as the hook in 'Talk Dirty':

Figure 4.1

'Talk Dirty' is in the concert key of G flat minor[24], and Kaplan's riff is based on the Phrygian dominant scale, as shown in figure 4.2 (in the key of E flat for alto saxophone):

Figure 4.2

The riff in Figure 4.1 is just one portion of the melodic material that Kaplan plays in Balkan Beat Box's song 'Hermetico' that served as the basis for 'Talk Dirty'. The Phrygian dominant scale is based on the fifth mode of harmonic minor, and it is also known as the Freygish scale, which is commonly used in klezmer music. This scale can be heard in a wide array of both Western and non-Western examples but primarily emerged from Eastern European Jewish folksong traditions (see Walden, 2014 and 2015). In the musical environment of 'Talk Dirty', the use of this scale signals exoticism and/or Orientalism as discussed above, while Kaplan's forceful and energetic sound evokes masculinity.

The simplicity of the riff in figure 4.1 belies the expressive spirit of Kaplan's performance. Stylistically, the playing in this track has a very fast, wild vibrato that almost becomes a shake between notes a minor third apart. When I tried to recreate this on my saxophone, it was very difficult to match the speed, width, and energy of the vibrato, and is evocative of the techniques inherent in the klezmer clarinet playing style. The fast and harsh articulations/tonguing of the notes in the solo also mimic the sounds of the klezmer clarinet; there is a distinct 'front' to each note played in the solo that is not an accent, as such, but rather an audible effect of the tongue hitting the reed and mouthpiece combination with force. This additionally provides Kaplan's riff with an emphatic sense of vigour and muscularity. Similar to how Pickett's concept of tone likely developed out of playing with rock and pop bands with amplified instruments, Kaplan's tone is also very robust with a brightness that is intended to match or overcome electronically produced sounds. Kaplan's aggressive, exotic, and masculine playing style embodies the ethos of 'Talk Dirty' and unambiguously contributes to the virility and Orientalism featured in the song.

SUMMARY

The saxophone is an instrument that is strongly associated with notions of masculine performativity and sexuality and therefore is especially suited to strengthen those qualities in Jason Derulo's track 'Talk Dirty' from 2014. The song is quite straightforward in its lyrical and musical material which are about talking dirty, in a minimally explicit way, as a precursor to sex. This song signalled a slight departure for Derulo whose music had previously been considered by some critics to ineffectually straddle the fence between purportedly feminine pop and overtly masculine R&B music styles. The addition of a rap verse also contributed to the song's attempt to create a more 'urban' sound for Derulo, and the term urban is code for the intersection of race and masculine sexuality which is considered a critical attribute in defining success for male artists in R&B music.

In mid-century America, R&B saxophonists imbued the instrument with charismatic and vigorous performance traditions, and these performative traits remain linked to the instrument in contemporary contexts. The honkers and shouters inspired audiences and exuded aggressiveness, power, and energy, embodying notions of Black masculine gendered forms of expression and laying the groundwork for playing styles that endure today. Women are generally absent from discussions surrounding performativity related to the saxophone despite their involvement with the instrument throughout its history, and the devaluing of feminine perspectives in the development of the conventions of performance practices is an interesting area for future research towards a goal of embracing diversity in perspectives toward instrumental performance. Gendered identities and sexuality are foundational characteristics that are transmitted through the bodies of the performers and through the musical instrument itself and have the ability to endow the music with those characteristics.

'Talk Dirty' is Derulo's most commercially successful song to date. The majority of the musical material for the track was borrowed from Balkan Beat Box's song 'Hermetico' from 2007, but the track was re-contextualised into a sexy R&B hit with the addition of a rap verse by 2 Chainz and prominently featured alto and baritone saxophones. Ori Kaplan's klezmer-styled saxophone riff forms the hook of the song and signifies the erotic multiculturalism and masculine sexuality that are also enhanced through the rap verse, the lyrics, and the visual imagery present in the video. As evidenced by the powerful saxophone sound produced in the recording of the song and witnessed in live performance, Kaplan embodies performative characteristics that are reminiscent of the R&B honkers and shouters, and his playing contributes to the construction of genre identity, sexuality, and the overall masculine aesthetic of the song.

In the next chapter, race and coolness are discussed in relation to the saxophone and its contribution to Kendrick Lamar's award-winning song, 'Alright' (2015).

CHAPTER 6

CASE STUDY #3: KENDRICK LAMAR'S 'ALRIGHT'
RACE AND THE SAXOPHONE

CASE STUDY ABSTRACT

This chapter examines how the saxophone engages with the key themes of race and cool in Kendrick Lamar's critically acclaimed song 'Alright' (2015) through its association with music from past eras, such as jazz, soul, and funk, and their exemplification of Black American agency, creativity, coolness, resiliency, and progress. Lamar's 'Alright' presents a snapshot of the social unrest in America in 2015, its lyrics shouted out in an act of resistance and hope against the backdrop of the Black Lives Matter social movement.

The lyrical focus and musical content of the song, in combination with the context of the social and political environment in which it was released, signified an erudite and progressive approach to rap at the time. Lamar appears to be emotionally transparent in the song whilst maintaining a sense of coolness, masculinity, and authenticity, principles that could be said to relate to race and are integral performative elements of both rap and hip-hop. Terrace Martin's saxophone performance played an important supporting role, providing a cool and nostalgic richness that intensified the song's socio-cultural impact, and his performance is discussed in detail below.

The chapter begins with an overview of the historical background and context for Kendrick Lamar and his music in the 2010s, then moves on to discuss how Lamar and the saxophone connect with and represent the key themes of coolness and race. The second half of the chapter features a survey of the critical reception and production of 'Alright', continues with a narrative and musical analysis of the song and accompanying video, and is followed by a close reading of

Terrace Martin and the saxophone's musical and cultural contributions. The chapter ends with a discussion of the song's leading role in the Black Lives Matter movement.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

In an article published in the *American Music Review* Will Fulton notes that Terrace Martin's saxophone playing is significant on 'Alright', and throughout the *To Pimp a Butterfly* (2015) album, because of the singular synthesis of jazz instrumentals with modern-day rap performance (Fulton, 2015). The title of this article, 'The Performer as Historian' bears out the idea that Lamar is acting simultaneously as historian and social commentator in his performances. In addition to playing the saxophone, Terrace Martin was also a co-producer of the album and his improvised lines serve to invoke jazz in its mid-century heyday; a time when Black musicians steadfastly affirmed their space in the musical landscape of America, achieving respect for themselves as instrumentalists and for the genre of jazz on the whole. This relates to the overarching theme of Lamar's album, which in Martin's words encompasses '…what it's like to be Black in this day and age in America'; it alludes to the past with musical material but is progressive in its lyrical content and thematic focus (Charity, 2015).

'Alright' is an example of a popular song that exhibits power through its conscientious treatment of the issue of racial injustice in the era of the Black Lives Matter movement and beyond. Jazz musicians and their musical signatures featured heavily on 'Alright' as well as the remainder of the album, and its success even prompted some critics to credit Lamar with helping to make jazz popular again (Cowie, 2015; Weiner, 2015). The video which accompanied the song is a cinematic reimagining of the struggle against systemic racism. The image of Lamar floating above the streets symbolises his attempt to rise above tenuous race relations, or to

transcend them, and in so doing, he encourages others to remain hopeful. The powerful hook of the song reinforces this idea by repeatedly exclaiming, 'we gon' be alright'.

Kendrick Lamar and his music have been the subject of numerous academic studies and articles in the mainstream news and entertainment media in the last few years. This chapter adds to this wealth of knowledge by looking at the background and context of Lamar's music from the perspective of a saxophonist, exploring potential meanings behind the choice to feature jazz, and more particularly the saxophone, as a conceptual and musical foundation for the album *To Pimp a Butterfly* (2015).

Born Kendrick Duckworth, Lamar is a rapper from southern California that has made a significant impact on popular music and culture through his poetic and socially conscious lyrics; lyrics that document life as a person of colour in a purportedly post-racial America. He is arguably an important voice of our time, '…the reigning fount of significance for not only hip-hop culture specifically, but more generally for Black and Brown young people during the second decade of the twenty-first century' (Pinn and Driscoll, 2019). Hip-hop and education scholar Bettina L. Love noted, 'the existential consciousness present in Lamar's lyrics is an inner resistance central to the wellness of our youth on the frontlines of human rights' (2016, p. 322). Lamar demonstrates a self-awareness of the leadership position he has assumed and in which his audience has placed him. Joe Coscarelli's interview with Lamar just after the release of *To Pimp a Butterfly* quoted his lyrics, 'as I lead this army make room for mistakes and depression', an admission of the necessity of his (imperfect) guidance, but also the emotional burden of leading a movement towards eradicating racial injustice in America ('Mortal Man' [2015] in Coscarelli, 2015). Lamar went on to say that the album did what it was supposed to do, 'That's not necessarily to sell tons of records — though it didn't do bad at that either — but to actually have

an impact on the people and on the culture of music' (Lamar quoted in Coscarelli, 2015). The recognition that Lamar has received is indicative of the way that he is viewed by some as a literal and spiritual truth-teller: a role model who effectively uses rap as his medium.

Lamar writes lyrics that represent his experiences as a Black man who grew up in Compton in south central Los Angeles, California. Compton is a predominantly Black neighbourhood that experienced a considerable amount of gang violence in the 1990s and was one of the principal locations of the infamous 1992 riots. Several other renowned hip-hop artists grew up in the same neighbourhood, including the members of N.W.A. (Dr. Dre, Ice Cube, Eazy E, MC Ren, DJ Yella), Coolio, and The Game, and Compton has played a significant role in their music. Indeed, it is where N.W.A. started and proceeded to aid in the creation and popularisation of gangsta rap with songs such as 'Straight Outta Compton' (1988) and 'Fuck tha Police' (1988), songs that protested police brutality and the systemic racism that members of the group experienced in everyday life. The neighbourhood of Compton has played an equally significant part in Lamar's identity as a rapper, featuring heavily in his music. Some of the scenes included in the video for 'Alright' depict violence, provoked by gang activity or police brutality, as experienced by residents across multiple communities in Los Angeles. However, although Lamar's music includes notions of spatiality, social consciousness, criticism, and protest similar to the music of N.W.A., it is generally less explicit in its language and slightly less adversarial in tone than many examples of gangsta rap.

With this turbulent background in mind, it is interesting to note that the thematic material in Lamar's music is distinctive for its introspective slant. His lyrics have been examined by scholars and critics across a range of disciplines including psychology, religious studies, and education for their focus on topics of resilience, substance abuse, depression, self-love, hope,

optimism, existentialism, and religion; themes which represent a 'woke' viewpoint of social progressiveness and political awareness in hip-hop (Love, 2016; Pinn and Driscoll, 2019; Sule and Inkster, 2015; Coscarelli, 2015). Lamar's music counteracts some stereotypes that have been attributed to contemporary rap produced for mass consumption and does not promote 'hedonism' or 'decadence', rather, it is rooted in community and social identity (Moore, 2020, p. 2). From this perspective, his music is similar to other contemporary rap artists such as Lupe Fiasco, Nas, Kanye West, and Common who also prioritise current social and political topics in their music and videos.

Lamar's music has amassed an overwhelmingly positive and high-profile critical reception, resulting in resounding commercial success, albeit in a reversal of the typical trajectory of an album disseminated to a broad commercial audience. In the United States, the position a song reaches on the *Billboard* charts is irrefutably linked to the amount of airplay it receives on mainstream airwaves. The track 'Alright' was released in June of 2015 and, although critically acclaimed, neither it, nor *To Pimp a Butterfly* the album on which it appeared, featured in the top half of the charts. It stands to reason that audiences were therefore consuming the song via mediums outside that of the traditional mainstream radio stations: through the circulation of its music video on digital media, via online streaming services, by witnessing Lamar's performance on the fifty-eighth annual Grammy Awards in February of 2016, and perhaps most crucially, through its association with the Black Lives Matter movement. The song and the album are prime examples of the ability of popular music to reflect societal controversies that speak to a broad and diverse group of listeners. Although the album did not produce a clear-cut hit song, it circulated widely due to its take on timely and sensitive subject matters. It garnered a

great deal of attention from mainstream entertainment outlets and was nominated, and went on to win, several high-profile awards.

Indeed, in 2016 *To Pimp a Butterfly* was nominated for eleven Grammy Awards including Song of the Year for 'Alright', positioning Lamar as the first rapper in the history of the Grammy Awards with that many nominations. His next album, *DAMN.* (2017), was released two years later and was awarded the elite Pulitzer Prize for music, the first non-classical and non-jazz album to win this award. This demonstrated a recognition of the skill required to craft music that is aesthetically valued by a mass, popular audience as well as the cultural elite. In this way, it transcends class constructs and demonstrates a poetic command of language and tone that expresses the Black experience in America at just the right time and place, from a person who has lived the experiences.

