



GUEST:

Ken Vandermark

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ONE REASON TO LIVE:

Louis Armstrong— “West End Blues”



What kind of shoe shine suits a shoe gazer's suit? The answer, of course, depends on whether he's looking down as he crosses Charing Cross Road or looking up as he hangs his dogs out the window of the moving bus. What if he's in both places, doing both things at one and the same time? Does that change the equation? Spit shine for one, buffed flat for the other? As he enters Foyle's on his way up to Ray's Jazz seeking a bran muffin and a wistful peruse of live Monk or those arcane diagrams on the Anthony Braxton jackets, his eye is caught by a travel guide for Bali and cascades of gamelan impressions ring not just in his ears, but in his belly and his vibrating throat and in the tips of his recently cut hair. There's a baroque fountain back home that gurgles the best tune you can't quite hear. It's bubbling up from inside the water, inside the earth, inside your head really. Damn if I know. It's just one reason to live.

JULIUS NIL: This choice did surprise me a little bit, knowing what you do. One thing that surprised me about it is that it is firmly and undeniably something that you would have to call jazz. Not something on the outskirts of jazz that plays with the definition.

KEN VANDERMARK: Yes, it's definitely one of the foundations of the music.

JN: But you're known more for something that pushes on the edges and the boundaries of the idea of jazz.

KV: Yeah, I think so.

JN: So I was curious why not something more like that?

KV: Well there's a couple of reasons, one is that I think that Armstrong's music is very central to everything that has

come after it, especially, I guess, as an American improviser. I think that this particular piece sets up many of the things that for me have become important in my own music. Aesthetically I think, from a superficial standpoint, the music sounds quite a bit different from what I normally work on. But I think that the mechanisms the group puts in place on this particular piece and the way in which they organize the music and, in such a short period of time, deal with so many structural elements; that has become important in the music that I work on. I think it is kind of interesting to look back and see that these things were in place or examined at the very beginnings of the music. I think the piece was recorded in 1928, so we are talking a long time ago. And another reason is that I was very unhappy with this documentary series that Ken Burns did, and in one portion of the program....

JN: You might need to fill people in, here in England, because I don't know if it's aired over here.

KV: Oh, okay, well, you are all very lucky. It's basically a very conventional perspective on the history of jazz from an American point of view and really fails to examine anything after the mid-60s, in any serious way. There really wasn't much time devoted to any music outside the tonal harmony approach to jazz, let's say, so everything that's happened since 1970 was either overlooked or scoffed at. And in one of the episodes, Wynton Marsalis was talking about this particular piece and I thought it would be worthwhile, for myself anyway, to examine the piece from the perspective of someone who comes from a very different set of

systems of working than Lincoln Center Jazz and to show that this piece has a lot to say to me and, I think, to the kind of musics I work with, even though it's associated with, as you mentioned initially, a classic sort of perspective. I don't think anybody out there would suggest that Louis Armstrong wasn't connected with the jazz continuum, so he's kind of a safe bet in that sense. But it's worth taking a look at the music from a less mythological standpoint.

JN: I actually wrote in my notes—without knowing anything about the Ken Burns documentary—I wrote “this is something that Wynton Marsalis could have easily chosen as his *One Reason To Live*.” I was thinking it was a really strange idea that you and Marsalis might have chosen the same track.

KV: Yeah, it was a bit purposeful on my part. I had to.

JN: I'm glad to hear that. It strikes me as problematic to set up Lincoln Center, the home of classical music in New York City, as the home of this large jazz group. It reeks of an attempt to “legitimize” jazz.

KV: Yeah, I would agree with that. A lot of the music they do is repertory: Duke Ellington, Thelonious Monk...and that music, without question, is significant and important but I also think it belongs to a different time period

and I don't think you can resurrect that music. Improvised music in jazz, from my perspective, is totally unlike composed music in the classical world and I think that there seems to be a lot of effort by the people—the powers that be at Lincoln Center—to try to couch the jazz continuum, as something that can step in for classical music in the United States as a legitimized art pursuit for people with a lot of money. And I think that's a huge mistake. I think that jazz and improvised music is without question an art form, but I don't think it works at all in the same way that composed music does. And the idea that you could perform Duke Ellington like you perform Mozart and have it mean the same thing is completely absurd, in my opinion.

