

*A BIOGRAPHICAL
HISTORY OF JAZZ
TROMBONE*

From Kid Ory to Curtis Fuller

Greg Fallis

University of Memphis

Introduction

The trombone has a unique place in jazz history. Among all common instruments used, its role has changed most since this music's creation. Three fundamental elements make up jazz: rhythm, harmony, and melody. In the early stages, the role of trombone was only to supply bass and harmony. This was a role trombonists were used to. For centuries they have sat behind orchestras playing down beats and block chords. However, as the language of jazz became more complex and tempos rose, the trombonist's role became more sophisticated.

Besides the march, which often gave melody to the trombone section, jazz did more to expand the technique of this instrument than any other style of music. Wind bands like John Phillip Sousa's helped to bring the trombone out from behind the orchestra, and helped it gain standing as a melody instrument. That being said, trombonists in the bebop era (e.g. Frank Rosolino or J.J. Johnson) played with speed, flexibility and fluidity that had never been done in history. Their expansion of the instrument's technique was greater than ever before, and it changed the role of the modern trombonist. Today, trombonists are the chameleon of the big band. At any given moment they might be supplying rhythm, bass, harmony, melody, or countermelody for the ensemble.

In Dixieland we see the trombone used primarily as a bass instrument. For this style it is mostly outlining the chord using a technique called 'tailgating' which will be discussed more later. Swing era jazz orchestras tends to use it as a rhythm or color instrument. Often the section is playing syncopated hits, or providing special effects with the use of glissandos and a wide variety of mutes. The end of the swing era, and beginning of bebop introduces a new type of trombonist—one who can play in small groups as a featured soloist, performing interesting and fluid melody lines. These players successfully 'saxophonized' the instrument, pushing the boundaries of what was thought to be possible. Yet before they are addressed, we must start from the beginning of jazz trombone, and it begins with Dixieland.

Early Jazz

Dixieland is a style of music that originated within the Storyville district of New Orleans. Instrumentation of a Dixieland group usually includes cornet, clarinet, trombone, banjo, tuba, and some type of percussion. The music is passed down through aural tradition, and largely improvisational. A cornetist will perform the melody, often with improvised embellishments. Meanwhile clarinet improvises countermelody, and the trombone serves a dual bass/harmony role known as 'tailgating'. The name tailgating comes from placement of trombone players on the bandwagon in a typical New Orleans parade. Due to the long slide and extra space trombonists require, they would have to sit on the back of the bandwagon (or tailgate) in a parade. As a musical term, tailgating may be defined as the outlining of chord tones (i.e. roots, thirds, or sevenths) connected by frequent glissandos. This technique requires the musician to have highly trained ears, and an intuitive ability to voice lead from one chord to the next. Kid Ory was a master of the tailgating style, and the first notable trombonist to appear in jazz history.

Edward "Kid" Ory was a musician of Creole descent born in 1886. He grew up speaking both French and English in La Place, Louisiana just outside of New Orleans. In 1902 at the age of

16, Ory began traveling in to the city for gigs, and started his musical career in New Orleans as a tailgating trombonist playing in parade bands¹. Like most players in this setting, he prioritized having a big blasting sound that could be heard from long distances over playing complex lines. Kid Ory's tone characterized the Dixieland trombone style perfectly: smears, growls, wide vibrato, good harmonic voice leading, and solos using simple, repeated motifs. In 1925 Kid Ory would solidify his place in jazz history by joining King Oliver's band, where the 34 year-old played alongside a young Armstrong. After getting a spot on King Oliver's band, Ory would go on to play with Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, Ma Rainey, Benny Goodman, and Charles Mingus.

Another notable trombonist from this era, but with a different style, was Charlie Green (b. 1893). "Big Green" was from Omaha, Nebraska. He started his career playing with Red Perkins, until eventually getting picked up by Fletcher Henderson's Orchestra in 1924. Green is still considered the godfather of blues trombone today. There is a lineage of great blues trombonists that includes J.C. Higginbotham and Al Grey, which can be traced back to Charlie Green. His playing on Bessie Smith's hit-tune Empty Bed Blues in 1928 is without question the greatest blues trombone playing ever recorded up to that point. Big Green's playing on this session was revolutionary for a couple reasons. For one, it captured the raw and provocative nature of the song's lyrics, which were so wildly popular during the Roaring Twenties. Additionally, he was the first to play improvised riffs behind a singer in between phrases. With the deep tradition of call & response in African-American music, it is improbable that Charlie Green was the first instrumentalist ever to improvise behind a singer in this manner. However, it is reasonable to say that he was the first to do so with a top-selling recording artist, popularized the technique, and solidified it as performance practice in blues music forever.²