Lamar knows the history of the rap game and the politics surrounding his hometown, and his music represents an evolution of West Coast rap from the outward expression of anger and violence that defined the style in the 1980s, to a type of expression that looks inward. His lyrics acknowledge the lasting effects of racism on the mental health of Black people and, instead of responding with rage toward the institutions that engage in oppressive and brutal acts of the policing of Black bodies as rappers have done in the past, Lamar comments on the emotional strain that the persistence of racism inflicts. This is not meant to diminish the work or agency of earlier rap groups; those groups were reacting to racial prejudices and police brutality in a way that was necessary for them at the time. Lamar raps about the substance abuse, addiction, and depression that results from being subjected to oppressive systems. Mental health is not a common theme in rap music, and Lamar is providing a fresh narrative, one that underlines self-reflection and the interior struggles of Black people in the United States. As Love noted, the

previously dominant narratives on this subject have been chiefly concerned with the external; they remain focused on Black bodies in public view in protests, as if there is no consideration of the inner life of people of colour, which in itself could be considered a racist view (2016, p. 323). Lamar brings inner thoughts and feelings to light and in doing so, enacts a form of quiet resistance that is impactful and supports the mobilisation of youth towards social change within the current climate (Love, 2016, p. 320). The booming voices of rap in the 1980s informed audiences of the quotidian injustices, brutalities, and inequities that people of colour experienced, but quiet resistance and a sense of hope as described by Lamar appears to be a modern direction towards effecting change in the late 2010s.

And I love myself
(The world is a ghetto with big guns and picket signs)
I love myself
(But it can do what it want whenever it want, I don't mind)
I love myself
(One day at a time, sun gon' shine)

Lyrics to 'i' (2015) from To Pimp a Butterfly *(written by Duckworth, Smith, O-Kelly Isley, Jr, Marvin Isley, Rudolph Isley, Christopher Jasper)*

In a similar manner to 'Alright', the song 'i' exemplifies Lamar's lyrical focus on resilience, hope, and optimism; this manner of expressing self-love is relatively rare in the world of rap. Rapping with confidence and bravado about various topics is a fundamental element of rap music, but personally I have never heard another rapper repeat the words, 'I love myself'. This declaration acts in direct defiance to a society that continues to devalue Black minds and bodies, but Lamar believes that loving yourself is a path forward despite clear obstacles. This positive self-talk is very enlightened and perhaps surprising coming from a high-profile male rapper who is expected to demonstrate strength and invulnerability at all times. He is engaging with his own emotions and wellbeing, which has the potential to endow him or his music with a sense of

vulnerability, something that is often construed as a feminine, or negative, characteristic. However, Lamar's vocal delivery and performance of hypermasculinity maintains the aggressiveness that is associated with rap music, and this subsequently erases any notions of feminine qualities related to him or his music.

One of the few of the articles I encountered in the mainstream media that was critical of Lamar and his music made note of the almost total exclusion of Black women from his descriptions of Black life in America, and observed that identity should not be tied so narrowly to heterosexual, cisgender Black men (Willis, 2015). This brings to mind some of the broader critiques of rap music, and despite the progressive focus on self-awareness and social consciousness, Lamar's music still displays some of the unfavourable qualities often associated with the genre, such as misogyny and toxic masculinity that centre the lyrics around male, heteronormative narratives. He may be considered woke, or keenly aware of social injustices, but perhaps not when it comes to gender parity. Lamar's skill is his ability to be emotionally transparent while performing the masculine conventions and delivery style of rap and maintaining a sense of coolness and authenticity. He does not stray from heteronormativity or gender exclusivity historically associated with rap music. Lamar's roots in Compton, California inform the perspective that he brings to his music, and both authenticity and coolness play an important part in his almost mythical status in rap music and American popular culture at large.

Lamar's background growing up in the neighbourhood where the original gangsta rap artists came from plays a crucial part in understanding the environment surrounding his creative output. It is outside of the scope of this study to include a comprehensive definition of rap and/or hip-hop, but a brief survey of some of the characteristics of the genre may be useful in providing additional context for Kendrick Lamar and his music. Rap is defined as the rhythmic chanting of

speech over musical accompaniment, and is the musical element of the larger cultural movement of hip-hop, which includes breakdancing, deejaying, and 'writing' (graffiti) (Keyes, 2019; Toop, 2013). It started in the predominantly Black neighbourhoods of the boroughs of New York City in the 1970s and was primarily performed by young Black and brown men. Later in the 1980s gangsta rap was developed on the West Coast, and it featured socially critical lyrics that glorified violence and were sometimes misogynistic and homophobic (Toop, 2013).

In a paper published relatively early on in the history of rap and hip-hop in the United States, scholar Cheryl Keyes defined the genre by how it is performed, which is a meaningful perspective that prioritises the lyrical content and its delivery. Keyes noted that, 'performance in rap music is based on Black speech acts (such as signifying [double meaning] or the dozens [artful or clever insults]) and on rhetorical skills such as braggadocio, metaphor, play on words, mimicry, and folk expressions' (1984, p. 143). In an introduction to the bibliography of Rap/Hip Hop that Keyes curated in 2019, the definition of the genre was amended to include 'manner of dress, gesture, and language that embodies an urban street consciousness' (Keyes, 2019).

In this updated definition, Keyes adds the concept of gesture to the definition of rap, which is significant because it recognises the role played by the primarily Black male bodies in the delivery of the messages of the music (2019). Other scholars have characterised rap and/or hip-hop in a disparaging manner in reference to gesture, and highlight the genre's associations with violence, misogyny, and homophobia, but also insinuate fear of Black men, which would appear to conflate rap with the more explicit gangsta rap (Oware, 2011, p. 22). The above themes are frequently perceptible in the lyrics and the gestures performed by rappers. Pinn and Driscoll observed that rap is, 'a world marked by aggressive absurdity', and Bynoe derided the genre for its frequent use of profanity, the N-word, and misogyny (2019; 2001). Bynoe went on to note,

however, that the explicit language often heard in rap is simply language that mirrors real life (2001). Lamar's music is too mainstream to be characterised as gangsta rap, but it is heavily influenced by the genre and displays some of these traits in its use of language and social criticism.

In some cases, the aggressiveness and hypermasculinity that rap musicians perform is just an act, a display of the characteristics that they feel are expected of them. As Dyson noted in Balaji, 'rap projects a style of self into the world that generates forms of cultural resistance and transforms the ugly terrain of ghetto existence into a searing portrait of life as it must be lived by millions of voiceless people' (2009, p. 22). Gangsta rap in particular '…is predicated on an essentialised and limited construction of Black masculinity' and many rappers 'construct a Black male subjectivity that incorporates the notion that masculinity means exhibiting extreme toughness, invulnerability, violence, and domination' (Oware, 2011, p. 22). However, there is no plausible excuse for the misogyny and homophobia sometimes expressed by rappers, and these lyrical themes combine to define the concept of toxic masculinity, which should be denounced by contemporary rap artists. The outcome that results from a review of these viewpoints appears to be that rap and/or gangsta rap music signals hypermasculinity and violence which is exhibited in both the lyrics and in the bodies of the performers, but scholars seem to disagree on whether or not that is a valid and/or valuable expressive response to decades of living with injustice and discrimination.

An overview of the rap genre, however brief, is not complete without a discussion of authenticity, and this quality is closely associated with Kendrick Lamar and his music. The perception of authenticity is an integral part of the equation for an artist's success in many popular musical genres, and none more so than rap and hip-hop (Armstrong, 2004, p. 336). The

vernacular versions of the concept, realness and street credibility (or 'cred'), play a fundamental role in how rap artists present themselves and in how audiences perceive and value artists and their music. Authenticity in rap is based on three principals: being true to oneself, location or place, and proximity to an original source of rap (ibid.). To be considered authentic, the artist must appear to be true to themselves, or to be perceived as real; in other words, to convey honesty and integrity in an unmediated form to audiences (Moore, 2002, p. 214). It is the appearance of realness and integrity that are important in popular music, and not the existence of those qualities in an artist's own life. Secondly, it is vital to consider location or place, as where an artist is from is a tenet that is 'central to the organising principals of rap' (Armstrong, 2004, p. 337). Indeed, geography was the original determinant of authenticity in rap and, while it has evolved as a genre that is created and produced in locations the world over, New York and Los Angeles remain strongly connected to the notion of authenticity. The third principle of authenticity acknowledges the importance of who a person knows. For instance, Eminem, one of the most commercially successful rappers of all time, is from Detroit but is connected to the West Coast rap scene because of his relationship with Dr. Dre. Some rap fans and critics believed early on in his career that Eminem would not be considered authentic because of his whiteness, and that his career would be affected by this. Dr. Dre is from Compton, was one of the original members of N.W.A., is often credited with coining the term 'gangsta rap', and spoke out early on behalf of Eminem noting, '…this white boy is tight', which had the effect of providing Eminem with an immutable sense of authenticity to rap audiences (Armstrong, 2004, p. 338).

Kendrick Lamar's authenticity also seems sacrosanct. He conveys integrity in his person and in his music, he grew up in low-income housing in Compton, and was influenced by Tupac

Shakur and connected with Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg, some of the titans of West Coast rap. All of these elements combine to provide Lamar with a strong foundation for authenticity in his music, and the music itself confirms the perception. In an article for American online media company *Insider* declaring him the artist of the decade (2010s), Lamar was described as, 'a compelling and honest storyteller who never compromised on either his core sound or values, making him an unprecedented outlier in music, and more specifically, hip hop' (Braboy, 2019). Braboy is making the claim that not only is Lamar authentic, but he is also truer to himself, or more 'real', than any other rapper of the 2010s. As Toop notes, many rap fans assess artists by their ability to tell a story, and this is another contributing factor to the determination of authenticity and honesty that lead to Lamar's commercial and critical success (2013).

In terms of the musical characteristics of his music, Lamar's engagement with Black musical cultures of the past further reinforces his authenticity. Lamar's use of jazz and 'real' instruments such as saxophone and trumpet serve to authenticate his music and his message (Moore, 2002, p. 213). This combination of factors of authentication and the featuring of musicians from multiple musical genres were the main ingredients for the success of the album. The saxophone played an essential part in this authentication because it embodies jazz and its ethos. Lamar and his collaborators are using multiple musical ingredients to convey messages of a political nature and to further validate the artist; the result is that the audience is more inclined to listen, believe, or even feel what they perceive is Lamar's truth.

Jazz and hip-hop are connected in many ways, but mainly for their 'representation of and impact upon Black American culture and traditions' (Conyers, 2015). 'Hip hop, a Black cultural product, is also committed to the tradition of Black popular culture, as evidenced by its centring the struggles of Black life in the music' (Love, 2016, p. 322). The two genres possess similarities

because of the race and gender identity of the majority of the performers, and because of the shared experiences of being male and Black and being the architects of important musical genres in a society that is sometimes fearful and often devalues their output. In many ways, whether you are a post-war jazz musician or a rapper in the twenty-first century, the act of producing or creating music can be perceived as both a necessary expression and a political statement.

In researching the definition of rap and its intrinsic associations with race and masculinity I found several resources that explored the intersection of Black masculinity with coolness, confirming and consolidating the significance of the interconnected nature of these qualities and of the way that they are performed in particular genres of music. Both jazz and rap are associated with coolness for reasons that seem to be tied to their reception by mainstream audiences. In their book, *Cool Pose: The Dilemma of Black Manhood in America,* Majors and Billson describe the cool pose as, 'a response to a history of oppression and social isolation in this country; coolness may be a survival strategy that has cost the Black male — and society — an enormous price' (1993, p. Xi).

> By cool pose we mean the presentation of self many black males use to establish their identity. Cool pose is a ritualised form of masculinity that entails behaviours, scripts, physical posturing, impression management, and carefully crafted performances that deliver a single, critical message: pride, strength, and control. (Majors and Billson, 1993, p. 4)

This may sound like the description of a musical performance and could easily describe either a rapper like Lamar or a jazz musician like Lester Young. Majors and Billson also propose a key assumption that cool masculinity equates to the cool pose, essentialising the concept of cool as a quality that is inextricable from masculinity. Striving for masculinity presents dilemmas for the Black male because it is so often grounded in masking strategies that rest on denial and the suppression of deep feelings (Majors and Billson, 1993, p. 2).

Interestingly, this is in direct opposition to what Lamar exhibits in 'Alright' and is perhaps an additional factor in the success of the song. He does not deny or suppress his emotions, rather, he embraces them almost as an act of catharsis for him and the audience. This is a contemporary realignment of masculinity and authenticity, and their embeddedness within the concept of cool. In the early 2010s, being woke was frequently considered to be cool, but a few critical factors caused that to change. The political climate in the United States in the second half of the decade saw an increase in divisiveness, leading to further unrest encouraged by the forty-fifth President and culminating in an attack on the Capitol Building in early January of 2021. The events surrounding the attempt to halt the function of government will be unpacked for years to come, but it partially represents a reprisal against progressive political views that advocate for equality, diversity, and wokeness. The backlash against wokeness had the effect of rendering Lamar's message less timely, making it a relic of the very recent past. This further underscores the political and cultural significance of 'Alright', and how it reflected the time, space, place, and events surrounding racial unrest in the years leading up to 2015. In terms of Lamar's music of that time, an awareness and engagement with music of the past while espousing positive self-talk and optimism was a modern approach to rap music.

COOL & RACE

In Chapter 4, coolness was primarily explored as a form of 'positive value orientation' whose qualification contributes to the wide circulation and commercial success that is expected from a mainstream pop artist such as Katy Perry (Hill, 2001, p. 458). In this section, coolness is considered principally through its intersection with race and masculinity as these concepts influence each other and the aesthetic frameworks for both rap and jazz.