JN: I agree. You always hear this tagline that jazz is America's great contribution to the arts of the world and there seems to be this effort to legitimize it and maybe commodify it too, so they can package it...in Ken Burns documentaries.

KV: I think it is a little bit questionable in that series that both Stanley Crouch and Marsalis were consultants and were represented in the series quite a bit. And Marsalis was sort of presented as the savior of the music. I mean there is a lot of conflict of interest about the idea that this was supposedly a documentary about the music. It raises a lot of issues and I think there has been a real effort on their part, for maybe po-

litical reasons connected to the music, to try and define what jazz is. I think it gets back to the whole perspective of legitimizing jazz. I think that if you talked to Wynton Marsalis directly he is very sincere about his ideas, I would imagine. I have never talked to him. But I would think that if you had a real conversation, I would be very surprised if he did not feel sincere about the efforts to save jazz from obscurity and from it being lost in the United States as a real contribution to culture internationally. I think that his intentions are probably very sincere. But I have to say that the way it has been done is extremely questionable because I don't think art works that way. I think that art goes the way it needs to go and to set up a system of support that is based on the past, for a music that has always been about looking some place different—maybe not always new, but different—is very strange. I mean Marsalis is really the first person that's been heralded as a significant part of the history, as far as I am aware, who was looking backwards. Until the 80s neo-conservatism in the music and in the politics in the United States—and I'm sure there are a lot of connections there as well—before that, it was about always looking forward. Whether that was true or not is open to a lot of debate, but this is a very strange time, I think. And that's connected to the politics of music. Because if you can define the music it becomes a little bit easier to make the argument for your funding request. And then it gets into a bunch of systems that are based on politics and power and money.

JN: So can you walk us through this a little bit, can you tell us what it is about this track that made you choose it?

KV: It's a little bit more than three minutes long, but as I mentioned earlier in the discussion, a lot of ground work is laid down on this one piece. And going back and reviewing it, even though I knew it fairly well beforehand, I was pretty stunned actually, about how much was happening. One thing I'm really struck by and one thing that is really connected to what I look for and tend to enjoy in my own work, is the idea of the ensemble. A lot has been made about Louis Armstrong's brilliance as an improviser and a lot has been made about the opening cadenza on the trumpet, which is completely mind blowing. But the thing that I would like to focus on is the way that the group works. From the very beginning in the first chorus, when Armstrong and the clarinet, which is played by Jimmy Strong, when they come in stating the theme and the first chorus, that groove that comes in sets the tone for the piece more than Armstrong's introduction does. In a sense, the rhythmic modulations that happen in that line—the cadenza speeds up and slows down and kind of sets up the pulse actually—and then his pick-up sets the tempo. But the mood of the piece, which is the soul of the piece, is

really stated by the quarter-note groove which is set up by the ensemble and also the four-beat holds that the trombone plays. For me that's one of the most striking things about the piece. You have this beautiful opening by Armstrong and it's almost like, well where does it go? And it goes to a very surprising place, in a sense, because suddenly there's this almost relaxed mood, even though it is a steady quarter-note played on the piano and banjo, it really is a bit of a surprise.

JN: Although it is less surprising now than I think it probably was at the time. I mean, I hear echoes of this in all kinds of big band arrangements and popular song arrangements, like Frank Sinatra songs where you hear that kind of opening trumpet cadenza and then it drops into an easy, lilting....