Both Kid Ory and Big Green set a precedent with their musicianship. They are immortalized in history as two individuals who laid the foundation for trombone playing in the jazz idiom. As younger musicians came onto the scene and music continued to evolve, so did the playing of Kid Ory and Big Green. However, in their earliest recordings one can hear the genesis of jazz trombone playing, and the greatest improvisation ever done on the instrument to date. In early jazz, there are two more individuals who stand out as pioneers for swing era trombonists: Jimmy Harrison (b. 1900) and Milfred "Miff" Mole (b. 1898).

Jimmy Harrison grew up in Detroit, and began playing trombone at the age of 15. He would have some success as a combo player there, but his musical career did not really begin until later. After playing semi-professional baseball for some time in Toledo, Ohio, Harrison went on to Atlantic City to perform as a singer and trombonist in a local minstrel show. Soon thereafter in 1923 he moved to New York City, where he played on and off with Chick Webb, Duke Ellington, and Fletcher Henderson.³ in 1931 while performing in both Webb and Henderson's band, Harrison died of a stomach ailment which had been painning him for

¹ David Wilken, "Evolution of the Jazz Trombone, Part One: Dixieland", *Online Trombone Journal*, (accessed April 1st, 2018).

² Bob Zieff, *Green, Charlie*, Grove Music Online, (accessed April 1st, 2018).

³ Leonard Feather, *The New Edition of the Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz*, (New York, NY: Bonanza Books, 1962) 245-246.

months.⁴ He is commonly referred to as the “father of swing trombone”, and his solo on Fletcher Henderson’s “Keep A Sound In Your Soul” explains why. Although it is melodically simple, Harrison’s warm sound is completely different from the gutbucket Dixieland trombonists who came before him. His rhythmic ideas based on the triplet, and lip trills at the tail ends of phrases will become common techniques for younger swing era trombonists like Tommy Dorsey. Along with Miff Mole who was similarly influential, Harrison successfully bridged the old Dixieland and new Swing Era styles.

By audiences of the time, Miff Mole was seen as Jimmy Harrison’s “white counterpart”.⁵ The latter passed from a stomach virus at 31, while the former continued his playing career well into his sixties. Harrison was equally talented, but not as prolifically recorded due to his untimely death. As a result, Miff Mole was the more influential of the two. Mole grew up in Roosevelt, New York where he learned to play trombone, and frequently traveled to New York City to hear Edwin “Eddie” Edwards and the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. Soon Mole decided to move in to the City, and played in several groups including the Original Memphis Five and his own band—Miff Mole & His Little Molers. Unfortunately the Original Memphis Five (who also went by the name Ladd’s Black Aces) were in no way affiliated with Memphis, and so-named as a marketing ploy to gain African-American audiences.⁶

Miff Mole’s playing was cleaner than any trombonist before him. His style omitted the rough glissandos and growls of Dixieland trombone. His lines are accurate, higher in range, and contain wider leaps than trombonists before. His virtuosity on the instrument gave trombone solos equal standing with the cornet and clarinet, and bandleaders took notice. At the height of his career Mole enjoyed work in the Paul Whiteman Orchestra, Benny Goodman Orchestra, and as a studio musician for NBC. Miff Mole never quit on his playing career. Although plagued with illness through the 1950’s Mole played as much as his health would allow, and continued to gig until passing away at the age of 63.

The Swing Era

One can argue that during the Swing Era there were two types of jazz musicians: the improviser and the pop artist. The improviser pushed boundaries and helped to develop the language of jazz. These are people like Coleman Hawkins, Teddy Wilson and Trummy Young. Meanwhile the pop artist produced records with mass appeal and jazz sensibility, but usually devoid of improvisation. This is the category Tommy Dorsey falls into, and his recordings feature written solos almost exclusively. Although he was not a brilliant improviser, no one can discount his virtuosity, artistry, and importance as someone who popularized jazz trombone.

Tommy Dorsey (b. 1905) came from a musical family. His father Tommy Dorsey Sr. was a bandleader, and brother Jimmy Dorsey a saxophonist with whom he would eventually start a band. His first noteworthy gig was in Paul Whiteman’s Orchestra, which he began playing with

⁴John Chilton, *Harrison, Jimmy*, Grove Music Online (accessed April 1st, 2018).