Cool has recently been defined as 'a metaphorical term for affect control. It is tied in with cultural discourses on the emotions and the norms of their public display, and with gendered cultural practices of subjectivity' (Haselstein, 2013, p. 6). Robert Farris Thompson's assessment of the concept of cool from an article published in 1973 is considerably less clinical, and in his research of the African and African American origins and cultural contexts of the word, cool is many things: a metaphor for 'moral aesthetic accomplishment'; the 'artistic shaping of matter and societal happening'; it 'has to do with transcendental balance'; cool is '…having the value of composure in the individual context, social stability in the group'; it is the 'ability to be nonchalant at the right moment'; and it is also 'calmness in time of stress' (Thompson, 1973, p. 41). Each of the descriptions that Thompson elucidates can be traced back to ancestral customs in Africa. Indeed, he notes that '…the African usage of the term, cool…seem(s) to touch basic roots of Black social wisdom. Part of the power of the cool is undoubtedly rooted in just this quality of referral to ancestral custom' (1973, p. 42). It is interesting, then, to observe how these ancestral notions of cool have been carried forward into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. What was to many Black Americans a way to exhibit a sense of control and calmness in the face of deeply rooted racial biases towards them became a part of the social environment in mid-century America. The descriptions above can easily be translated to the performative demeanour of both traditional jazz musicians and modern hip-hop artists.

In the early twentieth century in America the saxophone became so synonymous with sexuality, male virility and nightlife in general that religious leaders 'considered it the symbol of all that was low and dirty, and it became an emblem of the genteel and not-so-genteel decadence that defined the Roaring Twenties' (Segell, 2006, p. 39). This may have had the unintended effect of endowing the instrument with a subversive, anti-establishment, rebellious reputation that

made it more appealing to some audiences. Additionally, thanks to artists such as Lester Young and Charlie Parker in the 1930s and 1940s, the concept of cool became closely associated with the instrument. Lester Young donned his 'cool mask' as a reaction to 'hostile, provocative outside forces', while simultaneously expressing himself with his saxophone in each performance (Dinerstein, 2014). Consequently, the saxophone became the tool with which he, and others like him at the time, were able to uniquely communicate their feelings. This was an authentic, earnest musical manifestation of the complex and delicate situation that the Black male musicians found themselves in during the pre-war, pre-Civil Rights era in the United States. The saxophone is inextricably linked to these feelings and this scene, and consequently symbolises coolness and Blackness. Ingrid Monson also examines this racialised construction of cool, observing that the idea of hipness in relation to Black music has 'inspired several generations of white liberal youth to adopt both the stylistic markers of hipness, …and the socially conscious attitude that hipness has been presumed to signify' (Monson, 1995, p. 398). The saxophone's association with this perception of hipness is one reason why its popularity persisted throughout the twentieth century. Monson contends that, unbeknownst to the jazz-loving white hipsters of the 1940s to the early 1960s, they confused the cool detachment of the Black musicians as absence, inadvertently promoting the ideas of primitivism and exoticism (Monson, 1995). This further demonstrates the complexities of the American post-war racial milieu in which jazz—and by association, the saxophone—situated itself, and alludes to a form of othering carried out by the white youth. It also brings to mind another similarity between jazz and rap, that the audience is comprised of predominantly young white men. With white rap audiences, there still may be the effect of othering as well as a sense of exoticism relating to rap.

When jazz musicians adopted the saxophone in America in the 1910's it was finally paired with a musical genre that suited its capabilities. It had found a home. And yet, according to Cottrell, 'when the saxophone…became closely identified with the jazz tradition and its players, these…associations were to taint the instrument in the eyes of many' (Cottrell, 2012, p. 183). Early in its development jazz music was considered by many to be lowbrow, and the saxophone became the symbol for this music. After all, jazz was a synonym for sexual intercourse, ostensibly due to its beginnings as music that was performed in the Storyville district of New Orleans (ibid.). The music of this era heavily utilised the saxophone, therefore it became closely associated with and representative of the Black American male's struggle with marginalisation in America. This association is referenced by the inclusion of jazz-styled saxophone in Lamar's *To Pimp a Butterfly,* and specifically in Terrace Martin's performance in 'Alright'.

> …all of those rock and roll saxophone players in the 1950s are students of Lester Young. All they're doing is taking Lester Young's ideas with a brighter tone and growling the entire time while they play. Lester Young was the first kind of pop saxophonist even though he was playing jazz. He was the featured soloist in Basie's band which was essentially a dance band. He was the damn star of the band. He was the one everybody wanted to hear. He influenced dozens of jazz musicians and eventually that whole rock and roll thing that started in the late 1940s. Those guys were all Lester Young acolytes. (Marsalis, 2018)

As mentioned in Chapter 2 and as Branford Marsalis noted above, in the 1930s saxophonists Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young brought a certain validity to the instrument through their development of techniques and exploration of its expressive capabilities, and influenced countless saxophonists in later decades. Outside of music, they were also known for their cool personas, which came to be linked with the instrument. Indeed, Amiri Baraka (Jones) notably stated 'since Lester Young, jazz has become, for the most part, a saxophone music' (1963, p. 183). The development of his particular style of jive-talk and the subsequent 'cult of redefinition'

that he conjured in both language and music became a form of communication and ethos for generations of Black men in America (ibid.). American Studies scholar Joel Dinerstein noted that, 'African-American cool can be seen as an ideal state of balance, a calm-but-engaged state of mind between the emotional poles of 'hot' and 'cold'' (2014). These post-war musicians, who were engaged, knowing, and yet somewhat detached, established this sense of coolness as a shield of protection and self-control. This was, in effect, a coping mechanism developed by Black men of the time to handle the daily stress of aggression and hostility aimed at them. In *Blues People* Baraka argues that there is a 'complex nonconformist attitude' that is one of the most vital elements in the musical expression of Black Americans, and this attitude essentially manifested itself as hipness (quoted in Monson, 1995, p. 398).

Lester Young's expressive tool for the dissemination of this clever terminology and its adjoining culture was the saxophone, and it is inextricably linked to the concept of cool. Douglas Daniels in his book *Lester Young: Master of Jive* states that Young, or 'Pres' as he was sometimes called, generally found words to be an inadequate way to present ideas that could be presented musically, and in certain instances he would pick up his saxophone and play part of a song instead of speaking (1985, p. 315). The saxophone's sound was not only his metaphorical voice, it was also his literal voice. One would need to be familiar with the lyrics of the song to know what Pres was trying to say, reinforcing the notion of needing to possess a certain level of intelligence as well as awareness or competency regarding the music and the culture to understand him. When he wasn't playing the saxophone, he invented interesting turns of phrase and redefined words to express himself, not unlike some of the rap artists of today who have developed their own slang terms. His manner of speech mystified people outside of his circle, and in interviews he was almost impossible to understand, yet many of his words and phrases are

still commonly used today. Some of the most famous examples are 'cat' for musician, 'bread' for money, and 'cool' for approval. Young epitomised the definition of cool in every way. As Daniels noted, 'The role of music and language in Afro-American culture clarify the link between Young's ideas, his music, and his jive' (1985, p. 317).

Jazz musicians, and possibly a wider group of Black people in the 1930s and 1940s, used the jive language to defend themselves, or to have something of their own that only certain people could understand. Amid the social changes that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, younger white Americans discovered this scene and they too thought it was cool even though, or perhaps because, they were not a part of it. Jive talk, and the culture that surrounded it, was a form of self-preservation, it was rebellion, and it was a way to earn respect, both within and outside of their immediate environment. Jazz and related genres of Black American music exemplified the philosophy of these important elements of Black culture and experience, and, although there are issues with defining and/or relating the concepts of cool or hipness to race as Monson argued, it is undeniable that the saxophone played a considerable role as the sound that represented this subculture in mid-century America (1995, p. 422). The reception and popularisation of rap in the 1980s followed a similar path, with white audiences thinking that the language, dress, and dance were cool, thus elevating hip-hop to a high level of prominence and commercial success.

The saxophone continued to represent these ideologies as other genres of Black American music emerged and became increasingly popular.

> If you want to look at the saxophone's participation in popular music, it's very difficult to distinguish the recordings from the mid 1940s between jazz and rhythm and blues, or race music. There's a Johnny Hodges record called *Castle Rock* (1955) which was a popular crossover, number one hit record. I don't think people were really distinguishing the musics at that point. There was dance music. As the groups got smaller the horn sections got smaller. What was usually retained was at least the saxophone. (Lenny Pickett, 2018)

While the concept of genre does present limitations, especially during the pivotal, evolutionary moments in music history, Pickett spoke to the salient point which is that the saxophone maintained a presence in most of the styles of Black music that were popular during the first half of the twentieth century in America.

As noted in the previous chapter, audiences were electrified by R&B music and the performers' antics in the late 1940s and onward. Louis Jordan, along with Eddie 'Cleanhead' Vinson, Earl Bostic, Illinois Jacquet, and Jackie Brenston forged a path for other saxophonists such as King Curtis, Cecil 'Big Jay' McNeely, Maceo Parker, and Junior Walker. As discussed in the previous chapter, the robust and intrinsically masculine saxophone sound and style that they were developing became known as honking and screaming, a deeply pejorative term according to Doug Miller (1995, p. 155). Amiri Baraka (Jones) contends that this '…"honking and screaming" was an expression of separation on the part of Black musicians from the sound of Western music and from white popular song in particular' (1963, p. 172). Baraka (Jones) notably made a similar claim regarding early jazz musicians: 'Negro' jazz musicians were expressing their culture while the early white jazz musicians were protesting theirs. These ideas are reiterated and supported in Arnold Shaw's book *Honkers and Shouters* (1978). Shaw adds that the 'honking-falling down syndrome' was 'a conscious or unconscious projection of the post-war segregation of Black people, an abysmal expression of the separateness of the black ghettos' (Shaw, 1978, p. 171). As Guralnick argues, the popularity of mid-century Black musical genres amongst white people 'derived from the inability of mainstream American culture to offer a vehicle capable of expressing the frustration of its own disadvantaged youth' (Miller, 1995, p. 169). This might be the best example of the similarity of both the performance and reception of rap and jazz styles. While these observations on jazz are as much about the social, political, and cultural atmosphere

of the 1950's, it seems that Miller contends that it was the saxophonists that defined the sound of the era, not the era defining the sound. In any case, the saxophone was acting as a useful tool for these musicians as it had for Lester Young, regardless of how we might interpret it now.

The concept of cool was additionally fuelled by the need of Black Americans to express themselves while simultaneously maintaining a sense of emotional self-control that was required by a society that deemed them unequal (Caponi, 1999). As Monson states, 'The modernism of the beboppers explicitly sought to carve out a new space for a specifically African American creativity' (Monson, 1995, p. 411). So, while Louis Jordan went in a mainstream direction and experienced substantial success with his brand of 'popular' jazz or jump blues, bebop artists sought not only to change the sound of jazz, but to reject the legacy of the 'minstrel mask' by emphasizing 'art' over 'entertainment' (Monson, 1995, p. 407). Monson's definition allows us to assume that Jordan was proliferating minstrelsy or primitivism in his performances, while the beboppers pursued a socially conscious 'other' and 'modern' form of art music. For these racially marginalised musicians, bebop was a platform by which these artists could culturally elevate not only jazz, but African American masculinity. 'The saxophone's easy ability to project a player's persona, but to do it in a nonverbal way, on the other hand, seems to offer a gateway to new levels of perception and experience' (Segell, 2006, p. 283). The instrument was able to exist as a crucial element of both socially conscious music played for smaller audiences, as well as widely circulated popular styles.

> This hip subculture, comprising Black Americans interested in Western artistic nonconformity and white Americans captivated by urban African American styles of music, dress, and speech, fashioned itself as a vanguard cultural force against the 'shoddy cornucopia of popular American culture.' (Monson 1995, p. 397; Baraka, 1963, p. 200)

The reference to this subculture as 'hip' the implication is that these Black Americans were 'in the know', or socially conscious, as Monson has suggested. In parlance of the 2010s, we might refer to that as being woke, as mentioned above. Baraka (Jones) additionally observed that African Americans in the 1940s exuded a calm, unimpressed comportment and that their alienation or non-participation was translated by outsiders as cool (1963, p. 213). 'Hip' could also mean 'cool' at the time, and Black musicians developed these distinctive modes of music, dress and speech as a defence mechanism. Joel Dinerstein also speaks of this:

> Being cool is the public face of survival. As a term and concept, cool unifies the affinities of these concurrent artistic forms around the search for new masculine modes of subjectivity and identity in the face of modernity, trauma, mass society, technological encroachment, and geopolitical crisis. (Dinerstein, 2013)

In this passage Dinerstein also interprets the actions of these men as cool. This could be viewed as somewhat reductive, but I do not think he meant it to be a trivialisation of what these artists were striving to convey. On the contrary, it was because of their awareness that they were able to alter the way Americans thought about jazz and to elevate the genre to a new level of cultural significance: we could not have had one without the other. Black musicians performed their music and the (mostly) white audience members assumed the role of non-passive bystanders; together these two groups of people lifted 'modern' jazz up from its lowbrow cultural status. In a more contemporary context, artists such as Wynton Marsalis and Christian McBride perpetuate this hard-won cultural status for American jazz by commanding large fees for their sold-out shows at concert halls around the world, thereby similarly updating perceptions of jazz in relation to race and class in the twenty-first century. Present-day jazz musicians, like Marsalis and McBride, are not socially bound in the same ways as their forerunners, so they are perhaps not compelled to exhibit the same types of affect-control. However, we do not yet live in a post-

racial world, so the issues of race, class, and coolness are still integral components to the examination of both jazz and commercial popular music.