KV: Yeah, that's a really good point. I mean when this stuff was being done they were inventing everything and I think a lot of the conventions we have now with these cadenzas and with these different things that happen are just so familiar. These conventions didn't really exist at this point. They were inventing so many things so quickly that they're just taken for granted at this point. What you are mentioning is really worth pointing out. I mean it is a classic piece, it sounds composed. You couldn't improve upon what they did in the arrangement and I guess that's my point, that it's an indication of how important the ensemble is to the realization of improvised music, even if they are using compositional arrangement. The final chorus is one of the most incredible things I have heard in impro-

vised music, for a number of reasons. But the first chorus sets up the groove, the character of the piece and the melodic line with the trumpet and the clarinet coloring it and supporting it.

JN: At the very beginning they start in unison and then they veer off and Louis definitely comes to the fore and starts elaborating on the theme in a way. It's strange, they don't even get through one full statement before he starts moving off a bit.

KV: Right, and yet you have the total sense that they are communicating. There isn't a divergence and confusion happening. It's like a parallel commentary, definitely, Armstrong being in the lead and the clarinet supporting and kind of commentating on that lead, which becomes interesting because on the third chorus—essentially the second chorus is a trombone solo where the rhythmic sensibility completely changes: you have this kind of...I wouldn't say clunky because it has a negative connotation, but this sort of chopped-up rhythmic feel on what I think is a closed cymbal....

JN: I read it was milk bottles.

KV: Milk bottles? Okay, well it could definitely be milk bottles. But as I said it has this chopped-up feel and then with a tremolo on the piano, these sustains, and also the pulse continuing with the banjo, you've got three parallel sensibili-

ties of rhythm and they are all radically different to what had just happened in the previous chorus. It doesn't disrupt the flow though, because the continuation of the banjo kind of sustains this feel through the first two choruses and the third chorus. The piece basically focuses on soloists: the cadenza with Armstrong at the beginning, the trombone after the statement of the theme in the first chorus, the trombone solo supported by the rhythm section, and then later on, an unaccompanied piano solo by Earl Hines, and then the last chorus which features the trumpet primarily before it goes into the ending cadenza. It's interesting that the only time that there is a dialogue in an improvised sense—which actually could have been composed and arranged—is between the clarinet and Armstrong's voice, which to me, is really a recapitulation of the way that Armstrong and the clarinet work in the first chorus, which, because it's not trumpet, is a shift in the sound, in the timbres, in the sensibility and combinations of this very small group. The orchestrations and arrangements are really staggering, and it unfolds in a completely linear way, which again is connected to a lot of the work I am interested in.

JN: What do you mean by linear?

KV: Well, with music you are dealing with chronological time, so you are always dealing with a line in some sense. But the only time the theme is really stated—and as you mention, it veers quickly away from a distinct unison theme—is in the first chorus. After that, it's never returned to. The only thing that remains sort of consistent is the chord changes

of the blues, the 12-bar form. Otherwise every single chorus is a shift in instrumental combination, timbral combination, and the theme doesn't come back. So, basically, from the beginning of the piece with the unaccompanied trumpet to the very end with this kind of strange chopped rhythm—whether it's the cymbals, the high-hat or the milk bottles at the very end, it is completely strange and avant-garde thing even now—you have a linear narrative. It's not a cyclical form, which was very common. Even now it's common in quite a lot of jazz, where you have a theme, a series of statements, maybe based on chord changes underneath that theme, or even in the case of Ornette Coleman, a return after an improvisational system of solos or whatever, coming back to that theme, which is a very, very, very functional way of doing this kind of music. It sews everything up in a way that makes things quite clear and rounded off. But this isn't like that, which is also radical, I think. It unfolds like a narrative and nothing is repeated. There is never a section in the piece that happens a second time. It's just one system after another, that makes complete musical sense. And yet when you break it apart or when

you look at each, it's kind of surprising how they made the decisions to do these things in the way that they do. And after this clarinet-vocal dialogue, which again is interesting because it starts off as a back and forth, call and response, and then at the very end they become unison, which is a nice reflection back to the way that this thing starts with an almost unison and then they split apart. So it's like there is an envelope that opens up and closes again. And that could be the end of the piece, but no it's not. It goes to this unaccompanied piano solo by Hines, which is a nice reflection back on the unaccompanied trumpet at the beginning of the piece in a sense. Solo statements, ensemble statements, supporting statements underneath lead solos. And then to me the most staggering thing about the piece—and it still sounds completely contemporary—is the last chorus. In the last chorus it starts with the sustain of the trumpet and the clarinet and the repetition for fours bars of the banjo, piano and the trombone playing this four beat hold that repeats like a record stuck in one place. And then the melodic statement, the change from the static moment, which is four bars long. It's just staggering how