⁵ Joachim-Ernst Berendt, *The Jazz Book: From Ragtime to the 21st Century*, ed. Günther Huesmann, (Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books, 2009), 267.

⁶ Wilken, “Evolution of the Jazz Trombone, Part One: Dixieland”.

in 1927 at the age of 22. His time as a soloist in Whiteman's band significantly elevated his status in the music world, and by 1929 he set out to form his own band with Jimmy.

The Dorsey Brothers were a somewhat dysfunctional group. They saw a short-lived success, and due to frequent disagreements between Tommy and Jimmy, eventually disbanded in 1935. Tommy Dorsey went on to form his own orchestra, which was a wild success, and earned him the title "Sentimental Gentleman of Swing" based on the band's theme song: "I'm Getting Sentimental Over You" for which he was the featured soloist. His theme song portrays what was so great about his playing—a ballad played in the upper tessitura with immediate vibrato, and the articulation style that was incredibly legato without creating a glissando. One can hear Dorsey's influence on modern trombonist Bill Watrous in their ballad recordings; the latter uses an in-bell mic technique to emulate the silky sound of the Sentimental Gentleman.⁷

Of the Swing Era trombonists who straddled the line between improviser and pop artist, Jack Teagarden (b. 1905) did it the best. "Big T" was a Texas native who began playing Trombone at the age of 10, and worked at a young age in bands and theatres around the Southwest. He moved to New York in 1927 where he got a gig with Wingy Malone, and then with Ben Pollack from 1928-1933. Pollack's band was a hotbed for young talent; future bandleaders Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, and Harry James also spent time in the group. After leaving Pollack's band, Teagarden played in Paul Whiteman's Orchestra from 1933-1938, which boosted his reputation within the music scene in a similar way to Tommy Dorsey. Just like Dorsey, Teagarden's next step was to begin leading his own bands which he had great success with as both a singer and instrumentalist.

In 1947 Big T and Louis Armstrong created a duo that would record heavily for the next 4 years and cut nearly 10 albums.⁸ The public seemed to love this tandem which consisted of a high energy trumpet player with the hot jazz sound, and a lyrical trombonist with a cool approach to the blues. The fact that they both had incredible voices and a warm bond which could be seen by any audience did not hurt, to say the least. Big T's contemplative approach to singing, and expressive yet mellow trombone playing was also enormously respected by later cool jazz musicians of the fifties.⁹ In a similar way to Armstrong, Teagarden was both adored by audiences as a pop artist, and highly regarded by musicians as an improviser. He is remembered as someone who struck the perfect balance between artist and entertainer.

The next trombonist in line to join Louis' band was James "Trummy" Young (b. 1912). Trummy was great at doing the tailgate style Louis' band often called for, but his technique went far beyond that. Because of his ability to play many different styles at an expert level, Trummy Young was one of the most versatile trombonists in jazz history. On recordings by Young's band from the album *1944-1946*, one can hear him performing sensitive ballads, the blues, singing, and taking solos at blazing-fast tempos for the trombone (e.g. his solo on "Tea For Two" sits around 270 bpm).

A good example of Trummy's innovative style, which people did not hear in his playing with Armstrong's band, is on display in the recording of "Four Or Five Times" from the same

⁷ David Wilken, "Evolution of the Jazz Trombone, Part Two: The Swing Era", *Online Trombone Journal*, (accessed April 1st, 2018).

⁸ Wilken, "Evolution of the Jazz Trombone, Part Two: The Swing Era".

⁹ Berendt, *The Jazz Book: From Ragtime to the 21st Century*, 268.

album (1944-1946). This cut, which also featured Roy Eldridge on trumpet and Don Byas on tenor saxophone, is a perfect example of jazz right before the Bebop Era. Influence of people like Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young can be heard in Trummy's solo, in his use of double-time lines contrasted with rhythmic ideas placed on the backside of the beat.