The three elements of race, class, and coolness remain fundamental in the contemporary performance of rap music, and today's Black male rappers must maintain the traditions of affect-control or cool masculinity and authenticity that have come to be expected of them by audiences and the mainstream entertainment media in order to achieve critical and commercial success. These factors also commonly make up the connotations represented by the saxophone in performance, and Lamar purposefully deploys the saxophone and characteristics of jazz in his music to enhance his message. There is also the implication of nostalgia for Black American musical genres of the past in Lamar's music, but the principal suggestion evoked by the inclusion of jazz and the saxophone in *To Pimp a Butterfly* is the power and creativity of the Black musicians who came before him.

CRITICAL RECEPTION AND PRODUCTION

'Alright' is a protest song that articulates the issues surrounding race in America while simultaneously reassuring listeners that things will turn out alright, a fresh perspective in rap and popular music of the time. Jazz-styled saxophone improvisations, played by Terrace Martin, are integrated into the music to serve as a reminder of the rich traditions of Black music in America. It is a nostalgic gesture, highlighting the influential styles of jazz, soul, and R&B that played a part in the shaping of American culture and identity throughout the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, and formed the aesthetic foundation of the album *To Pimp a Butterfly*. The sound of the improvised saxophone lines symbolises those earlier genres and, by association, the power of the music to represent creativity, progress, and hope. The incorporation of the saxophone on this track is intended to evoke the ethos of those earlier styles, and Terrace Martin has gone as far as to

compare Lamar to the revered saxophonist John Coltrane; a reference to similarities that Martin sees between the dedication and spirituality that both Coltrane and Lamar bring to their respective genres (Weiner, 2015).

Along with Martin, several contemporary jazz musicians participated in the making of the album, such as the saxophonist Kamasi Washington, trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire, vocalist Lalah Hathaway, and pianist Robert Glasper, supplementing the album's characterisation as a collaborative emblem of both the past and future of Black American music. Martin performed with Lamar at the Grammy Awards in 2016 and was behind jail bars on stage, a strong statement concerning the continual struggle against systems of oppression that Black Americans face. The song became the unofficial anthem of the Black Lives Matter movement, and this is one of the ways in which the song exists as a powerful depiction of the social, cultural, and political considerations of a particular moment in American history. The video adds further narrative elements which aid in the telling of the story of racially motivated police violence in the United States, protested by the Black Lives Matter movement. The saxophone is not represented visually in the video, but its aural signature still serves to evoke jazz's intrinsic coupling with the agency and creativity.

The album's reception in the mainstream media was swift and effusive, and played an integral part in the album's popularity in the months following its release. The juxtaposition of modern lyrical content featured on *To Pimp a Butterfly* with the stylistic markers of music, which pays homage to musical genres of the past, combined to elicit widespread acclaim from the mainstream media. Many of the articles surveyed extol the virtues of Lamar's socially conscious lyrical content and incorporation of funk and jazz-styled musical elements. The *New York Times,* in the week after the album was released, referred to Lamar as 'not only one of hip-hop's most

provocative thinkers, but one of its most history-minded as well', in reference to the older styles featured in the music (2015). Greg Tate's review of the album for *Rolling Stone* stated, 'if we're talking insurgent content and currency, Lamar straight *owns* rap relevancy on *Butterfly*', a clear endorsement of Lamar's social consciousness and ability to transform that into poetry as well as commercially viable rap music (2015). The title of Weiner's article for *Billboard* was 'How Kendrick Lamar Transformed Into "The John Coltrane of Hip-Hop" on "To Pimp a Butterfly"' (2015). It could be said that Coltrane has been elevated to legendary status by critics and musicians alike for his virtuosity and sense of otherworldliness, so this was a high compliment. Del Cowie's article for the Canadian Broadcasting Company's website dedicated to music stated that Lamar's album 'provided a critical gateway to some of the most exciting musicians and movements currently happening in jazz' and made the case that *To Pimp a Butterfly* was responsible for a quantifiable surge in the popularity of jazz music (Cowie, 2015).

Although the majority of the commentary surrounding the album was favourable, there were other more critical views besides that of the feminist perspective from Willis, mentioned above. Clover Hope remarked on the 'overwhelming blackness' of the album in her review for the liberal, female-focused *Jezebel* website, stating that the '…initial feeling is suffocating', and that all of the elements of Blackness represented in the album equate to a sense of 'Dis Tew Much' (2015). One of the many articles that Justin Charity has written about Lamar and his music for the online youth culture magazine *Complex* asks the question, 'why did everyone claim to enjoy *To Pimp a Butterfly*?' and wonders why such a successful rapper would make a jazz album in 2015 (2015a). He went on to note that it was 'wildly derivative' of so many Black musical influences, none of which Lamar elevates, and remarks on the outdated pertinence of jazz as a popular genre (Charity, 2015a). Charity goes on to make the interesting point that *To*

Pimp a Butterfly is somewhat impervious to critique because its 'social urgency' and importance may outweigh any other observable shortcomings of the album, and that the torrent of favourable reviews and general absence of negative reviews reflect the difficulty that some 'white and middle-class' reviewers may have had when assessing the album (ibid.). As Rawiya Kameir was quoted as saying in Charity's article, 'how do you assess something that is not addressed to you?' (2015a).

In the context of racial politics in the United States in 2015, the difficulties of reviewing an album that features thematic material relating to race highlights the delicate nature of discussions of that topic in the United States, and the possibility that an unfavourable review of a Black artist's album written by a white journalist could be construed as racially motivated. Nevertheless, Charity ends the article by noting that *Butterfly* is an instantly classic record despite some of its flaws, and that it would 'buckle' without the addition of the tracks 'King Kunta' and 'Alright' (2015a). In the more critical articles written by Hope and Charity, the discussion of the song 'Alright' still tended to be positive, and the track was listed as one of the best songs of 2015 by the *New York Times,* popular music website Pitchfork, New York-based alternative news weekly *The Village Voice,* and *Billboard* (Pareles, et al, 2015; Patel, 2015; Village Voice Staff, 2015; Billboard staff, 2015).

NARRATIVE AND MUSICAL ANALYSIS

As many mainstream articles noted, the song 'Alright' was the most radio-friendly release from the *To Pimp a Butterfly* album. Despite its lack of *Billboard* chart success, the song circulated through several highly visible platforms such as its nomination for Song of the Year, Lamar's performance at the Grammy Awards in 2016, and its adoption as an anthem by the

Black Lives Matter movement. The video for the song was released on June 30, 2015 and enjoyed an enthusiastic critical reception that contributed further to the song's circulation and popularity. The director was Colin Tilley, who also directed Derulo's 'Talk Dirty' video, but Lamar's video was more cinematic and symbolic in scope. The radio release of 'Alright' is almost half the length of the video, with the radio version of the song measuring under four minutes (3:39) and the video clocking in close to seven minutes (6:55). The difference in length is due to the bookending of additional visual material; the musical material begins at 2:40 and ends at the 5:55 mark.

The video was shot entirely in black and white and is comprised of several different scenes of Los Angeles including the sea, the streets, skyscrapers, the sky, shoes hanging on a power line, and a young man riding a skateboard. The first two minutes of the video contain no music, and the scenes depicted are accompanied by various sounds of the city such as ocean waves, a maid asking to enter a hotel room, a woman speaking Spanish, and the turning of the dial on a radio. The environmental sounds subside and Lamar's screaming is heard at the fifteen-second mark, followed by spoken dialogue which begins around the thirty-five second mark. The scenes that accompany the dialogue depict other views of the city including violence, a police officer, fires burning, and indiscriminate yelling. Just before the two-minute mark a white policeman appears on the screen as he is struggling to place handcuffs on a Black man. The man escapes from the policeman's grasp and the policeman brandishes a gun, which he is shown shooting in slow motion; at the exact moment the bullet emerges from the barrel of the gun the title flashes on the screen: 'Kendrick Lamar, ALRIGHT, directed by Colin Tilley, The Little Homies, Top Dawg Ent.' (Entertainment).

The next scene shows Lamar in the driver's seat of a car accompanied by four of his friends. The car does not seem to be moving very quickly, and as the camera pans out one can see that there are four white police officers carrying the car down the street. The lyrics and musical material that are featured for about thirty seconds, starting at the 2:11 mark in the video, are completely different from the radio and album versions of the track. It seems to be a fragment of another song that Lamar decided to quote here and consists of approximately ten measures, or around thirty seconds of material. 'Alright' officially begins at the 2:40 mark and is accompanied by several familiar music video scenes such as Lamar driving around in a car, views of skyscrapers in the city, and an arrangement of a wall of ghetto blasters in an empty lot with people dancing in front of them. The dancers are notably also shown on the hood, roof, and trunk of a police cruiser, performing in active rebellion against the policing of people of colour. The scenes change rapidly, which brings to mind the Derulo video in which Tilley, the director, also changed scenes or perspectives very quickly. The most memorable and distinctive visual aspect of this video is the image of Lamar floating; he hovers above the street throughout many of the scenes, and this appears to symbolise his attempt to rise above the struggles of everyday life in an American city such as Los Angeles. As a Black person, the daily grind of the city is justifiably more oppressive due to living in fear of the police. At one point Lamar is shown standing atop the pole of a streetlight as onlookers gaze up at him in wonder and reverence. At the 5:41 mark in the video, a policeman appears and emerges from his cruiser with a shotgun; he spots Lamar on top of the light pole and raises his right arm (while the left hand is holding the shotgun) points his hand, which is held in the shape of a gun, up to him. He pretends to shoot, and the sound of a real gunshot is heard. Lamar falls from his high position in slow motion, and as he gently floats

to the ground, a smile gradually appears on his face. This is the final scene of the video, besides the credit for 'Top Dawg Ent.' which appears for one second at the end of the video.

In an interview published on *MTV's* website, the director Colin Tilley revealed that Lamar and his manager had come up with the idea of Lamar floating around Los Angeles, spreading positivity despite all of the 'madness', or instances of violence and injustice that had recently occurred (Tardio, 2015). Tilley took that idea and crafted many of the other images around the primary concept, which did not focus on one specific event, but attempted to express a general sense of the energy surrounding instances of police brutality that had happened around that time (ibid.). Tilley went on to mention that the scenes of people dancing in the video are meant to supplement the feeling of hope, as dancing is 'an act of celebration', and the smile on Lamar's face after he appears to be shot down at the end of the video was a parting symbol of optimism (Tardio, 2015). Lamar being shot down from his lofty position on top of the light pole was meant to signify his humanness, and that even though he has achieved a level of prominence as a rapper and social commentator, he is not untouchable (ibid.). This video also views the city of Los Angeles from divergent perspectives, first through an innocuous lens (the sea, skyscrapers, the sky), and then from a Black perspective (a police officer, fires burning, yelling). To many Americans, the scenes depicted in the video are almost too familiar to be considered violent; the smile on Lamar's face and the chorus of the song is reminding us that we will survive, somehow, and represents his aspiration to save us all from the despair of people being brutalised by police.

In addition to the powerful images portrayed in the video, 'Alright' is primarily defined by its lyrical content and the almost omnipresent saxophone improvisations. The song is rhythmic by its nature, with the bass, drums, and rap vocals all displaying relatively complex rhythmic

gestures. Pharrell Williams is credited with creating the beat for the song, which highlights the percussive sounds of the hi-hat and digitised snare drum. Notably, the stop time technique, in which all musical elements drop out of the music briefly, but the vocals remain, is deployed strategically in this song. It is an unexpected element that draws attention to the lyrics, and its use here is evocative of Little Richard's music of the 1950s which brought stop time into the mainstream and provides another example of the inclusion of intrinsic components of Black music from earlier in the twentieth century.

There are several melodic components in 'Alright', which is in the key of G major and does not stray from that key or employ a chord progression; this ensures that the lyrics and message are prioritised. However, the seemingly straightforward technical aspect of the tonal centre described here diminishes the sonic intricacies that are realised in the form of rhythmic variation, stop time, the layered effect of background singers, and the improvisational material played by Martin. The song begins with a cappella voices, seemingly the first melodic material, but they quickly shift to the background as Lamar enters with spoken dialogue in the introduction. Terrace Martin's improvisational saxophone is also featured in the introduction and is all the more conspicuous due to the absence of bass and drums. In the chorus, Pharrell Williams sings the title of the song, 'Nigga we gon' be alright'; a chorus which is altered in the radio-friendly version of the song, with all instances of the word 'nigga' removed so the refrain is simply, 'we gon' be alright'.

'Alright' begins with a quote from the novel *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker: 'Alls my life I had to fight' (1982). This sets the tone for the remainder of the song, and the opening words represent two levels of meaning: one is a reference to a seminal work about the lives of Black American women in the 1930s, and the other is a reference to Lamar's own upbringing as a youth

in Compton, California. The lyrics go on to detail the struggles experienced, decade after decade, by people of colour in the United States; but rather than being overcome or defeated by the discrimination, Lamar presents a hopeful view:

> *When you know, we been hurt, been down before, (nigga)**
> *When my pride was low, lookin' at the world like, where do we go, (nigga)?*
> *And we hate Popo, wanna kill us dead in the street for sure, (nigga)*
> *I'm at the preacher's door*
> *My knees gettin' weak and my gun might blow but we gon' be alright*

**The parentheses denote lyrics that were heard in the original song but were removed in the version released for radio airplay.*

Lamar is saying that this is not a new phenomenon, that 'we've been down before' and we hate the police (Popo), we are on the verge of violence or action ('my knees gettin' weak and my gun might blow') but if we demonstrate affect control, we can stay **cool**, we can survive (we gon' be alright').