powerful it is to me. It's just four bars long, which is like the accompaniment or the harmonic basis, so it's like the second line or, in the hierarchy of lead to support, the support steps up to make the motion towards Armstrong's solo. And this is completely counterintuitive. Okay, it's the last chorus and you expect, okay, there's this beautiful solo by Hines and then Armstrong is going to come in. And what do they do? They freeze it. And the tension built on that frozen four bars is really one of the most amazing things I have ever heard.

JN: It struck me as being like the foreground and the background switch places.

KV: Exactly. And that whole feeling and character of the piece starts with the ensemble coming out of the opening cadenza by Armstrong. It's like they have frozen that. It's a remarkable thing, I think. And then, okay, that's amazing. But then Armstrong does this incredible playing, and it is just four bars or so and then it stops and then there is the descending piano and the retarding motion of these holds by the band and then this utterly bizarre chop on the drums. In the last chorus, even in isolation, there is more music happening than you hear in a piece that is twenty minutes long, in terms of the variety, in terms of the power of the elements and the components. I think it's really—and I say this from my own ignorance really—for so long I would hear music form this period and would say “this is really square, this is stiff, you know, these people couldn't really play, they were fum-

bling around.” And this gives lie to that perspective completely. I mean the conscious choices that they made in a very, very radical piece of music. You can't really imagine people dancing to this thing. I mean it's art. When I hear this I can not see it as entertainment in any way. It's an art piece. I think that the things that they are doing in this piece inform many of the things that I am doing now, and other people that I work with, what we are doing now.

JN: So we were talking about your sense of having heard this song before and going back to it and pulling out the things that you reacted to naturally and then coming to some sort of understanding of why you reacted to it and that strikes me as a good way to do your analysis of music rather than starting with the ideas.

KV: Yeah, I know that when I am composing music and when I am performing it's really about a gut reaction to the material. And when you are improvising, at least the way that I approach it, I don't always have time to be considering what I should be doing next or how it relates. Things are happening so quickly, even a piece that moves slowly, there are too many decisions to make to consider them really. So yeah, I believe in intuition, very, very firmly.

JN: So going back to what you were talking about at the very beginning of the show, you were trying to make a distinction between how you might privilege this song in the history of jazz, versus Wynton Marsalis's classic approach to jazz. And, if I am getting your message, it seems to be about ensemble playing rather than the fact that Louis Armstrong invented soloing or taught the world how to swing, as some people say.

KV: I think that's a big part, I mean a huge part of jazz history or whatever we call it now in the twenty-first Century. A lot of people don't like the term “jazz” being about the soloist. I would say that with some exceptions, with rare exceptions, the achievements that have happened in the music have happened in ensembles, have happened in groups of people working together, either in a specific band or in a specific place. So, even someone like Sonny Rollins—who, unlike someone like John Coltrane, didn't really have classic bands that lasted for years—when he was in New York he was working with people like Max Roach all the time and with these different musicians, so they may not have

had a specific line-up that was consistent but there was a consistent pool of people bouncing ideas off each other all the time. I don't think anyone can just work in isolation. In general, my favorite music is created by people in ensembles, like Ornette Coleman's Quartet or Coltrane's groups or Miles Davis's groups, whatever. I think that there is a lack of emphasis on that somehow. I mean everyone is aware of it, but the place it has in the development of the music is kind of overshadowed by these “great men” theories of these fantastic improvisers who changed everything like Charlie Parker. But Charlie Parker didn't happen in a vacuum, you know. And it was Dizzy Gillespie that did a lot of the theoretical work that was connected to the development of bebop and the combination of these ideas working together and all the people that they worked with, in addition to the two of them, that helped that music happen. It wasn't just one great soloist. And I think that Armstrong cast an incredibly long shadow which is reaching me, you know, seventy-plus years after this was recorded. And I think that the power of this piece is not just his contribution, it's the understanding of the ensemble, working off of his incredible originality and incredibly versatile set of ideas. Trying to understand how the piece could have been developed without really being able to ask them now, I can't figure out that last chorus. It's quite possible that that fermata between the clarinet and trumpet and just sticking on that pulse of the rhythm for that amount of time, could have just happened, things like