In 1947 Trummy Young moved to Hawaii, where he would live on and off for the rest of his life. Tours with Louis Armstrong took him all around the world, but eventually Young would retire fully to Hawaii and enjoy frequent employment in local jazz clubs. This is where he met a youthful Conrad Herwig. Herwig, an army brat whose father was stationed in Hawaii, went with his family to see Trummy Young's quintet perform at the Hanohano Room (where the group played six nights a week) for his 13th birthday. Trummy knew the local Honolulu trombonist who taught the boy, and upon finding out it was Conrad's birthday dedicated a tune to him. Conrad talks about being inspired by Trummy in an interview with Michael Davis. Regarding the experience he tells Davis, "That moment was a life changing event, and I decided the only thing I wanted to do was be a jazz trombone player."¹⁰ His influence on Conrad, perhaps the greatest jazz trombonist ever, cannot be understated. Young was one of the trombonists who bridged Swing Era and Bebop improvisational techniques—along with Vic Dickenson, Benny Morton, and especially Bill Harris.

The next great bluesman after Charlie Green was J.C. Higginbotham (b. 1906). He grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio, and got his first gig in Wes Helvey's band at the age of 18. He would play with lesser known bands in the Midwest for a few years before moving to Buffalo, and finally arriving in New York where he got a gig playing with Luis Russell in 1928. He would go on to play with Chick Webb, Fletcher Henderson, Louis Armstrong, and Red Allen in that order. Allen was Higginbotham's closest musical companion through the 40's, and they frequently recorded in one another's bands. Although he was able to adapt his style to these different groups, nearly everything he played was nuanced with blues inflections or 'gutty' gestures. His style, which is commonly referred to as 'gutbucket' trombone, was an "extrovert style characterized by a forceful tone and savage attack."¹¹ For having such a long and prolific career (as a sideman) he is one of the most underrated trombonists to come out of the Swing Era.

Duke Ellington's trombone section had an iconic sound, more than any other orchestra, and three men were responsible for it: Lawrence Brown, Joseph "Tricky Sam" Nanton, and Juan Tizol. Lawrence Brown was Duke Ellington's lead trombonist. On recordings like "Blue Cellophane" (1945) one can hear the way Brown modernized trombone playing, not with his improvisational technique, but the way he interpreted solos written by Duke Ellington. Tricky Sam Nanton's playing on Duke Ellington recordings can be spotted by the use of a plunger, which he helped to pioneer as a serious mute for brass instruments. The most noteworthy example of this is "Black And Tan Fantasy" (1927), which demonstrates a combination of the plunger wah-wah effect and use of the growl. Mr. Nanton passed away too soon, in 1946 while on tour with the Ellington Orchestra, but was key to Duke's Jungle Sound early on.

The final trombonist of the Ellington Orchestra was Juan Tizol, and although he was a valve-trombonist, Tizol deserves mentioning. Juan Tizol was from San Juan, Puerto Rico, and arrived to the United States in 1920 where he worked in theatre bands around Washington D.C.

¹⁰ Michael Davis, "Conrad Herwig Interview", *Bone2Pick*, (accessed April 1st 2018).

¹¹ Feather, *The New Edition of the Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz*, 254.

for years until joining Brown and Nanton. In September of 1929 he got a spot in Duke's band, where he would remain until 1944. Tizol wrote some of the Ellington Orchestra's most well-known compositions, including "Caravan", "Perdido", "Bakiff", and "Moonlight Fiesta". Ellington and Strayhorn would often use valve trombone in the lower register, where rapid passages in the staff (e.g. B flat to B natural) would pose problems for the regular slide trombone.¹²

Juan Tizol is also known for carrying a bolo knife. In fact, Tizol and his knife infamously got Charles Mingus kicked out of the Ellington band. The story goes that one night Mingus took some liberty with one of Juan's written solos, changing it more to his liking. Juan Tizol did not like the alterations, and after exchanging words with Mingus on the set break, flashed his long bolo knife at the bassist during their second set (which he kept on the music stand each night.) In the middle of a tune, Mingus and Tizol lunged at one another and began fighting viciously. In Charles Mingus' autobiography, *Beneath the Underdog*, he recalls what Duke said to him that night after the show:

*"I congratulate you on your performance. But why didn't you and Juan inform me about the adagio you planned so that we could score it?... Really, Charles, that's destructive. Everybody knows Juan has a knife but nobody ever took it seriously--he likes to pull it out and show it to people, you understand. So I'm afraid, Charles--I've never fired anybody--you'll have to quit my band. I don't need any new problems. Juan's an old problem, I can cope with that, but you seem to have a whole bag of new tricks. I must ask you to be kind enough to give me your notice, Mingus."*¹³

Due to his tenure with the group Tizol was permitted to stay, but Mingus was forced to resign. The incident between them was taxing on Duke's relationship with Mingus, and was likely the reason why their future endeavors, such as the album *Money Jungle*, rarely went smoothly.