An additional way that Lamar uses lyrics to relate to people both inside and outside of his community is the struggle between good and evil. He references the name 'Lucy' twice in 'Alright':

> *What you want, your house, your car*
> *Forty acres and a mule, a piano, a guitar?*
> *Anything, see my name is Lucy, I'm your dog*

And again, in the 'outro':

> *Found myself screamin' in the hotel room*
> *I didn't wanna self-destruct, the evils of Lucy was all around me*
> *So I went runnin' for answers*

He is referring to a person, and one theory posits that 'Lucy' is short for Lucifer, the devil (Kornhaber, 2015). Contextually, this makes sense. In the first example a struggle with what could be greed is depicted, with 'Lucy' positioning himself as a loyal friend ('I'm your dog') there to support, or entice you, to participate in capitalistic endeavours. Another interpretation is that

Lamar is saying that (white, American) society has given you these things ('Forty acres and a mule'), what more could a person possibly want? The concept of materialism, or more specifically the connection between capitalism and inequality[25], still exists in this interpretation, but it is a bit more sardonic in tone. Lamar is saying that the devil, 'Lucy', is tempting people into buying things they do not necessarily need to feel better about their place in society, shifting their focus away from working towards social justice and equality in their communities. People of colour in America yearn for equality and respect, not these material things.

In the second group of lyrics this is an internal conflict in which he is fighting for self-preservation. He strives to stay in the light and not descend into darkness even though he feels surrounded by it. Again, the chorus is the reassurance that they (the Black community, possibly all Americans) and he (Lamar) need; hope is not lost, but it takes work to cultivate. The lyrical examples above speak to both the Black community as a whole and one individual in the community and demonstrate Lamar's ability to communicate and relate to listeners on multiple levels.

TERRACE MARTIN

Similar to qualities typically assigned to rap music, in many ways the saxophone symbolises coolness, masculinity and authenticity, and it augments those characteristics in 'Alright' through its close association with jazz. There are various elements of jazz heard here such as the improvisation in the saxophone and the appearance of both the flat nine and sharp nine, and this reflects the well-documented fact that Lamar enlisted the help of several different jazz musicians in the making of this album, such as the jazz and funk crossover bassist Thundercat, the pianist Robert Glasper, and the saxophonists Kamasi Washington and Terrace

Martin. The inclusion of the saxophone and other jazz musicians signals nostalgia, but alludes to a different part of the saxophone's rich past than the Katy Perry track discussed in Chapter 4. Here, the instrument likely references mid-century American jazz through the performance style and musical material. In an interview with Justin Charity for *Complex* Martin stated, 'I don't know what to call this album. Some people call it jazz…but it's heavily Black in general!' (2015). Martin is referring to the album *To Pimp a Butterfly,* on which he plays alto saxophone on all but two of the sixteen tracks and is also credited as a co-producer.

The saxophone exists as a secondary layer in the production of 'Alright', subordinate to the lyrics, but is significant as the primary instrument in the song that presents melodic material. Improvisatory interjections from the saxophone can be heard through the track. As the song begins, the saxophone serves as a countermelody, of sorts, to the text. The sparseness of the texture in the opening ensures that attention is drawn to the saxophone, the point at which the audience is meant to be aware of its presence and overriding symbolism. Considered in combination with the lyrical material, this represents Lamar's attempt to reference significant Black cultural contributions of the past in a contemporary amalgamation of rap and protest. Throughout the song, the material Martin plays is improvised over the G major (concert) chord, and this aleatoric approach virtually ensures that if the song is heard in a live performance the saxophone part will sound different. There is no discernible chord progression, and the emphasis on the ninth scale degree that Martin employs, which is common in jazz, is also heard occasionally in the keyboards and bass line.

Martin's playing style and tone production are not particularly bold or assertive, but they are consistent, and the improvisations are more melodic in nature than virtuosic or technical. It sounds as if he is listening to the lyrics and considering them as he improvises, similar to a call

and response relationship with Lamar. This endows his playing with an air of contemplation, and the somewhat reserved, smooth tone that he produces seems to align with this feeling. Interestingly, the first time that Lamar appears standing on the top of a streetlight in the video, looking down on the daily grind of the streets of Los Angeles, Martin is holding a high note in the altissimo range on the alto, which sounds like an aural representation of Lamar's suspension in the air. That point is where the transcription begins below:

Figure 5.1

This is a portion of the improvisational material that Martin plays in 'Alright', in the key of E flat for alto saxophone, and it occurs at 4:28 in the music video. In the final measure of figure 5.1 (at 4:34 in the video), all sounds drop out of the production except Lamar's voice and the saxophone. This has the effect of highlighting the sound of the saxophone and the emotional appeal elicited by a single, strained sounding note in the altissimo range, which in turn supports Lamar's lyrics at that point: '*my name is Lucy, I'm your dog; mother fucker you can live at the mall'*. This is another reference to the temptations of capitalism in the United States for people of colour, as described in the lyrical analysis above.

The musical material in figure 4.0 is representative of the improvisations that Martin executes throughout the track. The song is in the key of G major (concert pitch), which is the key of E for alto saxophone, but Martin is exclusively improvising over the static harmony of the track by playing a G major seven chord (concert Bbmaj7). This has the effect of adding

harmonic interest to the track because he is improvising over a chord borrowed from a different key, a technique common in jazz improvisation performance practices. By approaching the music in this way, Martin is able to highlight the 'blue' notes of the home key of G concert (lowered 3rd and lowered 7th scale degrees) while keeping the improvisational material securely within a defined tonic structure. The improvisations that he plays sound like 'noodling' at times, or playing a selection of notes indiscriminately, but he arrives on the high, emotionally appealing notes at key lyrical points in the song, establishing that there is intention behind his note selections.

In comparison to the two saxophonists discussed in the previous case studies, Martin's tone is present but compact; not aggressive or emphatic like Ori Kaplan's, nor bluesy and powerful as heard in Lenny Pickett's playing. In contrast, Martin's tone in this track is evocative of the saxophone sounds one would hear in a small acoustic jazz group. Similar to the other two examples, the musical notes alone in figure 5.1 do not fully communicate the expressivity in Martin's playing. He bends and scoops a few of the high notes, and there is a smokiness or raspiness in the timbre. It is laid back in nature, reminiscent in style and airiness of tone similar to some of the 'cool' West coast jazz saxophonists of the 1950s and 1960s like Art Pepper and Paul Desmond, and recreated by a few contemporary saxophonists such as Martin's collaborator on this album, Kamasi Washington. Martin's is not the timbre typically produced in an atmosphere surrounded by electronic and/or amplified instruments; it is more intimate in nature. He does not use large, forceful columns of air to support the sound, which is not intended as a criticism but rather an observation of the differences of the approach to performance practice. Whereas the timbres produced by saxophonists like Pickett and Brecker in the 1980s were big and bold, some saxophonists in recent years subscribe to a compact, focused sound that is

sometimes described as smaller. The characteristics mentioned above could represent inherent aspects of Martin's saxophone style, or they could be an attempt to match the thematic material of the song; aggressive playing does not necessarily align with the overall message of optimism in 'Alright'.

In an interview for *Ebony*, a popular Black entertainment magazine in the United States, Martin said that his playing is influenced by jazz greats like Coltrane and Joe Henderson, but also admitted, 'If jazz hadn't come to me in the form of hip-hop, I wouldn't give a fuck. I would not be playing jazz saxophone if I hadn't heard A Tribe Called Quest' (Allen, 2016). While you can hear evidence of jazz characteristics in his tonal concept and improvisational style, it is also apparent that jazz saxophone has not been his primary focus. The improvisatory material on 'Alright' is less complicated in nature than that sometimes heard from jazz saxophone purists, and this reflects his background of growing up listening to popular styles such as hip-hop, R&B, and funk. Martin's playing seems to be a blend of contemporary popular styles with what he learned from the jazz greats.

Not everyone is a fan of Martin's particular performance style. In the interview I conducted with Marsalis, we discussed some of the musicians that performed on *To Pimp a Butterfly*. I asked him about the blending of jazz and hip-hop styles that Lamar's album put forth and he emphatically stated that you cannot blend musical styles, and that what Robert Glasper, Terrace Martin, and Kamasi Washington are playing is not jazz. In regard to Martin's playing, Marsalis observed, 'Terrace is not a saxophone player. It's just the worst saxophone playing ever. I don't know how much influence he has on Kendrick…all of these people laying claim to all this stuff, but he's not a good saxophone player' (2018). When I asked about Kamasi Washington he

said, 'he's not a jazz player. I don't know why they're calling him a jazz musician' (Marsalis, 2018).

This topic was discussed earlier in Chapter 3 and reminds us of the class divide that exists between traditional jazz/classical saxophonists and saxophonists who play in popular genres; it reflects a tendency for jazz and classical players to devalue players of other genres, and the almost incessant need to pass judgment on them. From Marsalis' perspective as a highly accomplished traditional jazz musician, this perspective is not uncommon but is anachronistic. No, Lamar's track is not jazz in a conventional sense, so it should not be judged as such. It is popular music that borrows characteristics and 'real' instruments from jazz, R&B, and funk styles to provide support for the expression and perception of authenticity of the album, and it is meant for a mass audience the majority of which do not listen to traditional jazz (Moore, 2002, p. 213).[26] To a general listener, some of the styles featured on this album exhibit enough of the characteristics of jazz for it to be considered as such. Marsalis is an expert in traditional jazz therefore he believes that there is objectivity in his judgment of Martin's saxophone playing. It is of little consequence if Martin is considered a skilled saxophonist by traditional jazz standards because his playing serves a different function in this music. Consideration of the context and the audience for the music is a more pragmatic approach to an assessment of the musical value, and Martin's saxophone playing on 'Alright' undoubtedly provided a particular sound and theoretical heft to the song, a sound which positively contributed to the overall concept and reception of the song.

It is just one example, but Mindi Abair's story from Chapter 3 about being judged by an audience member at a performance with Jonathan Butler demonstrates that there are still pre-conceived notions pertaining to what a saxophonist looks like and sounds like. In the case of

'Alright', Terrace Martin 'fits the bill' and represents the typically assigned qualities of masculinity, authenticity, and coolness as a young Black male saxophonist, qualities which in turn aided the overall interpretation of the intended meaning of the song (Abair, 2018). In this context, Martin's contributions should be valued for their effective role in a socially impactful song and not maligned for a perceived lack of virtuosic saxophone playing.

BLACK LIVES MATTER

'Alright' became the unofficial anthem for the Black Lives Matter social movement, which had reached a high level of visibility in the summer of 2015 when the song was released. Young people at Black Lives Matters rallies across the United States were chanting the lyrics to the song. In an interview published in the *New York Times* in 2015, Joe Coscarelli asked Lamar if he had expected that to happen: 'Definitely. Simple phrase: 'we gon' be alright'. It's a chant of hope and feeling. […] This is what's happening in the world—not only to me but to my community' (Lamar quoted in Coscarelli, 2015). Lamar is compelled to act as a guiding voice in his community, and his lyrics demonstrate that sense of social consciousness and action.

The first time I heard the song I did not register the optimism, only lamented Lamar's lyrics about the truth of daily life as a man of colour in America. The conventions of masculine rap performance and delivery of the lyrics had obscured my understanding of the words themselves, so the expression of hope was somewhat unexpected because I was not overly familiar with his music and his perspective. My own preconceived notions regarding rap performance had led me to mistakenly underestimate the song's impact, and I am happy to say that it forced me to confront some of my own biases. This was my own experience, but it seems to signify the broader impact of 'Alright' on a diverse audience in the United States.

Lamar's music attempts to excoriate the myth of a post-racial America. I lived in St. Louis for eleven years, including at the time of Michael Brown's death and during the aftermath amidst the protests, rallies, and riots that constituted the strengthening of the Black Lives Matter movement. Michael Brown was an unarmed Black teenager who was shot and killed by a white police officer in the northern St. Louis suburb of Ferguson, Missouri. The police officer was acquitted of all wrongdoing in the shooting, and protests were carried out for several weeks after the acquittal. Ferguson and St. Louis became a hotbed of activity and support for the Black Lives Matter movement. I participated in the protests to show support for Michael Brown's family, the movement, and my intense indignation for what seemed like a lack of justice being carried out. It was around this time when I first heard Kendrick Lamar's music, and it spoke to me and millions of others through its address of the controversies affecting our communities.

Some people believed that a post-racial America would be realised in the form of President Barack Obama, but the reality is that it created a backlash, or 'whitelash' as some have called it, and people all over America have since been emboldened to disclose their prejudices. This was visible as a resident of St. Louis, one of the most segregated cities in America (Oliveri, 2015), where social unrest had proliferated to some extent before Michael Brown's death and greatly intensified afterwards. Ladee Hubbard recently noted that 'hostility towards Black lives matters continues and is so cruelly ahistorical, demonstrating a refusal to acknowledge the particular experience of victims of racialised persecution' (2018).

Similar examples of discrimination persist in the United States, and six years after Michael Brown's death Americans still demand justice for Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and many others, and continue protesting in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. However, I have not heard the lyrics to 'Alright' chanted as much as they once were.