that do happen in improvised music that are startling, we won't know. But even if it was that, even if it was an improvised moment and not an arranged moment, the ensemble created that moment. It wasn't just Armstrong. I am really fascinated by the dynamics of ensembles.

JN: You are sitting there trying to imagine if this was a composed or an improvised moment, and the way you read that moment changes what it means, in a way. Were these like-inspired people, who were just feeling it in the moment or was somebody a great musical thinker who wrote it down for everybody? What's the difference in terms of the listener's experience?

KV: Well I think there are a number of people that would make the argument that neither one is more important than the other. There are a lot of people who say improvisation is composition and I think they can make a pretty good argument for that. So I think from a standpoint of great musical thinking, whether it is improvised or pre-composed, it doesn't really matter.

JN: But it does effect one's sense of the sympathy between the members of

the ensemble, doesn't it? When Louis Armstrong starts to hold that note someone else in the ensemble might have taken that as an opportunity to step forward and change or do something new but they don't. What they do is hang there and let that moment just float. So if you are reading it as something improvised, you are thinking they are showing great sympathy for each other and great restraint and stuff like that. Whereas, if it was all just written down, then you are thinking Louis Armstrong wanted this note to just hang there and the other guys are just following his instructions.

KV: I see your point. But I would say that even being able to do that—as someone who has written a lot of music and tried to get it performed—getting people to understand the intentions is really dependent on communication as an ensemble too. So, again, it brings me back to the point that, either way, if it's an arrangement that is preconceived or an improvised moment, either way the result is startling. And I see your point from the perspective of a listener, maybe depending on their predilection towards composition or improvisation one or the other would have more excitement for them. From the artefact itself I'm just blown away that they are able to come up with it.

JN: I am finding this a strange and perverse moment right now to be sitting here with Ken Vandermark, and having

you say that Louis Armstrong is insane and your mind is blown. It's funny, it's a reversal of what you might expect, of who might say the other one is insane. But it's cool, it's really good. So were there other particular points you wanted to make about that section?

KV: For me the primary thing that's startling is the fermata of the trumpet and clarinet over the repeating pulse. One of the things about this—the static elements of this are really striking—but for me I become more and more interested in the idea of what constitutes a groove, a feeling of rhythm that motivates something more than just a metronome pulse. How much has to happen for there to be a feeling associated with time played? And not just in the context of jazz. There are lots of ways to play time. This is something that has become very interesting to me and my own music and trying to break out of dealing with meter, like playing with 3/4 time or 4/4 time and opening up the possibility of phrasing as an ensemble and as individuals in that ensemble, not restricted to meter. This piece, in this moment that comes up, perhaps because it relates to the beginning of this ensemble work

where there is this strong quarter note, which is really the feeling of the whole character of the composition. It's like it isolates the groove as if it is frozen in time and there is something about that that I think connects to my interests. They have somehow isolated the groove because the only things that are playing at the time are the piano and banjo. The other instruments are holding and you can't really hear the drums, so I don't know what the drums are doing. But essentially it's just that one pulse, the unified quarter note pulse, and the feeling is completely there. Part of it is probably due to the nature of the horns and the color of the sound in back of that. But that beat with the four beat hold and the trombone repeating, that's enough to set up the entire feeling of the groove and they have reduced it down to a quarter note. That is really fascinating to me as it is something I am interested in trying to get closer to in my own work.

JN: What else?