In shifting focus from Duke's band to the Woody Herman Orchestra, one trombonist from the section stands out. Bill Harris (b. 1916) grew up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he learned to play trumpet, trombone, tenor saxophone, and many other instruments. Perhaps these additional pursuits slowed him from beginning a professional career on the trombone, which he did not start until the age of 22. His first job was in 1942 playing in the Buddy Williams band, then with Goodman (1943), and eventually Woody Herman (1944-1946, 1948-1950). Harris's most revered solo in his span with the Herman Orchestra is from the tune *Bijou*, released in 1945. His playing on the cut was "the most admired trombone solo of the time"¹⁴ and it won him the Downbeat Award and Esquire New Star Award the same year.¹⁵

As a result of his expansive technical prowess and command of alternate positions, Bill Harris was able to execute smooth melodic ideas on the trombone at burning tempos. His technique, which was far beyond any other trombonist of the time, allotted him a great deal of small group work in the forties and early fifties. He led his own septet and played as a sideman

¹² Wilken, "Evolution of the Jazz Trombone, Part Two: The Swing Era".

¹³ Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog: His World as Composed by Mingus*, ed. Nel King, (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971).

¹⁴ Berendt, *The Jazz Book: From Ragtime to the 21st Century*, 269.

¹⁵ Feather, *The New Edition of the Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz*, 245.

in several combos (most notably Lester Young's) before returning to the Goodman and Herman Orchestras in the late fifties. Harris' influence on the great trombonist J.J. Johnson is analogous to Roy Eldridge's impact on trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie. He was the most pioneering stylist to help usher in a new generation of bebop musicians.

Bop

The earliest bebop trombonist appeared on the scene in Earl Hines' band in 1942. His style was indubitably developed from exchanging ideas about music with his bandmates, Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. Bennie Green (b. 1923) was an incredibly progressive player, and over the span of his career made the transition from a Swing Era style artist to hard-bop by the late fifties. Much of his early career was spent in Hines' big bands and small groups, until he began touring with his own quintet in 1953. In the quintet Green is still using a Swing Era style of phrasing, but asserts his evolving harmonic vocabulary with an exceptionally bombastic sound. He was the first trombonist to assume a flat-ninth on dominant chords—finding more interesting, colorful ways to create tension and release than any trombonist before.¹⁶ In those quintet recordings, the group's hard-driving shuffle feel coupled with a newly developing bebop language is strikingly similar to what Art Blakey & The Jazz Messengers had just begun doing around the same time. Much later in his career, in 1969, Bennie Green would join Duke Ellington for a tour, and then play in Vegas hotel bands until his death in 1977.

One cannot discuss jazz trombone without talking about James Louis "J.J." Johnson (b. 1924)—the greatest Bebop Era stylist, and father of modern jazz trombone. After learning to play piano at 11 years-old, J.J. began on trombone at the relatively late age of 14. Among his first influences at that stage were Trummy Young, Dickie Wells, and J.C. Higginbotham. After only four years on the horn, J.J. landed his first major gig with Benny Carter's big band in 1942 (featuring a young Max Roach on the drum set). The rapid rate at which Johnson's ability developed must have been a result of his extensive practice regimen, physiology of embouchure, and previous experience with piano. In any case it is clear J.J. was endowed with an incredible predisposition for trombone playing, and it was about to pay off in a big way.

In 1945 Johnson was hired by the Count Basie Orchestra, and toured with the group until 1946. In that trombone section he met Dickie Wells, who had a profound impact on the young man. In a 1995 interview, J.J. reflects on Wells' impact:

"...Dickie Wells, there was a persona. Dickie Wells was uniquely Dickie Wells when he played. He didn't play many notes on the trombone when he improvised. It was like, 'Less is more, simple is good.' I loved Dickie Wells' trombone conceptualizing because it was based on a minimum of articulation, not all over the horn, just a few bluesy, well-chosen notes that made chills run up and down your spine. So [Trummy Young & Dickie Wells] were my influences. And J.C. Higginbotham, of course."¹⁷

¹⁶ David Wilken, "Evolution of the Jazz Trombone, Part Three: Bebop", *Online Trombone Journal*, (accessed April 1st, 2018).