The sense of hope and optimism in the lyrics seems difficult to muster in the midst of continual episodes of racially motivated violence against unarmed people of colour and the proliferation of divisive rhetoric by the forty-fifth President of the United States and his administration. A new sense of hope and perhaps relief has come for some people since the inauguration of a new President in January 2021, but the deep political divides that have been exposed and have shaken American democracy will take quite some time to restore.

SUMMARY

This chapter examined how rap and the saxophone historically intersect with race and the qualities of coolness, authenticity, and masculinity. Kendrick Lamar's song 'Alright' exhibits the conventional performative qualities such as masculinity and aggression that are associated with rap while simultaneously expressing emotion and vulnerability, a unique and successful combination that signals Lamar's wokeness. The song's lyrics detail some of the ways that Black people suffer, both physically and emotionally, from violence and injustice in America, but rather than give in or give up Lamar implores people to be cool and remain hopeful. The improvised saxophone countermelodies support the thematic material in the song through connotations of coolness and nostalgia, and while Martin's playing style may not be considered exemplary by traditional jazz or classical saxophone standards it effectively functions here as a reference to the creativity and agency of Black musicians of the past. It symbolises the idea that Black people have survived in America for this long, and they will keep on surviving and hopefully thriving in the future.

'Alright' is a powerful political song that played an important role in the social movements that grew in the mid 2010s as a response to racially motivated violence in the United

States. It calls to mind some of Bob Dylan's music from the 1960s; his music did not keep the United States out of Vietnam, but it spoke to many people who opposed involvement in the war, and it exists as a definitive fragment of culture that is representative of that time, place, and emotional climate. Lamar's music from 2015 demonstrated a similar capacity to support and embolden the cause for which it stands. The video for the song displays some of the ways in which Lamar experiences race in America, and he positions himself (or possibly we, the audience, situate him) as the voice against racial inequality in America. The subtext here is allusion to the fact that racial injustices persist and feel similar to pre-Civil Rights America in many ways.

Kendrick Lamar is a celebrated rap star, a position which provides him with a platform to reassure people to stay positive despite the seemingly endless propagation of racist ideologies and systems in America. The Black musicians of the past had to exude 'transcendental balance' and 'calmness in time of stress', in other words, coolness, in the face of oppression, and rap artists in the 2010s carry on this expressive tradition (Thompson, 1973, p. 41). The interjections of the saxophone's improvisations in the song represent the perseverance and resilience that is required of people of colour in America today. Black saxophonists defined the concept of cool, and as a result the saxophone projects racialised and gendered identities related to coolness and authenticity in the context of Lamar's album *To Pimp a Butterfly.*

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This chapter aims to comprehensively summarise the investigation from each of the previous chapters, reviewing the ways that the saxophone intersects with various social and cultural touchstones as a significant artefact in mainstream popular music and culture in the United States. In regard to the background for this project, the first time I heard Lenny Pickett's squealing saxophone solo in the song 'Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)' (2010) on the radio, it piqued my interest and seemed to be a harbinger of a new but familiar trend in pop music. Soon after, I heard several other high-profile examples of broadly disseminated popular songs that featured the saxophone and my intuition seemed to be substantiated. The saxophone's return to chart-topping popular songs in the early 2010s was what brought me to this project. At first, I did not consider that this could be the result of popular music's shift towards reviving the nostalgic styles and sounds of popular music of the 1980s, but after further review I discovered that the signification of nostalgia was symptomatic of a broader set of pertinent social and cultural identities assigned to the instrument, identities that help to perpetuate and define its role in contemporary popular music. The instrument's deployment in certain contexts means that these identities are performed, metaphorically and musically, by saxophonists. Interviewing saxophonists provided a foundation for an analysis of the associations signified by the instrument and enabled a mapping of the cultural web within which the saxophone itself is an actor.

The primary goal of this project was to answer the question of how the saxophone contributes to American popular music via its historical and symbolic associations. I used elements of critical organology, ethnography, autoethnography, and concepts borrowed from media studies and reception theory to carry out an examination of case studies, to answer this

and the supplementary questions that emerged.[27] In response, this thesis argues that the saxophone functions to enhance particular characteristics in music through its historical and symbolic associations to qualities with which it has been endowed by the artists that play it, in relation to the context of their performances. The themes of race, cool/kitsch, and gender/sexuality explored in previous chapters are the socially constructed qualities that have emerged from its connection to saxophonists, in addition to the shifting identities that it has acquired over time as a musical object with a noteworthy visual and audible presence in commercial popular culture. The saxophone is a versatile musical instrument, and this characteristic is beneficial to its ability to shape listener perceptions in meaningful ways within contemporary mainstream music. The three songs investigated in the case studies showcase the instrument's versatility through its reputation as an iconic and cool element of 1980s popular culture, an aural representation of gendered expression and sexuality, and an auspicious symbol of Black American political and musical culture.

The second research question asked about the saxophone's associations in more recent pop songs and the investigation of this question placed the saxophone in contemporary contexts, exploring its functionality in specific examples of popular music in the United States in the twenty-first century. The three songs examined in the case studies were released between 2010 and 2015, and these studies explored the background of the popular artists and the environment surrounding the production, release, and reception of each musical example. They represent just a few of the various styles of music and artists that utilised the saxophone in mainstream music of the early 2010s, signalling the instrument's noteworthy return to the spotlight. An investigation of the key themes that were portrayed in the songs and their accompanying videos laid the groundwork for interpreting how elements of the saxophone's identity enhanced the

expression of thematic and musical material in the three examples. The analyses additionally served to map the saxophonists to the artists, and to specifically illustrate how each sax player contributed to the production and creation of the songs. The musical examples were chosen for this project because of the notable use of the instrument, as well as each song's widespread circulation and cultural impact.

The case studies examined how the saxophone engages with one or more of the key themes. In Katy Perry's light-hearted hit song 'Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)' the saxophone played a part in portraying simultaneously kitschy and cool features, because of the retro backdrop of the video that featured celebrities that were famous in previous decades and the hip modernity demonstrated in Lenny Pickett's electrifying, and electrified, saxophone solo. Kenny G is a self-aware subject of kitsch relating to the saxophone, and his inclusion in the video was more suitable as a symbolic reference of that quality, while Pickett's distinctive virtuosity conveys coolness. This divergence between visual and aural/cool and kitsch properties was purposefully orchestrated by Perry and her producers in order to relate to a broad and diverse group of listeners. Audience reception of the song and video relied on knowledge of popular objects and people of the past that signalled the key themes, and also engaged with nostalgic elements that activated a sense of sentimentality.

Jason Derulo's 'Talk Dirty' featured the saxophone as the catchy and sexy primary hook of the song, highlighting a connection to masculine sexuality, one of the instrument's most conspicuous qualities. The track constituted an attempt by Derulo to release music that was more obviously R&B instead of pop: the Black masculinity closely connected to the R&B genre was deliberately accentuated to suppress any notion of pop's feminine undertones. The addition of a rap verse and the powerful sax hook aided in this goal and provided a modicum of street 'cred' to

Derulo. The saxophone is associated with masculine identity and sexuality, even though there are many female saxophonists in the world, and the stereotyping of gendered expression in the instrument's performance is a subject that requires further exploration. In 'Talk Dirty', Ori Kaplan's playing style combines conventional saxophone performing styles of the past with modern pop sensibilities. His performance is reminiscent of some of the great R&B saxophonists of mid-century America in the way that he conspicuously performs masculinity, but when combined with the multicultural harmonic material this performance style is rejuvenated and relatable to contemporary audiences.

In the United States the decade of the 2010s has been partially defined by social unrest stemming from systemic racism and its lethal manifestations. Kendrick Lamar's 'Alright' speaks to the injustices experienced by people of colour by juxtaposing modern rap performance styles and topical lyrical content with jazz, funk, and R&B styles of the past that served a similar socio-political role in mid-century America amid the Civil Rights movement. The saxophone is the principal signifier of the older styles, but it is presented here in a stylish package that speaks to contemporary audiences. Listeners related to the song because Lamar's lyrics acknowledge the hardships of the past while emphasising the necessity of maintaining hope for the future. The instrument's participation in a song that became the unofficial anthem of the Black Lives Matter social movement and played a part in Lamar's role as an important positive voice at a crucial moment in American history demonstrates its ability to implicitly connect to social and political affairs.

In each case study the instrument reinforces distinctly American notions of popular culture, and transmits both classic and modern iterations of the concepts of coolness, kitsch, gender, sexuality, and race. Fundamentally, the saxophone exists in these contemporary examples as an

element of nostalgia, summoning the coolness and kitsch of commercial popular culture of the 1980s, the racial connotations and coolness characterised by mid-twentieth century jazz saxophonists, and the masculine gendered expression and coolness of early rock and roll. However, there are two factors that contribute to the modernisation of the instrument in contemporary contexts: the juxtaposition of a 'real' or analog musical instrument participating in digitally produced music (which is currently the predominant mode of musical production), and through the way in which the instrument's association with kitsch is advantageous to its reputation. The viral videos discussed in Chapter 2 had the effect of reigniting nostalgia and highlighting the saxophone's capacity for comedy, both of which contributed to making it cool again.

The third research question asked how the relationship between saxophonists and the saxophone contributes to the latter's identity, and this study indicates that it does so through the bodies of the players and the intentionality behind their performances, endowing the music with a set of connotations. The interviews carried out for the project explored these relationships and served to define the community of saxophonists in popular music genres, in addition to providing a frame of reference for this small but influential group of musicians by illuminating how they engage with the key themes. When I asked each participant questions about how coolness, kitsch, race, gender, and sexuality related to saxophone playing they responded by discussing authenticity, class, nostalgia, and genre. Each of the participants mentioned that regardless of genre or perceptions of class or prestige, the most crucial factors in performance are authenticity and integrity. They alluded to these factors in determining whether they felt the saxophone, or a particular saxophonist, was cool or not. The way that the themes are expressed through

saxophone playing in examples of contemporary pop songs is through an honesty of intention emanating from the saxophonist's performance in the song.

In the early days of this project, I did not plan to discuss Kenny G, but he was brought into the conversation by several of the participants due to his position as someone who represents the instrument to a broad audience, and because of his involvement with the Katy Perry video explored in Chapter 4. Interestingly, several participants initiated a discussion of Kenny G and, overall, they were not complimentary when they referenced him and his music. They generally perceive him as a sell-out and question his integrity. The feeling is that he just plays for money or notoriety rather than for a genuine love of music or performing. This is partially in response to the reputation that he gained for being responsible for the impression of the saxophone as kitschy, in a negative sense of the word, because of the questionable recording he made 'with' Louis Armstrong as well as other musical choices he has made (see Metheny, 2000).[28] It seems as if saxophonists have collectively directed their fear of being judged, for lacking integrity or being considered kitschy or lowbrow, towards Kenny G. To some people his earnestness in endeavours that other musicians find inauthentic embodies the negative qualities associated with the instrument that so many saxophonists strive to expunge from collective memory.

The final research question explored the aesthetic principles related to saxophone playing that inform its character and reception. This is related to the discussion above because the saxophonists interviewed were invested in the notion that authenticity, integrity, and honesty would shield them from negative assessments for performing in popular genres rather than in Western art music or traditional jazz styles. However, in practice, saxophonists are often judged by others, both within and outside their community. The class divide still exists despite the fact that these musicians, who generally possess the skills to play in any genre they choose, have

consciously decided to perform for broader, commercial audiences. Interestingly, classical saxophonists, who may look down upon other musicians for performing popular music, are often judged by musicians enmeshed in Western art music traditions, thus perpetuating the long-established hegemonic tradition of aesthetic valuations relating Western art music to high class and mainstream genres to low class. The aesthetic principles of saxophone playing vary depending on the style of music that is being performed, but the pedagogical foundations remain virtually the same regardless of genre; saxophonists are typically quite adept at adapting to musical environments and contributing in meaningful ways to the character of a song and its subsequent reception.

Timothy McAllister, a well-known American classical saxophonist, Grammy Award winner, and professor at the University of Michigan was recently interviewed live on Facebook for the group 'Saxophone Studio Class – Online!' (McAllister, 2020). Part of the interview related to some of the adversity that saxophonists have faced in terms of recognition and acceptance in Western art music traditions, but I believe that he speaks for all saxophonists when he observes that we are '…fighting for our identity' (2020).[29] This quote is indicative of the feeling of marginalisation and subsequent pursuit of respect to which several of the participants in this project referred in their interviews. In terms of Western art music, this feeling of inadequacy likely results from a deficiency of established pedagogical methods or canonical repertoire. In popular music, this manifests as negative aesthetic valuations and/or a performer's skills being called into question. Regardless of genre, the saxophone's somewhat marginalised status—its perceived lack of a true musical home—has endowed it with a reputation for adaptability and versatility that distinguish it from other instruments and reflects the diversity of styles and players that are associated with it. The discussion surrounding the instrument's

identification as cool in this project reflects my own personal uneasiness concerning a lack of acceptance as a saxophonist in particular performing environments. If saxophonists are not aesthetically valued or accepted in all genres than perhaps we can make up for that by being considered cool by a broad segment of the population.