KV: Well that's the main thing to me, it's the most striking. But in that last chorus it goes from this moment of stasis, that repetition that freezes, into this short—maybe it's 4 bars of Armstrong playing—into this piano cadenza, into the slowed down motion of the end of the piece. It's

self-reflective almost, closing on the high hat or whatever the heck it is. It's almost self-reflective in a way, because it is so jarring you haven't heard that sound since the second chorus of the piece. It sounds as if it's right up on the mic and it doesn't fit into the field of the ensemble in terms of the sound space of the ensemble. It's like someone ran up there and is listening to a record and "click," just shuts it off almost in an artificial way. Those are very avant-garde things happening in one chorus of the blues in 1928. Today I was working in this apartment where I've been able to stay while I'm in London and listening to some of the work by the trio with Han Bennink, Peter Brötzmann and Fred Van Hove, from the second record that they did on FMP. I guess we'd characterise them as Dadaist or Fluxus-type moments with radical, strange, quiet piano parts and then Han Bennink sounds as if he has hurled his drums out the window and you know, self-reflective moments in the music, I guess they were trying to break through to what might be on the other side of those experiences. And to me, you've already got it happening. Those recordings I guess were made in the early 70s, so that's like 45 years after

"West End Blues." I would qualify this as something that warrants perspective. This is modern music, it's not old-fashioned. And you are laughing at me because I am raving about Armstrong. But as you go through Armstrong music in this period, the stuff he is doing on trumpet is insane, and not just from a technical, virtuoso standpoint. This is where I would separate myself very, very radically from the conservative perspective of jazz history. Yeah, he is a virtuoso. But it's the leaps of creativity, it's not the technical skill that is amazing about Armstrong. The technical skill serves an incredible mind and creativity. I would say that is true of the beboppers, it's true of Coltrane. The mistake very frequently happens because it is easier to try to qualify technique and try to analyze technique. It's very, very difficult to understand creativity and fully appreciate that aspect. So I think that's another place where I would separate myself from the—what's the word?—fetishism, I guess, of the virtuoso improviser. I think that Armstrong's playing is completely raw in the way that Peter Brötzmann's playing is completely raw, seeking something, and it's beautiful in the way it seeks it, but it is not clean, it is not figured out. It's like jumping to these things. And in the time I have worked with Peter, I've really been stunned about how much he knows about American jazz history and

his real enthusiasm for the early players like Armstrong and Bechet and he knows that music cold. And when you realize that, and spend some time with him you hear it in his music all over the place and you feel like slapping yourself in the face and saying "why wasn't I catching this before?" because it seems very self-evident. I have to give him a lot of thanks because my looking back on Armstrong from where I am now has really been motivated by Peter's interest in that music and by trying to understand what Peter's hearing in it. And it has really helped me appreciate, not just Armstrong but these early players, like Johnny Dodds, he is one of the great clarinet players. And I would say that these elements that you hear in Peter's radical music or in music that I am trying, is right in "West End Blues," all of it. The radical elements that are associated with music on the fringe of the mainstream was in the foundations of the music, from the beginning.

JN: So, are you saying that, in those more Dada and Fluxus-kind of moments, what they are doing is magnifying what is already part of the genetic code of jazz or American improvisation?

KV: Yeah, maybe in opposition to it. It's really great to be able to talk to Peter about this stuff. And it would be amazing to talk to Bennink and Van Hove, sit them down and have a discussion about that group. Because I think it is one of the great trios of improvised music. A friend of mine, another musician, Jeb Bishop, made an amazing, important point one time, when he said that a lot of the

changes in the music and the changes and innovations that happen in the music frequently come from isolating elements in something that happened in the previous generation or earlier, focussing on elements that were there but maybe not highlighted before. Maybe an easy example would be someone like Evan Parker taking characteristics from Pharaoh Sanders' music and John Coltrane's music and zeroing in on those.

JN: Distilling it in a way.

KV: Distilling it, and looking at one or a few parts of that huge perspective on music and huge sense of creativity and saying "I hear a whole world in these three elements." And so possibly some of the things that Brötzmann and those guys were doing in that trio, maybe it was like trying to throw a drum set at that American sensibility and seeing what would bounce back.