¹⁷ Bob Bernotas, "An Interview with J.J. Johnson", *Online Trombone Journal*, (accessed April 1st, 2018)

After leaving the Basie band, J.J. began to work in small groups on 52nd street playing bop, and as time went on his reputation within the club scene had begun to rise considerably. His most noteworthy accomplishments during that period were a session he did with Charlie Parker in 1947 (*On Dial, vol. 6*), and playing in Dizzy's band from 1949-1951.

After leaving Dizzy's band, J.J. had trouble finding gigs. The early fifties were a period of sporadic work for J.J., and he was forced to take a day-job as a blueprint inspector from 1952-1954. When asked about this period in an interview, Johnson reveals that financial hardship may not have been the only reason for his hiatus:

"In my case, yes, of course, there were times of disillusionment with where jazz was going, or what seemed to appear where jazz was going. In some cases, it was disillusionment with where J.J. was going with jazz and how he was progressing with his manner of trombone playing. In other instances, it was just to step outside of the jazz arena so that I could have a view of jazz from the outside looking in. Sometimes you need to get out, to get a good look at what's happening on the inside... Sometimes you need to stand with your nose to the window and have a good look at jazz. And I've done that on many occasions."¹⁸

In his interviews J.J. was incredibly thoughtful, articulate, and at times profound. In the seventies he would go through another period of stepping away from jazz, when he began to focus on composition which will be discussed later.

A partnership with Kai Winding which began in 1954 helped Johnson's career to bounce back from its slump. In a similar way to Miff Mole and Jimmy Harrison, Kai Winding was viewed as J.J. Johnson's "white counterpart" on trombone.¹⁹ Although this point is irrelevant today, from a historical perspective it is worth mentioning to better understand how the two were perceived by audiences of the day. The duo, which toured as the "Jay and Kay Quintet", was wildly popular for a few reasons: For one, they were two of the best trombonists anyone had ever heard up to that point. Second, they were both brilliant composers, and wrote great arrangements of songs that sounded interesting while only using two trombones (e.g. their arrangement of "It's Alright With Me"). Lastly, the public loved to see an integrated band being co-led by two men who had great rapport, but who came from such different backgrounds—a white man from Denmark and an African-American man from Indianapolis. The brilliance of this quintet lies not just in the music, but also in the sociological impact it had on a country experiencing first stages of The Civil Rights Movement.

In the sixties Johnson enjoyed a prolific career performing and recording both as a leader or sideman. The next major hiatus in his performing career, which J.J. alluded to in the aforementioned interview, was when he moved to Los Angeles in 1970 to become a film composer. After much "prodding" from Quincy Jones and Lalo Schiffrin, J.J. decided to take a chance on something that was "eating [his] heart out to try." He would live in L.A. for the next 17 years as a composer with varying success. Due to his fame as a jazz musician, agents often had a hard time getting him work, since producers would hear the name J.J. Johnson and think,

¹⁸ Bernotas, "An Interview with J.J. Johnson".

¹⁹ Berendt, *The Jazz Book: From Ragtime to the 21st Century*, 269-270.

“He’s a jazz musician. We don’t want jazz in this picture.” In this way J.J. was typecast throughout much of his film composition career. Another battle he was fighting was racism, and the films or television Johnson was frequently hired to write for he referred to as “Blaxploitation” (i.e. films that exploit stereotypes surrounding African-Americans.) Racism in Hollywood film production would plague J.J.’s career as a composer, but not end it. Johnson’s love for writing kept him there for almost two decades, until he stopped composing for film in 1987 to resume his career as a full-time trombonist. Johnson would cut several more albums before passing away in 2001.²⁰

During the fifties Carl Fontana and Frank Rosolino pioneered bebop techniques which allowed them to perform lines on the slide trombone at higher speeds than had ever been done. One of which was doodle tonguing—a multiple tonguing technique that is more legato than double tonguing and idiomatic to jazz. The other was against the grain playing, and is executed by changing partials quickly with minimal slide movements. This requires an incredible amount of lip flexibility, which Rosolino had in abundance.

Rosolino’s first job as a professional musician was in the army bands. When he returned to his hometown of Detroit after two years of service, Rosolino played in sundry bands before joining the Kenton Orchestra from 1952-1954. Upon leaving Kenton’s band he began recording with his own group, for which he sang on occasion. Much like his trombone sound, Frank had a bright and cheerful singing voice.