The ultimate musical goal when performing in mainstream genres is not typically achieved by demonstrating virtuosity and/or technical mastery of the instrument, so assessing saxophonists by a set of conventions intended for Western art music or jazz is not suitable. The goal in popular music is to succinctly serve the style, concept, thematic material, expressive and emotional intent of the music. Virtuosity, in a holistic sense that encompasses technical mastery with aesthetic judgment and expressive expertise, is inherent in the pop sax solo. The determination of aesthetic value in this context is dependent upon considering the musical, historical, political, and social contexts for the song and the saxophone playing. As Watkins noted in his interview, '…you need to have something to say and get it over with pretty quickly', referencing the importance of both brevity and intentionality (2017). Marsalis also spoke of this, making the point that Clarence Clemons may not be considered one of the most skilful saxophonists in the world, but his playing with Bruce Springsteen was unparalleled (2018).[30] After discussing some of these ideas with the participants in the study it is evident that saxophonists work hard to dispel what they feel are misperceptions about the saxophone and its performance in popular music, and we should strive to put an end to judging one another's skill levels as a reaction to genre and without consideration of context. The saxophone is part of so many different musical genres all over the world and that versatility and adaptability is its superpower. The notion that the sounds produced while performing on the instrument serve as the voice of the player may be why saxophonists are sensitive about its critique and reception; they maintain a very close relationship with the

instrument and it is an extension of their bodies, a part of them, and no one wants to feel devalued or judged negatively in their life's work.

In terms of the saxophone's character and reception, one reason that the saxophone retains its popularity as a musical instrument in multitudinous musical genres is its alleged similarity to the human voice. I was unable to locate any published scientific studies to support the claim that the saxophone more closely resembles the human voice than other instruments, but each participant interviewed for this study mentioned the instrument's capacity to not only emulate the human voice but to embody the expressive agency of the performer. This claim is probably related to the ranges of the alto and tenor saxophones, which are closely aligned to the range of the human voice. It has an ability to change sonic character and colour easily, in comparison to other woodwind instruments, and this is due to the purity of the overtone series that it possesses. This discussion supports the idea that the saxophone came to typify the voice of its earliest renowned practitioners, the Black men that embraced the instrument and contributed to its development at the forefront of jazz in America in the twentieth century, while simultaneously representing their quotidian struggle against racial prejudices. Musicians such as Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young suffused the instrument with their personalities in this way, with the saxophone acting as an active intermediary; it was a way for them to be heard. One consequence of this demonstration of agency is that these saxophonists laid the groundwork for the instrument's continual inclusion in commercial popular music styles as each of the styles evolved throughout the twentieth century.

IMPACT OF STUDY

This project represents but a small sampling of fieldwork in this area, and people interested

in the instrument and critical organology will benefit from this project because it focuses on an under-served group of performers within a genre with relatively high visibility. Investigating a niche group such as this from a primarily socio-cultural perspective allows a glimpse into another side of the creation of music. The potential impact of this project is threefold: it aids in understanding the saxophone from a musico-sociological perspective, it contributes to the scholarship in broader contexts, and it defines the community through a cross-section of people and their contributions to popular music. Studying the relationship between saxophonists and their instruments provides insight into how the saxophone developed its identities and this in turn explains how its identities are performed in popular music and perceived by audiences.

Academic research focusing on the saxophone has heretofore been chiefly concerned with historical, theoretical, and pedagogical approaches to the instrument and its performance rather than its social life as a musical artefact that is deeply embedded in American popular culture. Several earlier projects used a scientific-analytic or historical viewpoint to provide a foundation for research related to the instrument or simply to catch up to the number of studies that have been carried out for other, older or what some may consider more highly regarded musical instruments. There have been studies that closely examine the works of composers, that profile prominent jazz saxophonists and their improvisational or compositional techniques, or explore various pedagogical methods. Equally, many doctoral theses and master's dissertations have focused on methods that composers utilise related to the particular technical capabilities of the saxophone. Whilst each of these topics is valuable and necessary in cultivating knowledge related to the instrument and its performance, they demonstrate how saxophonists/scholars are principally concerned with the saxophone's role in contemporary art music and jazz.

Questions of class and prestige have been addressed in some of the scholarship, but it occasionally results in the perpetuation of the divide between jazz/classical and popular saxophone players, instead of embracing the instrument's versatility and stylistic range. There are two recent examples of this, an article by noted American saxophone professor Steven Mauk and a master's thesis completed by Mathew Ferraro (2015, 2012). Mauk's piece, entitled 'The Saxophone: Is it a Legitimate Instrument?' reflects on the persistent renunciation of the saxophone as a so-called 'legitimate instrument' (2015). It considers the role that saxophonists and scholars play in perpetuating this idea by writing articles as well as arguing against the assumption that the saxophone is not to be taken seriously, or that it is somehow illegitimate (Mauk, 2015). This article seems to suggest that the only way to legitimise the saxophone is to include it as a permanent part of the instrumentation of the symphony orchestra, or to have distinguished composers of the Western art music tradition write for it, and it also demonstrates that this question of prestige persists both within and outside of the saxophone community.

In his thesis entitled, 'The Missing Saxophone: Why the Saxophone is Not a Permanent Member of the Orchestra' (2012), Mathew Ferraro contends that the saxophone is mostly missing from the orchestral repertoire because of its mainstream popularity. Ferraro asserts that, due to its lionisation and circulation during the saxophone craze of the 1920s, the instrument became so popular that it earned a negatively coded lowbrow reputation that prevented it from being taken seriously by Western art music composers and performers. It was therefore limited to serving as a key feature of jazz and other popular music genres of the time, and Ferraro perpetuates the high/low, art/popular divide by considering the saxophone's involvement in those styles as having diminished its value.

Ferraro notes that in the early twentieth century the Six Brown Brothers utilised the instrument as a comedic device in their performances, and one member performed in Blackface. This group was extremely popular at the time and undoubtedly left an enduring mark on the reputation of the instrument: it was not to be taken seriously. It was associated with parody, entertainment, and racial caricature, qualities which disqualified it from being considered as 'art'. Even though the saxophone is ubiquitous in popular music today, in part due to the success of groups such as the Six Brown Brothers, sometimes it has not been seen as deserving of academic study because, as Nachman was quoted as saying in Levine's book *Highbrow/Lowbrow,* Americans '…tend to take for granted all things quintessentially American' and are 'patriotic about everything but our art' (1988, p. 1). It may be considered generous, but I interpret Nachman's mention of 'our art' in this context to include various modalities of creative popular visual and musical output, from pop art of the 1960s, to Hollywood films, to all manner of popular music produced in the United States.

The saxophone, as it is heard in commercial popular music, is quintessentially American, representing an amalgamation of genres conceived in this country such as jazz, R&B, jump blues, and early rock and roll that featured the instrument. In some ways, the instrument symbolises an American struggle to reach the top levels of class stratification, as historically defined by western European conventions of aesthetic and artistic value. This is representative of the dualities that exist in the United States; Americans claim to be freed from the constraints of European values and systems (of government, of religion, of the arts), but still define themselves by those measures. The concepts of freedom and individualism are prioritised in the United States, but not practiced in daily life; they take pride in the diversity of people that call America home, but perpetuate systemic forms of oppression such as racism and sexism. The saxophone's

value lies in its ability to represent distinct intersections between race, class, and gender that arise from circumstances that are unique to the United States and its contemporary musical production, and therein lies its power. It is long past the time to abandon outmoded ways of determining musical value and welcome diverse frameworks that are more well-suited to the appraisal of modern popular music. Embracing all of the associations that have formed the various components of the instrument's rich character is an effective way to increase knowledge and understanding of the instrument and the actors involved with it in a broader view.

A principal element that may assuage some saxophonist's feelings of inadequacy is to canonise our pedagogical methods. Recently in a closed group for professional classical saxophonists on Facebook a young performer and professor posed a question about teaching different types of articulations on the instrument:

> Do we have any resources on advanced saxophone articulation? I look at our stringed instrument playing friends who have 40+ (sic) defined terms for bowing techniques and have trouble finding anything comparable for us. I don't want to be a good saxophonist, I want to be a good musician, and I want to teach my students how to be good musicians – and I can't find resources to share with my students. Sometimes I wonder if sensitivity in how we articulate is a part of our pedagogy that could use more attention. (Mechmet, 2019)

Examples of inconsistent, or insufficient, educational texts regarding how to play the saxophone are still quite common, even in a closed community of saxophone educators. It would appear that saxophonists continue to strive for two things in performance: to be considered objectively good musicians, and to develop and substantiate the pedagogical shortcomings that linger because the instrument did not develop a strong didactic history until the middle of the twentieth century. There are still things to be discovered about the instrument, whether they are pedagogical in nature or social and cultural; both how to play it and teach it as well as how it circulates in our world.

The fact that the early saxophonists created their own styles and techniques supports the idea that it became their voice; there was no preconceived notion about how to play, no saxophone playing 'schools' (like the French flute or German clarinet schools) from which to either break away or adhere. The saxophonists in the early twentieth century taught themselves and were free from constraints. They shaped the tonal concept and technical capabilities of the instrument to fit their will, and in return it developed a particular character, versatility, and vitality that distinguishes it from other wind instruments. This is another argument for why the instrument persists in popular music; the boundaries are still being explored and its capabilities are still being discovered. The willingness of saxophonists to expand the boundaries not only of performance techniques but also of genre and modernisation, such as Pickett's embrace of electronic manipulation, for instance, and its existence in mainstream electronic music may guarantee the instrument's inclusion in popular music of the future. In his interview, Jeff Coffin remarked, 'I tell people I'm interested in what the saxophone can't do. I've really yet to find anything. If you have the imagination to try stuff, that instrument can do anything, I'm completely convinced of it' (2018).

Invaluable anecdotal evidence was gathered throughout the project that highlights the importance of the relationships between saxophonists as well as the value in documenting their experiences in performing environments. There were many examples of informative stories of professional experiences that deserve individual mention here. For instance, according to Kirk Whalum, Whitney Houston only did three full takes for the official recording of 'I Will Always Love You' (1992) and he has every reason to believe that the first take was the one used for the commercially released recording which went on to become one of the highest-selling singles of all time (2018). One of the more humorous stories was told by Sal Lozano, who was hired for a

secretive recording session with Paul McCartney and Lady Gaga. Gaga was so impressed with the studio musicians that she lifted her shirt and pressed her bare chest up to the glass that separated the sound booth from the recording studio, shocking all of the studio musicians who immediately erupted in laughter (Lozano, 2018). Mindi Abair's narrative about a performance with Jonathan Butler was also entertaining and revelatory, because I could relate to the experience of not looking the 'part' of a saxophonist, but also because she was able to positively alter an audience member's perception of what a saxophonist looks like and sounds like (2018).

On a solemn note, Carlos Sosa had just finished performing with the Josh Abbott Band at the Route 91 Harvest music festival in Las Vegas, Nevada in 2017 when a shooter opened fire, killing fifty-eight people and wounding over eight hundred attendees (2018). I had learned through online news sources that Sosa had been performing at the event, but I decided not to broach the topic in our interview. However, he felt compelled to discuss the traumatic event and how it has changed him as both a person and a musician. When I asked him how he felt the event had changed him, he said, 'more appreciation…more not fucking around' (Sosa, 2018). He added that the experience has led him to focus on the important things in life, and that therapy was helping him to cope with the trauma he had sustained. Sosa also stated that Jeff Coffin, one of the other participants in this project, called him and they talked on the phone for hours just after the horrifying event. Sosa was very open and gracious in answering further questions that came to mind related to the event and in discussing his experiences. I greatly appreciate having had that discussion with him. Upon reflection, this terrifying event is an example of what has come to be considered a distinctly American experience, and articulates some of the trauma that results from interminable gun violence that many people have had to live through in recent years,

whether perpetrated by the police against people of colour or by a lone gunman shooting people at a music festival in Las Vegas.

By carrying out this project I learned that I am not alone. The interviewees confirmed many of my own beliefs about the saxophone, namely that each of us strives to elevate the reputation of the instrument and to be considered objectively good musicians, because we are connected to it in both physical and emotional ways. We are connected to one another for more mundane reasons too, such as our infatuation with saxophone-related equipment, or experiencing back pain acquired from years of bearing its weight, or the daily struggle of finding a good reed. It is in the observation of these collective experiences—how our community is defined—that we understand connection to one another and to the saxophone and our broader contributions to musical communities and environments.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As with any academic study, there are a few limitations to the study that should be brought to the fore. Firstly, the initial goal for the project was to interview a larger number of saxophonists but unfortunately, only nine agreed to participate. A larger number of participants could have contributed a more diverse and equitable set of data, but it is important to note that the emphasis here is on quality rather than on quantity. There are several saxophonists that performed on widely circulated songs for which insider information regarding the creative and/or performance process could have contributed meaningful information to the project, but this goal was still achieved through the information shared by the project's participants. The inclusion of additional perspectives on the topics explored in the study could have contributed to the overall goal but I feel this was not critically detrimental to the overall results.

The interview findings turned out differently than I expected on the issue of race as it relates to the saxophone. In the early stages of the study, I presumed that when asked about stereotypes concerning saxophone players the participants would support the theory that the general public associates the saxophone with primarily Black American men, but the only participant that provided a narrative that backed up this theory was Mindi Abair. The majority of the participants agreed that the saxophone is associated with and most often played by men, but not necessarily men of colour. This is likely because the participants cannot necessarily speak to what audience's perceive about saxophone performances, or it could be a reflection of my own (and Mindi's) experience of being white, female saxophonists that led to this presumption. Each of the interviewees did discuss the primary influences on their playing styles and the group of musicians named were all men and primarily Black, indicating that the way most saxophonists engage with questions of race are through the traditions of saxophone performance practices. This was an interesting result that led me to reframe discussions surrounding race on more recent considerations relating to the instrument.