JN: So if you were to turn that same view point upon yourself and the music you're making, could you say what sorts of things you are trying to extract, distill from previous generations or from other musics that you are hearing?

KV: I'm really fascinated with what I see as a gap between 1970 and where we

are now, so let's say thirty-five years. Before that, it seemed there is a lot of awareness, or there seems to be among the people that I know, a sense of what was happening and how the music was working. And then it becomes really interesting to me because in 1970—just to use a random year—around that time things kind of come apart. Because before that I think it's fair to say a large majority of innovations that happen and music associated with jazz came from black Americans. There are exceptions, but the main things were coming out of their creativity. And then in the 70s, the way I see it, from trying to understand it trying to look at and study it, things kind of change. There is a huge explosion in Europe, between the Dutch, the English, and the Germans and other people between the cracks of that, coming up with their own systems of thinking, in many cases, in reaction to the American hard bop and things that were happening. And then in the United States you had people like the AACM, who in some ways were doing things like the English were doing. And there's this strange fracturing and it seems to me that there really hasn't been some serious, serious investigation of all these things that have happened in the last thirty-five years. It seems that investigating is being done by the

musicians, and the musicians have been trying to figure out what has been happening, what to do with this history that has been gathered, it's almost oral history, you know, "I heard this record what do you think? Blah blah blah," and this exchange of information that way. But where I am, I know, is in relation to that material. I am not a black American and I am coming from a point in time where John Cage had already happened where Albert Ayler has already happened. I was born in 1964, so any sensibility of anything happening was really post- those developments and the explosion of the core of tonal harmony in jazz.

JN: Not to mention that you are playing in a post-sampling world now.

KV: That's true too. I am very, very, very curious about—I am trying to figure out how to articulate it—but why all this stuff broke up. It's like this super extraction of even a myth of a mainstream. It doesn't exist anymore. I could be one hundred percent wrong, but it does not seem possible to me that someone my age or younger is going to play bebop well. It's just not possible. Because that music was developed out of a period where musicians were growing up in

the 30s and creating their craft in the 40s, so we are talking about sixty years ago. The time I am in right now is based on all these developments that already happened thirty years ago and I'm just trying to make sense of them and I'm thirty years late.

JN: Bebop wouldn't mean now what it meant then.

KV: It doesn't make sense to me. Because you have this one thread which magazines like *Downbeat* write about all the time to try to sustain this whole thing which, again, is connected to trying to sustain this system of finances, conservatories which are trying to teach kids how to play jazz in a way that is associated with tonality which doesn't really function any more in our society. You know, to me, the major thing about improvised music is that it really has been a music of its time, of its cultural period.

JN: I am not sure if you are saying this is a positive thing, what happened post-1970.

KV: Oh, it's incredibly positive.

JN: If you look at the connect-the-dots history of jazz, through all the geniuses as of 1970, that all falls apart and you can't find your geniuses so easily anymore.

KV: It's not a straight line and it's confusing and it's fantastic, it's really fantastic.

I definitely don't think it's negative. I'm obsessed about it because within that, so-to-speak, confusion, there are all these threads of thought. And now here we are in 2005, almost, and you have this path the English had, you have this path the Germans had, and they are like schools of thought now. So now what happens? Because we haven't even thought what the schools of thought are, how they function yet. Let's say you are English and you have been working with guys like Evan Parker and [Paul] Lytton and then [Derek] Bailey or whatever. Maybe there is a way to talk about it that I would love to hear. But as an American, these schools of thought and then whatever has been happening in the United States, post-AACM—Anthony Braxton and all these other things—here we are at a point where something else has to happen. And we haven't even really been fully able to grapple with what happened over the last three decades and it's time for another breakthrough to deal with this influx of information from all these different countries in Western Europe and Japan and the United States. So, to me, to be bogged down in American jazz and try to preserve it, that is so far away from the direction of the art of the music.