Unfortunately, there were parts of his life which were not so bright and cheerful. Rosolino suffered severely from an undiagnosed (and likely drug-induced) bipolar disorder. My trombone teacher at University of Tulsa, Vernon Howard, has seen his personality disorder first-hand. Once when Rosolino was featured as a guest artist at TU, Vernon let him spend the night in his guest bedroom. They stayed up talking and listening to records late that evening, Rosolino had to get up early and travel home to California the next day. When morning came Vernon found Rosolino jumping up and down on the bed giddily like a little boy. When they got to the airport, Frank handed him a cloth sack and said to him, “Here man, I want you to have this.” The gift Vernon still has to this day—a hash pipe from Frank Rosolino.²¹ Although this story is comical there were also dark times, and Frank’s life ended in tragedy. On November 26, 1978 Frank Rosolino took his own life, after shooting both of his sons in their sleep.

The next generation of great hard-bop trombonists was led by Curtis Fuller (b. 1934). Fuller grew up in Detroit, Michigan. His mother passed away when he was six years old, and his youth was spent in an orphanage with his older sister who became his biggest influence in life. Since he was the only African-American in the orphanage often times he was isolated from the group. The only times Fuller saw other people of color was in movies like Tarzan, in which the Africans were portrayed as inferior. One day his older sister took him to a concert so that Curtis could “see [his] people and what they do.”²² The group was the Illinois Jacquet Band, featuring soloist J.J. Johnson, and Curtis immediately fell in love with his playing.

²⁰ Bernotas, “An Interview with J.J. Johnson”.

²¹ Vernon Howard, interview by author, Tulsa, April 1st, 2018.

²² Molly Murphy, “An Interview with Curtis Fuller”, *National Endowment for the Arts: NEA Jazz Masters*, ed. Don Ball, (accessed April 1st, 2018).

Curtis picked up the trombone, and began playing in school where his classmates included Donald Byrd, Barry Harris, Pepper Adams, Tommy Flanagan, Milt Jackson, Hank Jones, and Kenny Burrell. After graduating Fuller played in the army from 1953-1955, and returned to Detroit where he found great success performing the club circuit. In 1957, Miles Davis brought him to New York.

He became very desirable in New York as a result of his likeness to J.J. Johnson. Fuller's tones and melodic approach is very close to J.J., but as a younger player in New York he often tried to play lightning-fast solos. In those years, Billie Holiday would tell him, "When you play, you're talking to people, so learn how to edit..."²³ She had an enormous influence on the young man during the early stages of his career. After his brief stint with Miles, Fuller worked with a wide array of high caliber artists, including Dizzy Gillespie, Benny Golson, Gil Evans and Art Farmer. However, his most significant contribution to hard-bop trombone playing was done in Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers and with John Coltrane.

Curtis Fuller's appearance on Blue Train (recorded in 1957) was wildly influential to the progress of modern jazz trombone, since Coltrane's harmonic language was so different that what came before, and had not yet been played on the trombone. As Fuller himself put it, "John was taking music another direction... it wasn't just rhythm changes anymore, it was completely different." Three hours before the session Coltrane brought the music for Blue Train in to rehearsal. Curtis made a comment to him about "putting the music on [the band] on a moment's notice,"²⁴ which became the title for the standard we know today. Throughout the session, Fuller was weary of soloing on the more complex tunes like Moment's Notice, but Coltrane reassured him. Coltrane saw Fuller's genius through his modesty, and for this reason they were best friends. When the latter passed in 1967, it was within months of the death of Fuller's sister who had raised him, and he stepped away from music for some time before returning to the scene at the request of Dizzy Gillespie.

Fuller's time with Art Blakey were some of his favorite years. With Blakey as the leader and Wayne Shorter as musical director, he felt "there was a magic in [the band]."²⁵ Blakey was very important to Fuller's life: he took the young man in as family (since Fuller had none), let him speak for the band, and supported his original compositions. Fuller's piece entitled "Buhaina's Delight" was so loved by Blakey that it became the name of an album as well as a theme song for the group (often listed as "Bu's Delight").

Curtis Fuller currently lives in New York where he continues to teach and perform as he is able. A fight with brain cancer in 1994 led to the removal of his right-lobe. Afterward he was forced to relearn trombone, and is still working to "get back where [he] was."²⁶ Unless he achieves that goal, his musical genius, style, sound, and humility will never be matched.

Musicians of the bebop era expanded technique of the trombone by approaching the instrument in a different way. Their mastery of alternate positions, against-the-grain slide technique, and innovation of a new multiple tonguing system (doodle-tonguing) allowed bebop

²³ Murphy, "An Interview with Curtis Fuller".