In terms of further research, plans for continued ethnographic fieldwork with saxophonists is a general goal and could also be expanded to include broader groups of instrumentalists that play a role in creating the soundscape and social environment of global popular music production. There are several examples of previous research that explore communities of studio musicians and producers in various capacities (Bates, 2016; Zak, 2001; Pierce, 1998), but I am specifically interested in the idea of the intersection of performative social properties discussed in this project (coolness, gender, race) that contribute subtext and/or other implicit meaning to the music that is created.

The main goal for further research involves the investigation of gendered forms of expression in instrumental performance, broadly conceived. This would begin with the saxophone, but I would like for it to eventually extend to other instruments. There has been noteworthy research regarding women in terms of instrumental performance and/or popular music, primarily stemming from the 'new musicology' that emerged in the 1990s by scholars such as Susan McClary (1991), Sheila Whiteley (2013a, 2013b), Lucy O'Brien (2002, 2012), Veronica Doubleday (2008), and Ellen Koskoff (1995) that is very influential, but this study would differentiate itself by exploring the body in performance and sound production. Women have compulsorily subscribed to male-defined measures of musicianship because men have been the architects for the standardisation of both aesthetic and technical considerations in instrumental performance. What would it look like or sound like if those standards were updated or challenged to include feminine and non-binary perspectives? An ethnographic approach, interviewing female instrumentalists and educators, would substantiate concepts relating to gendered expression in performance. This investigation would also potentially engage with theories from sound studies, performance practices, and embodiment in music.

Additionally, I would like to conduct an investigation into how and why the saxophone is the sonic signature of the popular American television variety show, *Saturday Night Live*. An ethnographic approach could also be utilised here, with a supplementary interview with Lenny Pickett as well as interviews with some of the saxophonists who have previously performed with the *Saturday Night Live* Band. Those who have performed on the show are some of the most renowned saxophonists in the world, and include Lou Marini, David Sanborn, Michael Brecker (sadly no longer with us), Howard Shore, and Ronnie Cuber. The sound of the saxophone is a key part of the identity of the program, and the fact that it is the longest-running variety show in

the history of American television speaks to the widespread circulation and cultural significance of both the show, and I believe, the instrument. The link between the two is notable and has the potential to produce a compelling study that locates the saxophone further within cultural studies in America.

An additional idea that stems from this study would be to investigate public perceptions of the saxophone's cultural relevance. This would serve to enhance and complement the existing study by mapping other, outsider (non-musician), perspectives relating to the significance and power of musical instruments within the context of contemporary popular music. One way to collect data from the general public would be to post a survey online, primarily through social media outlets, therefore potentially reaching an extensive cross-section of people.

CLOSING REMARKS

A side effect of this study is to provide acknowledgement for the musicians who perform in popular music and receive little recognition. At the outset, this referred to the saxophonists that participated in the interviews carried out for the project, but I would like to extend that to include the saxophonists that acted as an integral part of the musical bridge from jazz to rock and roll and its derivatives. Their playing styles are still emulated by today's players. This list includes but is not limited to Louis Jordan, Earl Bostic, Illinois Jacquet, Hank Crawford, Eddie 'Cleanhead' Vinson, and Big Jay McNeely. In September of 2018, I presented a lecture to the saxophone students at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire on topics related to this thesis, and the students, along with their professor, were completely unfamiliar with these players. While it is true that these musicians were Americans and therefore there may be a cultural divide at fault, the fact that these artists and their music are not taught as part of most saxophone curricula was

also noted by each participant that was interviewed in this study. These artists featured prominently in the development of rock and roll and their legacies and contributions to popular music endure through the steadfast pervasiveness of the saxophone. I was not able to go into great detail about each of these musicians in this project but would like to at least briefly recognise their contributions here. Arnold Shaw's book *Honkers and Shouters*, Doug Miller's article on rhythm and blues playing styles, and Christopher Costigan's doctoral thesis all do some valuable foundational work of providing detail about these important musicians, and hopefully further research will be conducted in order to analyse the impact and influence of these players and others like them (Shaw, 1978; Miller, 1995; Costigan, 2007).

The saxophone can be political, it can be cool, it can be funny, and it can be sexy; the adaptability tied to its musical and iconographical output establishes it as an inimitable element of American popular culture and makes it a fascinating topic for study. My hope is that the readers of this research project will emerge with a greater understanding of the ability and/or the power of musical instruments to embody social characteristics that we relate to and engage with as humans every day. These are significant qualities in terms of the importance that many people place on the power of music at large. The saxophone is a musical object that reflects the broader world, and by focusing on a small sample of musicians that play a part in creating music that disseminates widely it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the social and cultural life of musical instruments and the humans who love them.

ENDNOTES

[1] Bates is using the term 'thing-power' coined by political scientist Jane Bennett in her book, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010*).*

[2] A recent keyword search for doctoral dissertations listed on the American Musicological Society's website that have the word 'saxophone' in the title returned a list of thirty-four documents all relating to historical, pedagogical, or compositional approaches to the instrument in Western art music or jazz. http://www.ams-net.org/ddm/advancedResults.php

[3] The last factor seems too obvious to mention, however, it is a seemingly indefatigable trope that is deserving of consideration.

[4] Mr. Watkins and I met at a saxophone shop in St. Louis, Saxquest, where we both happened to be visiting. He was gracious enough to grant me an interview on the spot.

[5] Some of the world's most famous musicians have unmatched gig sense along with a natural propensity for showmanship, such as Michael Jackson, Frank Sinatra, or Madonna; they are world-class performers capable of transcending all manner of adversity on stage, and this situates them as members of a community of performers with a particular set of skills.

[6] John Laughter, a semi-professional saxophonist from Florida, has been working for several years on a complete list of saxophone soloists entitled, 'The History of 'Top 40' Saxophone Solos: 1955-2014'. This is something I'd like to contribute to in the future, but that is a different project.

[7] Other articles exploring guitar cultures in Jamaica, Turkey, Mexico, and Japan appeared in the April 2013 edition of the *Ethnomusicology Forum* and were authored by Ray Hitchins, Sinan Cem Eroğlu (co-author with Dawe), Thomas J. Kies, and Henry Johnson. Dawe also co-edited the volume *Guitar Cultures* (2001) with Andy Bennett.

[8] *Saturday Night Live* (*SNL)* is a popular late-night sketch comedy television program that airs on NBC almost every Saturday night. It is one of the longest-running network television shows in the United States and has been on the air since 1975.

[9] Jeff Coffin has been a featured performer there on a few occasions as well as many other notable players such as Tia Fuller, Rahsaan Barber, Adam Larson, and Doug Webb. The shop also presents a series featuring local professional musicians.

[10] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gy1B3agGNxw

[11] In the 1980s and 1990s, Kenny G demonstrated an overabundance of earnestness in his music which prompted him to be judged as kitschy by audiences and other musicians (see Chapter 4). However, in contemporary contexts he appears to be in on the joke, and in the video for 'Last Friday Night' discussed in Chapter 4 he knowingly performs kitsch.

[12] At the time of writing, just one of the several Sexy Sax Man videos that are posted on YouTube has been viewed approximately forty million times (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GaoLU6zKaws). A ten-hour long video loop featuring Epic Sax Guy's performance from the 2010 Eurovision song contest has been viewed over 23 million times (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ZcmTl_1ER8). Katy Perry's video for 'Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)' which features Kenny G has been viewed approximately 1.2 billion times (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KlyXNRrsk4A).

[13] One particularly famous example can be seen in the discriminatory designation of 'race music' that was a catch-all genre classification for music marketed to Black audiences in the pre-war years in the United States.

[14] The 'Sexy Sax Man' video was released on YouTube on March 12, 2011, Lady Gaga's song 'Edge of Glory' featuring saxophonist Clarence Clemons was released on May 9, 2011, and Katy Perry's 'Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)' was released on June 6, 2011 and peaked at number one on the *Billboard* Hot 100 in August of that year, so there was a lot of saxophone represented in popular music and culture in the spring and summer of 2011.

[15] The first so-called saxophone craze occurred from the 1910s to the late 1920s (Cottrell, 2012, pp. 150, 295).

[16] The saxophone was not featured as a solo instrument in the songs from the 1960s that were heard in the film but can be heard in the ensemble of instruments on 'Be My Baby' (1963) by The Ronettes.

[17] Kenny G was not approached to participate in this particular study because he primarily performs as a soloist and not as a supporting musician.

[18] The statement that Metheny made in response to Kenny G's recording superimposed over Louis Armstrong's 'What a Wonderful World' can be found at this link: https://www.jazzguitar.com/features/kennyg.html.

[19] Other prominent examples of the 'geek-to-chic' transformation can be seen in the two main characters in *Weird Science*, the love interest in *Pretty in Pink*, and Ally Sheedy's character in *Breakfast Club.* In each example, the nerdy character(s) transforms into an attractive cool kid that the other characters in the film had never noticed before.

[20] For a thorough and detailed discussion of techniques and musical devices commonly used in saxophone solos in popular music, see Chapters 5 and 6 of Woodward (2018).

[21] All saxophones are transposing instruments, and the tenor saxophone is in the key of B flat (similar to the clarinet and the trumpet). In the concert key of C, the tenor saxophonist plays a D.

[22] The name of the David Bowie tour that Pickett performed on was 'Serious Moonlight'; in the interview Pickett mistakenly referred to it as the 'Let's Dance' tour, which was the name of the album upon which the tour was based.

[23] I visited Marrakech in 2018 and distinctly remember the bright, reedy sounds produced by the rhaita players in the main square, Jemaa al-Fna, in the old city. The power of the sound and the requisite air stream required to play the instrument reminded me of Kaplan's sound on the saxophone, and the middle Eastern, North African, and European Jewish influences heard in his playing style.

[24] The alto saxophone is in the key of E flat and transposes down a minor third from concert pitch; for example, in the concert key of C, the alto saxophonist plays in the key of A. 'Talk Dirty' is in the key of G flat minor, so the saxophonist plays in the key of E flat minor.

[25] This idea can be traced back to Marx who believed that capitalism exploited the working class. In the United States in recent decades capitalism has had the effect of perpetuating socio-economic inequality, and people of colour in the United States are disproportionately affected by these stratifications (see Siddiqui, 2018).

[26] Moore's article 'Authenticity as Authentication' discusses how 'real' instruments such as the ones in Bruce Springsteen's band represent 'a certain sort of musical and artistic purity going hand in hand with a sincere message' (2002, p. 213). The implication is that real, or acoustic, instruments signal a 'purity of practice' and therefore authenticity in certain forms of popular music (ibid.).

[27] The research questions are as follows: how does the saxophone affect perceptions of American popular music? What impact does it have on contemporary listeners when they hear a saxophone featured in American popular music in the twenty-first century? How has the relationship between the performers and the instrument contributed to the saxophone's iconic status as a meaningful object with particular symbolic associations? What are the aesthetic principles shaping saxophone performance practice that inform its character and reception?

[28] Kenny G set a world record, certified by officials at the *Guinness Book of World Records*, for the longest held, continuously played note in 1997 when he held a concert E flat for over forty-five minutes using the circular

breathing technique. This was viewed by other musicians at the time as a gratuitous stunt, mainly because many saxophonists are capable of circular breathing but see no need to do so for forty-five minutes. The category has since been cancelled by *Guinness* (Inskeep and Martin, 2017).

[29] 'We (saxophonists) don't get to make the rules. There's a larger musical society and an industry standard that we must operate within; parameters that have been dictated for hundreds of years. The idea that the classical music industry has been this long, deep, and wide raging river of playing and people and musicians and trends and composers, and as saxophone players we are standing on the banks of that river, and we're looking into it, and those of us who are prepared to jump into that, we better be able to swim with it or you will drown. You'll get swept up. I think for the longest time those concepts of what excellence was (sic) evaded us. There are great amazing examples of playing in our entire history, but it didn't always mean that we fit in every single situation or circumstance, and I think we were just fighting for our identity at a time when other instruments had their identity in place' (McAllister, 2020).

[30] 'And the whole point is that there were a number of guys, Herb Hardesty, the guy in London, Dave Parry, the guy who played the solo on 'Money' (Pink Floyd). A lot of these guys are not good saxophone players by any stretch of the imagination, but good saxophone playing is not what is required for the job. The job is that you have to create a sound that matches the intensity of the song and raises it a level. And sixteenth notes ain't going to do it. While there are plenty of saxophone players who are better than Clarence Clemons, none of them can play with Bruce Springsteen. Because what he has that they all lack is the conviction and the power of musical intent. That's just what I learned from playing R&B'. (Marsalis, 2018).

APPENDIX 1

List of participants, mainstream artists they performed with, and date of interview

Participant	Date of interview
Mindi Abair (Aerosmith, Backstreet Boys)	18 January 2018
Mike Burton (Jill Scott, Patti LaBelle, Mary J Blige)	25 January 2018
Jeff Coffin (Bela Fleck and the Flecktones, Dave Matthews Band)	31 May 2018
Sal Lozano (Lady Gaga, Christina Aguilera, Jennifer Lopez)	25 April 2018
Branford Marsalis (Sting, Grateful Dead)	25 May 2018
Lenny Pickett (*SNL* Band, Katy Perry, David Bowie)	24 January 2018
Carlos Sosa (Jason Mraz, Kelly Clarkston)	19 February 2018
Jeff Watkins (James Brown, Joss Stone)	10 October 2017
Kirk Whalum (Whitney Houston, Dionne Warwick, Luther Vandross)	30 May 2018

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