²⁴ Murphy, "An Interview with Curtis Fuller".

²⁵ Murphy, "An Interview with Curtis Fuller".

²⁶ Murphy, "An Interview with Curtis Fuller".

trombonists do things truly innovative. Complex lines played with the speed and fluidity of players like Frank Rosolino or J.J. Johnson have never been written in solo repertoire since the first appearance of a sackbut (an early trombone) in the year 1490. Their achievements blazed the trail for players like Conrad Herwig, Steve Davis, Michael Davis and Bob McChesney, who have effectively removed the trombone's speed handicap and are playing the modern language at burning tempos. The developments of this new generation are giving the instrument equal standing with valved or keyed instruments in jazz.

Bibliography

Berendt, Joachim-Ernst. *The Jazz Book: From Ragtime to the 21st Century*. Edited by Günther Huesmann. Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books, 2009.

Bernotas, Bob. "An Interview with J.J. Johnson". *Online Trombone Journal*. Accessed April 1st, 2018. <http://trombone.org/articles/library/jjjohnson-int-4.asp>.

Chilton, John. *Harrison, Jimmy*. Grove Music Online. Accessed April 1st, 2018. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/search?q=jimmy+harrison&searchBtn=Search&isQuickSearch=true>

Davis, Michael. "Conrad Herwig Interview". *Bone2Pick*. Accessed April 1st 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wP7Ubz3gMU>.

Feather, Leonard. *The New Edition of the Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz*. New York, NY: Bonanza Books, 1962.

Howard, Vernon, interview by author, Tulsa, April 1st, 2018.

Mingus, Charles. *Beneath the Underdog: His World as Composed by Mingus*. Edited by Nel King. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971.

Murphy, Molly. "An Interview with Curtis Fuller", *National Endowment for the Arts: NEA Jazz Masters*. Edited by Don Ball. Accessed April 1st, 2018. <https://www.arts.gov/honors/jazz/curtis-fuller>.

Zieff, Bob. *Green, Charlie*. Grove Music Online. Accessed April 1st, 2018. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-2000176700?rskey=93GFnA&result=1>.

Wilken, David. "Evolution of the Jazz Trombone, Part One: Dixieland". *Online Trombone Journal*. Accessed April 1st, 2018. <http://trombone.org/articles/library/evo jazz1.asp>.

Wilken, David. "Evolution of the Jazz Trombone, Part Two: The Swing Era". *Online Trombone Journal*. Accessed April 1st, 2018. <http://trombone.org/articles/library/evo jazz2.asp>.

Wilken, David. "Evolution of the Jazz Trombone, Part Three: Bebop". *Online Trombone Journal*. Accessed April 1st, 2018. <http://trombone.org/articles/library/evo jazz3.asp>.

Famous Musicians, Jazz Musicians, Trombone, Jazz Artists, Music Artists, Big Band Jazz, All About Jazz, Sound Of Music, Music Music. Louis Armstrong Jazz Artists Jazz Musicians Music Artists Music Is Life My Music Billy Holiday Rap Singers True Stories. Untitled.Â Stereo CULTURE Society. Partituras Trombone, Jazz Musicians, Jazz Artists, New Bands, Tumblr, Before Us, African American History, Poses, Angels. Joe Sample Bobby Womack Pop Musicians Joe Cocker Jazz Funk How To Express Feelings Jazz Artists Rock Songs Diana Ross. Houston jazz great played 'dynamic trombone sounds'. These best jazz trombone players in history are from different eras but are all extremely talented jazz musicians. The great trombonists on this list have the ability to create flawless music whether its a rehearsed piece, or an improvisational solo. These musicians have helped define jazz, and make it the genre it is today. The best jazz trombonists of all time include musicians such as, Jack Teagarden, Tommy Dorsey, and Delfeayo Marsalis. To become one of the best jazz trombonists of all time takes great commitment, a strong work ethic, and natural skill. Vote up the greatest jazz trombonist... History of Jazz. (Encyclopaedia Britannica). Archibald Motley.Â Nonetheless, one important aspect of jazz clearly does distinguish it from other traditional musical areas, especially from classical music: the jazz performer is primarily or wholly a creative, improvising composerâ€”his own composer, as it wereâ€”whereas in classical music the performer typically expresses and interprets someone else's composition.